

CBJ CLERK

JAN 29 2020

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January 29, 2020

Visitor Industry Task Force
City and Borough of Juneau
155 South Seward Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Members of the Task Force,

I offer you these comments regarding the large growth in cruise ships and cruise ship passengers and their effect on the community.

I. Some Facts

The following table is based on cruise ship passenger numbers from the City and Borough's Port Director. A copy of the spreadsheet and graph accompanies this letter.

Table of Cruise Ship Passengers to Juneau

2015	977,157	Percentage increase from previous year
2016	1,000,819	2.42151
2017	1,055,245	5.43814
2018	1,128,626	6.95393
2019	1,283,853	13.75362
2020 (projected)	1,400,000	9.04675

Beginning with 2017 season, passenger numbers have increased dramatically compared with previous years. The average annual increase for the past three years and including the projected total for 2020 is 8.79811 per cent. Using this number, rounded to 8.8%, I calculate the following increase in passengers for the years 2021 through 2024:

2021: 1,523,200

2022: 1,657,242

2023: 1,803,079

2024: 1,961,750

So, in just another four years, we will be up to about two million passengers. And if NCL builds a new dock, there will be a lot more than two million.

This means that whatever problems we are experiencing from this level of tourism will get progressively worse during the next four years and beyond.

II. Some Issues

Some of the problems in this community caused by tourism are familiar: traffic congestion on South Franklin Street and Egan Drive; incessant noise from floatplanes and helicopters, residents living on or near Basin Road being robbed of their enjoyment of their own area. But new issues and problems have now been identified in comments made to this task force and articles in the Juneau Empire. Local fishing holes have been depleted. Some local trails have been taken over by tourists. Of course, there is also the fact that downtown is no longer a downtown for the locals, and it has been that way for a very long time. Except for those who live or work in the downtown area, everyone avoids going downtown at all costs during the season, and the day after the last ship leaves, it becomes a ghost town. There is also the intrusive aspect. See <https://www.juneauempire.com/opinion/opinion-when-tourism-becomes-overtourism/>

Yet each of these issues is merely a symptom. The underlying cause, and the overarching issue, is the fact that there are simply too many tourists, specifically cruise ship passengers. Juneau has become overwhelmed with tourists. That is the cause of the symptoms. Unfortunately, this task force, and no one on the Assembly admits to that. Nor to my knowledge has anyone on the Assembly or this task force asked the question out loud: How much is too much?

III. A Word about Words

The mayor's charge to this task force included the following:

Is the current approach to managing the visitor industry adequate to make Juneau an attractive place to live and to visit? [emphasis added]

As if! When the mayor speaks in terms of a "a current approach to managing the visitor industry" I have no idea what she is talking about. I am unaware that the City and Borough of Juneau presently has any "approach" to managing tourism at all. I believe that when the mayor used the word "manage", she made a mistake. I think what she really meant was "accommodate," as that has been the history of the City and Borough vis'-a-vis the cruise lines for the past thirty years. Additionally, the word manage implies some degree of control. To my knowledge the City and Borough has never exercised any degree of control over tourism in Juneau.

The word “manage is also a nice sounding but vague word. I have yet to hear the mayor or any member of the Assembly or any member of this task force speak in specific terms of what can be done about the ever-increasing number of tourists.

The last phrase of the Mayor’s charge is also interesting “. . .an attractive place to live **and** to visit? [emphasis added]. Sounds like a moral equivalence to me. It reminds me of Australia’s Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, when he said that he is willing to make a greater effort to fight climate change as long as it doesn’t adversely affect Australia’s coal industry. The implication is clear: we should not do anything to improve Juneau’s livability if it would adversely affect tourism.

The long and short of it is this: The mayor is not serious about making any change regarding tourism if it would in fact adversely affect tourism. The task force was created with a wink and a nod. This is also revealed by the composition of the task force. See my opinion piece at the Juneau Empire on October 27, 2019: <https://www.juneauempire.com/opinion/opinion-overtourism-in-juneau/>

In other words, the work of this task force was baked in from the beginning. You will nibble at the edges and call it good. But you will not recommend anything that would have a real effect.

IV. What Can Be Done; The Haines Example; Exercising Control over City Owned Docks

In October of 1999 the voters of the Haines Borough approved the following ballot proposition:

ADVISORY QUESTION

Do you wish to advise local government officials to adopt the following tourism growth guidelines?

Guidelines: It is the wish of the people of the community that the annual number of dockings of large cruise ships (capacity of 1,000 or more passengers) in Haines shall not exceed levels already scheduled for the year 2000, and that tax revenues used for Haines tourism development shall focus on attracting visits by small cruise ships, independent travelers conventions, conferences, and special events.

_____ Yes

_____ No

This guideline is still in effect for the Haines Borough. A copy of this page of the Haines Borough ballot for Tuesday October 5, 1999 accompanies this letter. If the Assembly so chooses, they could simply ask the voters of the City and Borough of Juneau whether they would like to see fewer cruise ships in Juneau as a matter of policy. No legal problems would be involved by simply asking the voters what they would like to see.

