TO: Visitor Industry Task Force

RE: Comments for the November 5, 2026 Meeting

Members:

I am sorry I cannot attend tonight's meeting. I would prefer to give my comments in person, but I have another meeting that conflicts. For those of you who don't know me, I have been involved in efforts to reduce the impact of cruise ship tourism on my downtown neighborhood since the 1990s. I live at the top of Gold Street near Basin Road, a popular destination for bus traffic generated by a gold panning tour run by Alaska Travel Adventures, as well as numerous other cruise-related taxis, passenger vans, Jeep rental cars, and local vehicle traffic, as well as hundreds of pedestrians who access walking tour information on line. It is a maddening impact on a residential area, as well as dangerous as the road is substandard and there have been significant rock falls just before the wooden trestle bridge, as well as directly on the bridge. The Assembly has chosen not to address my neighborhood's issues for years. I am hopeful the VITF will recommend the road be closed to vehicular traffic at the steel bridge just past the Mt. Roberts trailhead.

In addition to the impact on my neighborhood, I am concerned with a number of other issues related to large scale cruise tourism. They are as follows:

- The complete lack of interest in lowering the cost of living for Juneau residents ***by tapping into the money that should be flowing into city coffers from the cruise ship industry, the "Golden Goose" that lives for six months in our harbors***. Our city's infrastructure is severely impacted each year by 1.7 million visitors plus crew, and as just one example, we residents are expected to pay for things like upgrades to our water and wastewater (sewer) system. As members of the VITF, I would like your recommendations to the Assembly to include language insisting that the cruise industry pay for upgrades to our water and wastewater system. We must consider that our population for six months out of the year is at least 2.5 million when considering crew and other visitors to Juneau. The impact on infrastructure by those visitors must be shared by the cruise industry. Think of it as 2.5 million toilets flushed by tourists and crew every year (probably several times that many). Why are Juneau residents who are less than 2 percent of our population for six months of the year paying for upgrades to our water system?

  In June this year our water and sewer rates increased by 5%, and that increase will be an annual 5% increase until 2029. I remember speaking to Jesse Kiehl sometime around 2015 when he was a member of the Assembly after the Assembly approved a five-year plan for rate increases for water and wastewater. I recall telling Assembly member Kiehl that the rate increases could drive low-income seniors out of their homes. He responded that the increases were necessary to keep our water and sewer infrastructure from failing. Why should Juneau's increasingly aging

community members and young families struggling to pay their mortgages bear the burden of infrastructure repairs caused mainly by the impacts by 2.5 million visitors? The industry should be paying its fair share.

https://www.ktoo.org/2026/06/30/residential-utilities-rates-and-parks-and-rec-and-fees-to-increase-in-july/

- The complete lack of attention by our Assembly and the VITF to resident concerns about our quality of life. Helicopter and fixed wing aircraft noise have been a problem for decades. You have heard from people who are unable to have conversations in their homes, are unable to enjoy a quiet moment in their yards or on trails. The noise is maddening and getting worse with every increase in passenger numbers. I was part of a group of Juneau residents who in 1990 put forth the Peace and Quiet Initiative to reduce the impact of helicopter and fixed wing aircraft noise. While the initiative was not successful it gives you, as members of the VITF, a look at the history of the noise issue in Juneau. I refer you to this *New York Times* story on cruise ship tourism in 1990. We were a town with a population of 30,000 and we were very concerned about the growth of cruise ship tourism, at that time bringing 630,000 passengers to Juneau a year.

https://www.nytimes.com/2000/08/20/travel/a-land-so-wild-it-s-getting-crowded.html

- An interest in dealing with the growth of whale watching excursions. Yes, there has been talk of trying to limit the number of vessels, but it remains to be seen if a type of limited entry on whale watching vessels can be implemented. According to an October 9, 2026, story in *The Alaska Current* by Rachel Levy, you on the VITF are considering placing a cap on the number of whale watching vessels operating out of Statter Harbor. Currently there are 78 commercial whale watching vessels plying the area. Levy's story states the Assembly will decide on permitting by the end of the year, but if they do, they will probably grandfather in the existing fleet. The story also says the permit limit, "...is occurring concurrently with a proposed increase to per-passenger fees on commercial boats using Statter Harbor as a way to fund, among other projects, the replacement of the harbor's breakwater." Replacement of the breakwater sounds like it will cost a significant amount of money. I hope all the replacement costs will be funded by passenger fees and direct funding by the cruise industry.

https://thealaskacurrent.com/2026/10/09/cbj-whale-watching/

- Passenger limits should be front and center of your discussions and recommendations to the Assembly. With new docks under construction or being planned, the VITF must acknowledge any increase in ships and passengers is not acceptable. The planned docks on North Douglas by Goldbelt are causing great

concern for people in that area, as well as others who may be impacted by boats shuttling passengers to Auke Bay to go to the glacier. The addition of a dock by Huna Totem and the further impact on traffic exiting on Egan Drive is another dangerous bottlenecking of the street.

There are far too many ships in Gastineau Channel. We saw a near miss last year when a freak storm caused the mooring lines of the *Celebrity Edge* to snap, and for the ship to nearly hit the *Carnival Luminosa* that was anchored nearby. While this was a freak storm, Gastineau Channel is limited in the number of ships that can moor there.

The current number of passengers and ships is too many, and any increase is too much. The fact that the number of passengers grew by 2.7% percent this year was, "...not particularly different from expectations," according to CBJ tourism manager Alexandra Pierce. That is 44,200 more passengers than was agreed upon in the voluntary daily passenger limit agreed upon by the CBJ and the industry. Every year we see an increase, and the fact that Manager Pierce thinks this is to be expected and acceptable shows me that the CBJ does not care if the voluntary passenger limit is adhered to. This is another example of why a voluntary limit is worthless. Bar Harbor comes to mind.

https://www.juneauindependent.com/post/juneau-sets-another-cruise-tourism-record-with-1-733-016-passengers-up-2-6-from-last-year

These are my main concerns regarding the cruise ship industry's effect on those of us who are just trying to live here. It would be wonderful if recommendations to limit the number of passengers and ships are put forward to the full Assembly.

Kimberly Metcalfe
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