From: Robie Janes
To: City Clerk; Borough Assembly; Beth Weldon; Day, Kirby (HAP)
Subject: VITF Written Comments - Whale Watching
Date: Thursday, November 5, 2026 2:49:55 PM

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Good afternoon,

Here are my written comments for the Visitor Industry Task Force, the Juneau Assembly and Mayor Weldon.

On October 5th, the Juneau Economic Development Council hosted its annual Economic Indicator Insights Event.

At this meeting, they presented that Juneau's population is shrinking. During a breakout session, they asked all of us a question: ***How might Juneau's businesses, employers, nonprofits, and community networks make Juneau a place where adults ages 28–40 and families with children are more likely to come and stay?***

Juneau's whale watching industry demonstrates how tourism can attract and retain young people, helping keep our community thriving. Many of our management teams came to Juneau for a seasonal job and turned that opportunity into careers, homeownership, and families of their own. Each summer, we welcome new young people who fall in love with Juneau and choose to stay, whether they continue in tourism or pursue other careers in Juneau. We also proudly employ many seasonal and year-round locals.

I strongly disagree with the VITF recommendation that the current whale watching status quo is not sustainable and that future tapering of our industry is suggested. Doing so would reduce the many benefits tourism brings to Juneau.

As Interim Chairman of the Southeast Alaska Whale Watching Association, we are actively working to address concerns and have solved many. We are committed to working together and with the community to find solutions and improve how our industry operates.

Here are examples of continued practices and new guidelines starting in 2027

1. Statter Harbor 500 yard extended no wake zone
2. Reduced congestion for locals at Statter Harbor loading zone
3. Coghlan Cut No Wake Zone at all times (However, majority of companies have already agreed not to use Coghlan cut in 2027)
4. AIS on all inspected whale watching vessels
5. Number of inspected whale watching vessels around a group of whales
6. Continued practice of Whale Sense Guidelines regardless of NOAA's status and funding of the program
7. All industry captain meeting, training and captain signoff.

I agree that involving local scientific experts is important, but decisions should be based on

data and facts, not opinions.

At Gastineau Guiding, we operate a citizen science program with a dedicated science team and multiple ongoing studies. Our review of the past four seasons (2023–2026) showed that 2026 had our highest number of whale sightings identified, whales identified in a single day, days of bubble-net feeding activity, and individual bubble-net feeding whales. We also continue to see new calves in Juneau and Southeast Alaska each year. I would be happy to share our full report with anyone interested.

As local, family-owned businesses, we want to work together to address community concerns and find solutions. We believe we can manage these issues as an industry without unnecessary government regulation and potential legal implications.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

All the best,

Robie

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