Alternatively, the city could poll its citizens, if it could manage to frame the question in an honest and straight-forward manner.

Next, there is the fact that the City and Borough owns two of the four docks that accommodates large cruise ships. That's important. It means that the city could choose not to make those docks available to all cruise ships at all times, which appears to be the present practice.

I am aware that suggestions have been made by Juneau citizens both directly to you and through the Juneau Empire that they would like to once again have at least one day a week free of cruise ships. That may not be possible as two of the docks are privately owned, but the city could decide that it will not make its own docks available every day. The city could decide that, say on every Saturday during the season, that its docks will not be available to any large cruise ship. That would at least provide some relief. It is not nearly enough in my view, but if the city just did just that much, it would be something. But I am not going to hold my breath.

The only way to reduce the negative effects of tourism is to reduce the number of tourists. This is axiomatic. Apparently it is also blasphemous, but it should not be.

Over the years, I have learned that both individuals and institutions almost always take the easiest course of action. For a long time that has certainly has been the case with the City and Borough of Juneau vis-à-vis the cruise lines. But it doesn't have to be that way. We don't have to be a company town.

Yours truly,



Ray C. Preston
4990 Thane Road
Juneau, Alaska 99801

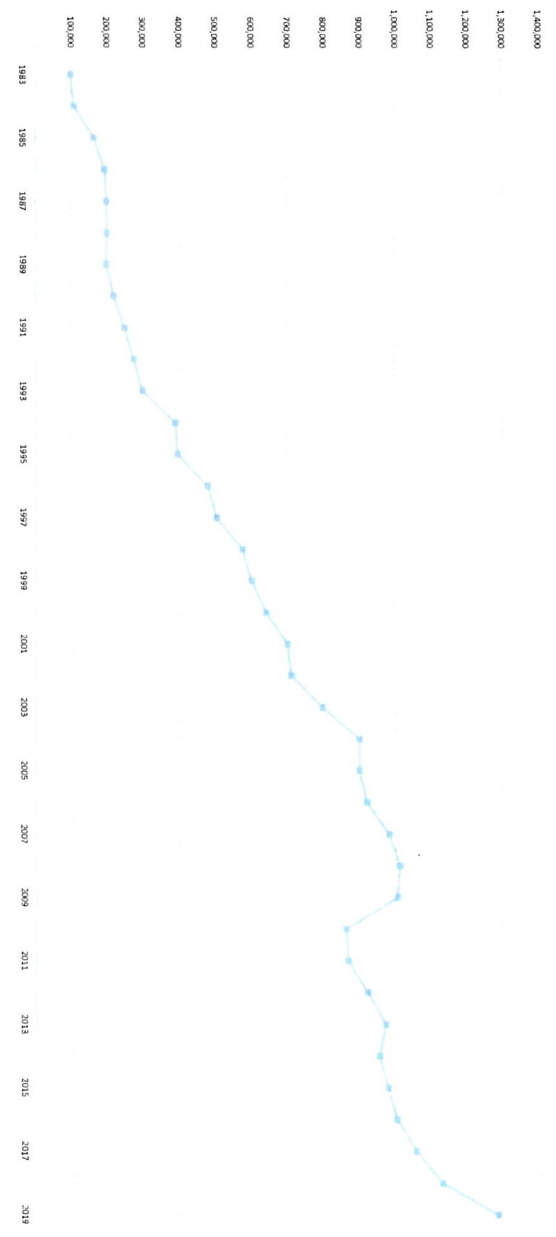
Attachments: (1) Spreadsheet and graph of cruise
passengers to Juneau: 1983 – 2019;

(2) Sample ballot page from Haines Borough
election of October 5, 1999

cc: Mayor Weldon and other members of the Assembly
Various friends in Juneau and elsewhere

1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
100,000	110,000	165,000	195,000	200,000	201,000	199,000	220,000	250,000	275,000	300,000	390,000	390,000	395,000	480,000	505,000	575,000	660,000	640,000	699,000	710,000	755,000	899,000	899,000	939,000	981,399	1,012,100	1,004,064	860,978	866,761	921,023	971,515	953,091	977,157	1,000,819	1,055,545	1,178,626	1,283,853

Cruise Passengers to Juneau : 1983-2019



**HAINES BOROUGH – Precinct 170
SAMPLE BALLOT**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1999
GENERAL MUNICIPAL ELECTION**

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS: Fill in the oval next to the candidate of your choice as shown: 

**BOROUGH ASSEMBLY/
SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER
SEAT A – CITY SEAT
3 YEAR TERM
vote for ONE only**

- ☐ JUDITH L. HALLMAN
☐ LUCY W. HARRELL
☐ Write-In

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- ☐ YES
☐ NO

PROPOSITION 1

Shall the power of solid waste management be established through the formation of a service area with boundaries as follows?

**ALL THE AREA WITHIN THE
BOUNDARIES OF THE HAINES
BOROUGH EXCLUDING A PORTION OF
THE KATZEHIN RIVER DRAINAGE
DESCRIBED AS SECTION 8, T30S, R62E,
CRM.**

- ☐ YES
☐ NO

TURN BALLOT OVER TO CONTINUE VOTING