From: Larri Spengler
To: Clerks Office
Subject: comments on VITF draft recommendations
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Greetings, Visitor Industry Task Force members:

I have not had time to review in depth the recommendations on which you are now taking public comment, but I have several concerns and suggestions that are laid out below.

Thank you.

Larri Spengler

Larri Irene Spengler
[redacted]

MISSING: RECOMMENDATION ON LIMITING SHIP AND PASSENGER NUMBERS

There are at least two items in the Mayor's charge to the task force that seem to cry out for addressing what so many people in Juneau are concerned about: limiting the number of ships and passengers.

These two tasks were to "identify ways to manage impacts," and to "set a broad 10-year tourism direction for Juneau."

Since 2024, there has been a voluntary agreement of a five-ship per day limit between the city and the cruise lines. https://www.ktoo.org/2023/04/18/juneau-limits-future-cruise-tourism-as-first-ship-docks/ The ships that come to Juneau are getting bigger and bigger, so the allowed five ships carry more and more passengers. In May of this year, a federal court held that a 1000-cruise-ship-passenger-limit daily cap imposed by Bar Harbor, Maine, could be enforced during peak cruise ship tourism months. https://www.mainepublic.org/business-and-economy/2026-05-20/bar-harbor-can-only-enforce-cruise-ship-passenger-caps-in-july-and-august-judge-rules

In light of that clarification of the legal landscape, the task force should recommend ship and passenger limits that will keep the number of visitors at level that will provide a better balance for residents, and a better experience for visitors. At least you should recommend the

Assembly enact an ordinance that would make the borough-wide five-ship daily limit mandatory, and thus enforceable.

YES ON CROSSING GUARDS!

Crossing guards, under the new management of JEDC, have had an extremely positive effect on transiting downtown in the summer. The recommendation (#17) to continue and nurture that program is an excellent one!

BAD IDEA: REINSTATING CROSSWALK BETWEEN HERITAGE WAY TO MARINE PARK

One of the recommendations (#13) is that the crosswalk from Heritage Way to Marine Park be reinstated. This is a terrible idea! The proposed location is just over 200 feet from the crosswalk at the streetlight at Main Street, and just over 425 feet from the crosswalk by the library. This will stack up too many crosswalks, which will slow down the already congested traffic through downtown. There was a crosswalk there some years ago — and even then, when there were exponentially fewer pedestrians -- it was always challenging. **A substitute idea** would be to blockade crossing both directions between Heritage Way and Marine Park, using bollards and chains, or some kind of landscaping.

TO ADDRESS CONGESTION, PROHIBIT LEFT TURNS FROM THE TOWN-BOUND LANE ON FRANKLIN

Transiting the downtown corridor has become much more challenging with left-turning north-bound busses and vans. These hold up the entire lane of north-bound traffic until they can find a gap in oncoming traffic to allow it to make the turn. The simple solution would be to prohibit tourism-related vehicles from turning left.

VISITOR/RESIDENT SAFETY: ADD STREETLIGHTS

The task force should recommend that streetlights be installed from just past the South Franklin Street Dock (Dock B) to Mill Street. With the increasing length of the cruise ship season into October, this would increase safety for tourists from ships berthed at the AJ Dock walking in the dusk or dark along that section of road. It would also improve safety for local pedestrians using that stretch of sidewalk throughout the dark winter months, in particular, those using the warming shelter off of Mill Street.

ALTERNATE HELIPORT SITES: NOT THANE!

The draft recommendations include suggesting (#18) that a consultant look at, among other things, alternate heliport sites as a way to address the dreadful tourism helicopter noise

assaults suffered by so many Juneau residents. While it may make sense for the city to look at this, the prospect of Thane as a potential alternative site should be taken off the table from the outset.

When alternate sites were being discussed in 2001-2002, the Thane Neighborhood Association did a survey of Thane residents which showed overwhelming opposition to any Thane-adjacent location. There were 89 responses to the survey, which had an 80% response rate.

There were very good reasons for that opposition, all of which have only intensified with the exponential growth of cruise ship tourism in the intervening 24 years.

There was concern about the increase in noise from the helicopters.

There was huge concern about the increase of traffic on Thane, which back then was (and still is) narrow and winding, with no shoulders. If putting a heliport on Thane was a bad idea 24 years ago, how much worse it would be now, with the still-decrepit state of Thane Road combined with the tremendous growth in visitor numbers and those transiting to heliports.

Another aspect of this equation is the difficulty in emergency vehicles (ambulances, fire trucks, police cars) getting through the increasingly unmanageable summer downtown congestion to travel to Thane, or to the southern cruise ship docks. The city has outlined a system to counter those delays with the help of crossing guards. But despite all the good will in the world, the downtown crowds make speedy and smooth access for emergency vehicles a huge challenge. If a heliport were placed somewhere Thane-adjacent, and there was a severely ill passenger — or, heaven forfend, a bad accident — Thane Road itself would be more crowded with heliport-related traffic, which would be on top of the regular downtown crush. Thus help would not come as swiftly as it would to another location.

Two other strikes against locating a heliport somewhere Thane-adjacent are the high winds that sometimes impact this end of the channel, and the fact that avalanche season (and thus, Thane Road closures) and the spring cruise ship shoulder season overlap.

An additional aspect of this is simple fairness. Of all neighborhoods, Thane already bears the hugely burdensome brunt of the seasonal downtown congestion. It would be simply unfair to add heliport-bound buses and vans to our decrepit road, and additional helicopter noise to our lives.