

# ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORKSESSION **DRAFT** MINUTES

November 06, 2023 at 6:00 PM

Assembly Chambers/Zoom Webinar



## Assembly Committee of the Whole Worksession

### A. CALL TO ORDER

Deputy Mayor Michelle Hale called the Assembly Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 6:00p.m.

### B. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Ms. Adkison provided the following Land Acknowledgment: We would like to acknowledge that the City and Borough of Juneau is on Tlingit land, and wish to honor the indigenous people of this land. For more than ten thousand years, Alaska Native people have been and continue to be integral to the well-being of our community. We are grateful to be in this place, a part of this community, and to honor the culture, traditions, and resilience of the Tlingit people. *Gunalchéesh!*

### C. ROLL CALL

**Assemblymembers Present:** 'Wáahlaal Gídaag (Zoom), Christine Woll (Zoom), Ella Adkison, Paul Kelly, Wade Bryson, Alicia Hughes-Skandijs, Greg Smith, Deputy Mayor Michelle Hale, and Mayor Beth Weldon.

**Assemblymembers Absent:** *None*

**Staff Present:** City Manager Katie Koester, City Attorney Robert Palmer, Municipal Clerk Beth McEwen, Deputy City Clerk Diane Cathcart, Engineering/Public Works Director Denise Koch, Community Development Director Jill Maclean, Tourism Manager Alix Pierce, Emergency Programs Manager Tom Mattice, Assistant Attorney Emily Wright, Assistant Attorney Sherri Layne, Lands Manager Dan Bleidorn, IT support staff Erin Flick and Jasmine Blackwell, Harbors Administrative Officer Teena Larson

### D. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

*The agenda was approved as presented.*

### E. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. **January 26, 2023 Assembly Legislative Delegation Worksession - Draft Minutes**
2. **January 26, 2023 Assembly Committee of the Whole Worksession - Draft Minutes**

*The minutes of both the January 26, 2023 work sessions were approved by unanimous consent.*

### F. AGENDA TOPICS

#### 3. **Mendenhall River Flood Mitigation**

*The Assembly COW will be taking public testimony on this agenda topic only and is seeking community questions and suggestions during this time.*

Deputy Mayor Hale invited Manager Koester and Director Denise Koch to first give their presentation and then the Assembly will take public testimony from the members who have signed up to testify on this topic. Deputy Mayor Hale thanked Mr. Bryson for keeping this topic on every Public Works & Facilities Committee (PWFC) agenda since the flood occurred.

Manager Koester introduced the topic and said how much they appreciated the written testimony. This meeting is to provide an opportunity to continue hearing from the public and try to answer the questions, what can CBJ do, what can property owners do? What information do we as CBJ need to help gather. She noted that CBJ has received written testimony as well and staff will collate those questions along with the ones they hear tonight and follow up with that information at a future meeting.

Engineering/Public Works Director Koch gave a short presentation to give some context on how we got here. She noted that as a local government, they set up an incident command. The Assembly moved very quickly to declare a local disaster which set the stage for the governor to establish a state disaster that was helpful. She said they brought in the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA, who set up meetings in the Valley to talk about things like individual assistance that was available to impacted homeowners.

Director Koch noted that there was a request made for federal disaster relief to FEMA and that request was unfortunately denied, but they wanted to be sure to let people know about that.

They also invited the National Resource Conservation Service to Juneau to look at the river top to bottom. They came to try and figure out what sort of their programs we might be eligible for in terms of mitigation. She said they were here during the week of September 11<sup>th</sup> and are currently working on a draft report that we expect to receive sometime this month.

Director Koch said that CBJ did things like participate in community clean ups and try and help impacted homeowners that way. The Community Development Department also met with impacted homeowners to let them know what the requirements were for permitting. There was some relaxing of permitting in the first 30 days to allow people to do what they needed to do to protect their property in the immediate aftermath. CBJ also put forth that real property exemption or the reassessment.

They also wanted to support the University of Alaska Southeast. She said that Doctor Aaron Hood and Aaron Jacobs had given a presentation about monitoring to the Committee of the Whole as well as to the community at large and the evening and Egan series. They really they put forth some efforts, they really want to improve their monitoring; we have supported them in those ways, so they've put forth a request for congressionally directed spending.

CBJ has sent a letter of support for that congressionally directed spending, they've requested some more funding for, for monitoring and we have put forth, there's already an ordinance that was put forth to increase the amount of the CBJ contribution for that monitoring.

Director Koch then shared a "Where We are Now" slide with color coding showing the various areas where there may be potential assistance available for private property owners. The first one is the low interest disaster loan, so that comes from the federal government, the US Small Business Association came to Juneau, set up shop at the Diamond Park Aquatic Center. They processed different loan applications from both residents as well as from businesses as of last week, they had processed and approved 17 loans at approximately \$1.8 million.

She also noted that FEMA was here last week talking about flood insurance for property owners. They had a public meeting at DZ in the evening. The State of Alaska DMVA has also been working with them on state public assistance. This is assistance just for CBJ public property. So that includes things like the Mendenhall Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Other grants include a NOAA grant, that is a transformational habitat restoration and coastal resilience grant for which the lead entity on that application is Southeast Alaska Watershed Council. That is a grant, that if awarded is a little bit over \$5,000,000, it would benefit both public and private property owners and Southeast Alaska Watershed Council is really doing a good job in terms of getting a number of different partners together, including CBJ, ADF&G, DNR, Tlingit & Haida, so that would be a very exciting project if that grant were awarded then back to NRCS.

NRCS was here during the week of September 11<sup>th</sup> doing a review of the river and an assessment of what potential programs they have that might be eligible. She said that NRCS has reached out to the US Army Corps of Engineers and she noted that NRCS and the US Army Corps of Engineers are really the experts in flood mitigation.

She said CBJ has reached out to them and they have two different programs. One is a Section 14 program that is limited just to public property and the other is a broader Section 8315 program that is what they call their general investigation. For both of those U.S. Army Corps of Engineers projects, we

have requested that they come in and do the feasibility studies that they offer for up to \$100,000 at no cost to CBJ. She said CBJ has requested that they come in and do those studies, and to let us know what's possible from their perspective and what might be a good fit for some of their programs.

In concluding her presentation, Director Koch said that there are some big FEMA grants that they are also investigating and gathering information on this hazard mitigation program and the brick program and the flood mitigation assistance program. The thing to remember is that all those programs are FEMA money ultimately, and they all come with strings and their own nuances. She said they have a meeting tomorrow with them to talk more about some of those items, but to leave them with is the fact that when staff finds opportunities to apply for grants, they are doing that. They are inviting in the experts from NRCS but all of these various will come with some cost to CBJ including staff time, some local match, some lifecycle maintenance funding and that is important to remember. At the September 18th PWFC meeting, Assemblymember Hale had asked for a list of experts, technical experts on flood mitigation. We have reached out to a number of those experts who work at DMVA, the Army Corps of Engineers, and NRCS, and they stand willing to give presentations or to answer questions based on some of the feedback and comments and questions that we hear today from the public.

Deputy Mayor Hale thanked Director Koch for her presentation and said what they are trying to do with this COW meeting tonight is to try to gather questions and there will be a follow up meeting from the experts to address those questions. It is a two phase process that will be at a future COW meeting, likely held in December.

Moving into public testimony, she began with those who signed up in advance to testify online followed by those who were in the room. Each person was given 3 minutes to provide testimony.

**Mr. Steve Bradford**, a resident of 4401 Riverside Drive and the condos that were severely damaged in the flood. Mr. Bradford said he is a graduate civil engineer with over 40 years of experience. He is retired from the Alaska DOT as the Chief Bridge Engineer and has lived in Juneau for nearly 50 years. He said that he was pleased to see in the previous presentation that the city is talking to the Army Corps of Engineers about investigating the flood. He said that he thinks it is important that the Corps come in and analyze the river geomorphics. There have been numerous properties armoring their river slopes and this is going to have a profound effect on the unarmored properties along the river. He said that while he appreciates their studying and forecasting the future events. He believes we should be taking some proactive steps to control the outflows from these future events. We should not merely stand by and simply advise the public of impending floods. We need to take steps to implement flood control. He said that according to the gentleman from the university, we're expecting maybe 30 more years of possible outbreak flows. Mr. Bradford proposes CBJ vigorously seek federal funds and authority to construct an overflow tunnel from the Suicide Basin with an outlet in the Nugget Creek area. This is the distance of approximately 2300 meters. This overflow tunnel will only allow the Suicide Basin to hold a small amount of water, thereby minimizing the outbreak sledding, if any, on the Mendenhall. He said there are a number of people in Juneau that are very well experienced at tunneling and rock, so those with a lot more experience than he could speak to the costs and so forth. He said that while these things can be studied, he believes that action should be taken. Senator Lisa Murkowski was at our site and observed the damage and has been up and down the river and he thinks we could get her support for federal funds for this problem.

**Ms. Deborah Rudis**, a resident on River Rd, stated that she lives on the opposite side of the road from the river so her property was not affected by the flood. She asked why there's no emergency type of funding that the city would have to give some short term emergency funding for property owners that are affected by various catastrophes, such as the jökulhlaup that occurred this August. She said that she finds it sort of disingenuous that the city can spend \$150,000 to remove junk cars on a piece of property, but they can't have an emergency fund to help people that are severely affected and financially stressed out because of emergencies such as this. So she would like to see some discussion about that, or if there is such a possibility of that type of funding, they wouldn't need to rely on an immediate state or federal money, but it would be CBJ funding.

**Mr. Andy Kumelev**, a resident of Meander Way since he was a kid. He said that when he was a kid, he had a dream that he would have a castle with a moat and for one day this summer his dream came. He said that the riverbank on his house is reinforced so that thing held out like Fort Knox during this flood. He said that fortunately their house was unaffected also because it sits very high. However, Meander Way became a second Riverview in the front of their house. He said that while he isn't an engineering, he believes that one of the reasons for that was that the culverts that were draining out from Meander Way into the river were completely underwater, and the water had absolutely nowhere to go, which is what created the massive flood on Meander Way. He said that their house suffered no damage because it sits very high up on the river, but the houses across the street from them, their garage levels got flooded and first levels got flooded. He said that they sat out in the backyard and watched the river keep rising and rising and rising until it peaked at about 11:00p.m. at which point they realize it was not going to get any higher than that. He said that one a normal day, when he stands in his backyard and looks down at the river, it's usually a 14 foot clearance on this particular day, there was barely one foot clearance at the highest point. He brought this up because he is concerned that if these floods get worse, he has a feeling that the entire valley is going to be open to potentially being flooded and flooded badly, because at that point the river is no longer a river. He said that something might have to be done to redirect the flow of the water or possibly what Mr. Bradford suggested about redirecting water from Suicide Basin because if it gets over the hill where his house is, it's going to be bad for everyone as you're not looking at one or two isolated houses, you're looking at possibly hundreds of houses getting wiped out completely or at the very least getting really badly.

**Mr. Marty McKeown**, a resident at 4411 Riverside Drive, said that while he doesn't have a lot of questions, he does have a little bit of venting. He echoed what Mr. Bradford said about the need to be proactive. Mr. McKeown said that he is a 4<sup>th</sup> generation Alaskan whose family goes back to the 1890s. His entire family is in Juneau and he has raised all his kids here. He said that he owns several businesses, and feels like he kicks in and pays his taxes. He said that he doesn't feel like everyone one the river or affected by this flood got much support from the city. There was no money coming in from CBJ, not \$1.00. He said that he didn't get one phone call, somebody came up and said your house is condemned and you can't live there. He said that he agrees with the lady who testified about the fact that there should be some sort of funding by the city if there's a big fire that goes through downtown, if there's some other major catastrophe, there needs to be something that the city does to support the citizens. He said that he is out \$300,000. He said that he isn't a complainer but something needs to be done. He didn't get a phone call or an email. He did receive a form saying he'd get a break on his taxes next year. He filled that out and they sent him another one. He said he has his commercial businesses on the river and the bank's getting hammered. There's nothing from the SBA or from the state for commercial properties. There's no support so everybody's having to dip into their pockets and pay to get some riprap and that is expensive. He said there were suggestions that they may take the tax off the gravel pit and somebody said that would not be very much since it is only 5%. He said at least that is something and something is better than nothing.

**Mr. Howard Jagger**, a resident of 3451 Meander Way, said that he didn't plan on speaking because he said his piece four or five years ago and it fell on deaf ears. He said they are now hearing from this gentleman talking about the same thing they talked about five years ago. They also didn't receive any reimbursement for their bank either. They lost 15 to 20 feet of it towards river which they could not reclaim. He said that he doesn't know what the folks currently affected are doing now, but when it happened to them, they had to pay the whole bill at the same time. He said at that time, it was a little event and only got a few houses. He said that the water this time was higher than it's been since he has lived there 40 years and it seems like it's gotten much bigger than that run. He said that nothing went on for those four last four or five years. He said that for everybody along the river, the help from the city was very minimal. He was told here's who you have to get your permits from. And when I was trying to get my permit, there was a fellow from Anchorage that was down here and when Mr. Jagger asked him about it, he was told that he was in a precarious position as well as the neighbor who testified and the former neighbor. He said that his riprap stood up pretty well but whenever those 100+ foot trees came down the

river, there was one of those trees that went up the bank to the property of former Representative Bill Hudson's house.

Deputy Mayor Hale thanked all of those who testified and shared their input and she stated how very sorry she was for what they have gone through. She encouraged anyone who still wishes to comment to submit written comments to the Assembly. She affirmed that they will be notifying everyone on the email list when they have the next COW meeting following up from this COW meeting with some of the suggestions and questions that came up tonight.

Mayor Weldon asked Director Koch if any of the funding she was looking into were going to be available for preventative measures or if it was just for repair and recovery.

Director Koch said they are looking at what preventative measures are possible and that is part of the scope of what NRCS in particular is looking at.

Mr. Smith asked about the mention at a previous presentation that they were shooting LIDAR to determine what the new channel looks like. He asked if that was being done. Director Koch said that DOT was very helpful right after the flood and running LIDAR but they know that there has been a lot of work that has happened on the river since that time. In light of that, Director Koch said that they have made an additional request to DOT. They have their own permitting they have to do and they have to coordinate with the FAA so that won't be something instantaneous but their intent is to do LIDAR again.

Ms. Hale asked that they make maps and any additional information available to the public. Director Koch said they will ensure that is done.

#### **4. Ordinance 2023-18 Landslide and Avalanche Hazard Regulations**

Manager Koester provided an overview of the background of this issue and referenced her memo dated November 2, 2023 as provided in the COW packet. This picks up where the Assembly COW left off during the last COW meeting at which time, Deputy Mayor Gladziszewski made a motion to repeal the current code, adopt the Avalanche maps only and not adopt the landslide code and no regulations of landslide. The motion also included the requirement to publish the maps on the CDD website and provide notification to the public and people who live in those hazard areas that those maps existed. She said that what they took from that discussion and what she put in her memo was from a logistical perspective was that they would send out an annual postcard that would go out to people who lived within 500 feet of the mass landslide area and a public service announcement. She asked the Assembly to provide direction to staff if that is not the direction they want staff to take.

She said that with staff doing those notification pieces related to landslides, the ordinance before them at this time is just related to avalanches and that she was willing to answer any questions about the ordinance or process pieces and Mr. Palmer was also available to answer any questions on the ordinance.

Mr. Palmer provided a brief overview of the ordinance. He said the ordinance is roughly 11 pages long but the heart of the ordinance is in Section 7 as found on pages 7-10 of the ordinance. He said that the decisions/recommendations that the COW should focus on Section 7 as the other sections are secondary based on what is contained in Section 7. He said that he would be happy to answer any questions they may have.

Mr. Bryson asked Mr. Palmer if this changed anything for the ability of the public to either achieve financing or insurance goals. He said it looks like they eliminated the slide zones, left avalanches in place so it seemed to him like nothing much has changed for the residents of Juneau because the shaded

areas are still considered a hazard zone and that we haven't eliminated or made any improvements is how he is reading this.

Mr. Palmer said that is a tricky question and he will try to answer. He said that one side of the discussion is easier if the COW decides to go with this ordinance and that would be the repeal of the current landslide ordinance. He said that this ordinance, in concept, retains the avalanche hazard areas although they are a little different, and could be thought of in terms of a Venn diagram that some are in and some are out of avalanche zones.

Mr. Palmer said that from a regulatory perspective, if this ordinance is adopted, it would still generally allow for the CDD Director to permit single-family homes or a dwelling unit but anything more than that would require a Planning Commission process and there are some conditions that would exist. He said that with respect to Mr. Bryson's question about the lending and insurance industries, that gets a little more tricky. The reason he said that is tricky, is that we can identify areas that are hazardous and to the extent we have done that, that is included in the third whereas clause on page 1 of the ordinance in which CBJ can identify areas as stated in the Tetra Tech guide as follows:

*"The level of assessment prepared for this project is suitable for determining whether land areas could be affected by avalanches. A more detailed site-specific investigation and evaluation would be required to determine appropriate mitigations for specific properties;"*

He said there is an identical clause for landslides but because we are not regulating landslides with this current draft, he will stay away from that. He said that they have regulatory levers in play for people to be able to develop on their properties for at least single-family homes but what that ultimately looks like and how people will be able to get lending or insurance are separate questions. He said it is becoming a chicken and egg question. Are they regulating because there are hazards or are they creating a hazard. He said that his take is that we are regulating the current and expected conditions of a property and that lenders and insurance companies can reach their own conclusions without CBJ's maps.

Ms. Woll said that she was curious about the language around regulating in Avalanche hazard areas. She said that we had certain terms of regulation when they were just a generic hazard area that included both Avalanche and landside. She said that the manager made some recommendations on the regulations that should be in place and the Planning Commission worked on those regulations. She asked if the regulations that are in this ordinance are what was originally in there or where it came from? Where did those terms come from? Mr. Palmer explained that various portions come from current code, but the bulk of the avalanche text came from CDD text and Ms. Woll asked if someone from CDD was present who may be available to speak to those questions.

CDD Director Maclean said that Attorney Palmer was correct and this is almost identical to the version of the ordinance that the Lands, Housing, & Economic Development Committee saw back in March 2023. She said that if her recollection was correct, that draft was just after it had gone to the Planning Commission (PC) a second time. The PC had forwarded it to the Assembly and asked for more guidance. The LHEDC provided additional direction and it went back to the PC which held another public hearing on it and they resent a recommendation to the Assembly and they had concerns with risk on the landslide of things and were a little more comfortable with the avalanche side.

Mr. Bryson said that if they were to remove the avalanche component as well as landslides, he asked if every single home would still have to go through the permit and PC process. Ms. Maclean said that she avoids the "every" and "all" language but generally speaking, each development would need to go through a permitting process whether that was through Director approval or approval by the Planning Commission. She said that the value in this ordinance details what the Assembly supports for development in the hazard areas where they are identified as moderate or severe for avalanches only.

She said that the Director can approve a single-family home, lot consolidation, and some other items on the list. The rest would be before the Planning Commission for approval. She noted that the key piece is whether the Assembly wants to regulate development more strictly in this mapped hazard area or not. If they want to permit those areas like any other areas in the community, he is correct, the permit process would be no different.

Ms. Maclean said in touching back to an earlier question from Mr. Bryson about what does this do and does it help property owners in the avalanche zone. She said that she believes it does. They have been hearing from the public. The current maps are not of a good quality, the boundaries are a really thick font and aren't very good. Simply removing landslides, repealing the current ordinance and maps completely and then not regulating landslides and only adopting the avalanche maps, she said they believe that will help people who are truly in avalanche zones that are not landslide zones. She said that beyond that, she would concur with Mr. Palmer's earlier comments.

Ms. Maclean and Mr. Palmer then proceeded to answer questions from Assemblymembers about some of the specific language in the ordinance, who would be able to provide approvals for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) and what the roles of the Director, PC, Building Official, and Engineering/Public Works Director's are in this ordinance.

Mr. Smith said that during public testimony, they heard talk of un-ringing the bell on this. He asked if we have complicated this even more by just having these maps out in the world or prevented transactions of real estate from happening in landslide or avalanche hazard zones. Ms. Maclean said that her understanding was that no one in those industries were willing to come forward and speak on the record about it. She said that due to the nature of each individual property, she understands why they may not have wanted to come forward to speak in general terms in a public manner like that.

Additional discussion took place about the philosophical questions surrounding the ability and/or likelihood of being able to build housing in the downtown and other areas that are known to members of the insurance and real estate professions in town as having potential hazards. Mayor Weldon said that she asked CBJ Emergency Programs Manager Tom Mattice to come and speak to the committee about this topic. Mr. Mattice introduced himself and noted that he was initially hired on with CBJ as the Avalanche Specialist in 2008.

Mayor Weldon said that she has been struggling with this topic internally trying to weigh the rights of individual property owners against public safety issues as seen through her background with disaster response. She asked Mr. Mattice if, with his expertise in avalanches, does he feel the maps reasonably map out avalanche hazards in those areas.

Mr. Mattice said the avalanche maps have been done to a good scientific standard and have been reviewed nationally and internationally and have been very well done. He said that when they start projecting 300-year climate models with 300-year avalanche slides based on climate change, that is debatable.

Mr. Kelly said his concerns with this ordinance are two-fold, one related to the lending industry and the other is with respect to public safety. He asked Mr. Mattice if he thought there would be elements of this ordinance that would improve the safety of Juneau residents and homeowners.

Mr. Mattice said that it is important to recognize hazards and understand the hazards that affect our jurisdiction. He said it is somewhat difficult because some areas have been overstudied and yet it is hard to ignore certain areas that have historical events. He said that acknowledging hazards and developing hazard models are good to do and the difficulties here about landslides and avalanches are that avalanches are very well versed in magnitude and frequency whereas landslides are more like thousand

year models as opposed to hundred year models. It is using newer science that makes it harder to take at face value but he sees the Assembly making good decisions.

**MOTION** by Mayor Weldon to move Ordinance 2023-18vCOW1 to the Assembly for consideration.

Objection by Mr. Smith for purposes of a question. Mr. Smith asked Manager Koester what the expected timing on this ordinance would be. Manager Koester said that they could introduce this ordinance at the next regular Assembly meeting on November 18. Chair Hale said that after that, it would be scheduled for the next Assembly meeting for public comment. Manager Koester said that the public hearing would take place at the December 11 regular Assembly meeting.

Mr. Smith said that he is good with keeping this moving but that he may want to reach out to members of the real estate and other professional industries to provide appropriate disclaimers so they can hopefully un-ring the bell somewhat on this. Mr. Smith removed his objection.

Mr. Bryson objected to the motion. He said that he feels they can un-ring the bell. The best thing that the Assembly can do is to get the 1987 ordinance repealed and anyone who wants to build will still have to go through the appropriate permitting process and people are going to be as cautious as they feel they are comfortable in being for their property.

**ROLL CALL VOTE** to forward Ordinance 2023-18vCOW1 to the Assembly for introduction

**Yeas:** Adkison, Kelly, Waahlaal Gidaag, Smith, Hughes-Skandijs, Hale, Weldon

**Nays:** Bryson

**Motion passed 8Yeas:1Nay**

Mr. Kelly said that it was his understanding that they were going to be considering the ordinance and then considering process. Ms. Hale said that they were not intending on discussing process but she recessed for a break and said they'd pick that up after the break.

Following a 5 minute break, Ms. Hale called the meeting back to order and said that during the break she spoke with Mr. Kelly and he said that he had a question on the memo. Mr. Kelly said that in being a new Assemblymember, he is curious on how things are implemented in general. He said that since the memo mentions the method by which they are communicating to the public through a postcard notice is not referenced in the ordinance, he asked how staff goes about ensuring that those processes are followed.

Manager Koester explained that CDD keeps a calendar for tracking notifications and sends out similar notices throughout the year for a variety of reasons. She said they would send out notice once this ordinance passes and then set it on their annual calendar to be sent out annually, likely in the fall, since that is when they get heavy rains and the soils have not yet frozen for the winter. Mr. Kelly said that works for him and thanked her for that answer.

Mayor Weldon said that begs the question that if they aren't adopting landslide maps, why would they be sending out notices to individuals in the landslide identified areas. Manager Koester said that was the direction that staff took from the previous conversations and meetings at which this topic was discussed by the Assembly but if the Assembly didn't want them to do that, this would be the time to provide additional direction to staff.

Ms. Hale asked Mayor Weldon if she wanted to entertain a motion at this time to give alternative direction. Mayor Weldon said not at this time as she will wait to see what happens at the Assembly level.



## **5. General Direction on Tourism Management**

Tourism Manager Alix Pierce said that she is here seeking extremely high level direction from the Assembly with the idea that gives her marching orders to be able to drill down and come back to the body with options, tools, levers that can be used to manage visitor volume. She said that they ended this last tourist season with 1.638 million visitors which was a 30% growth over the 2019 season which had been the busiest season ever. She said the projected numbers are level for the 2024 and 2025 seasons. She said that the busy days, with the five ship limit going into effect in 2024, will be less busy. Our busiest days this year were approximately 20-21,000. The busiest days for this year are approximately 17,000 visitors so the five ship limit is already having a moderating effect and has plateaued.

Ms. Pierce explained the history of the five ship limit and said that it was a strategy which came out of the Visitor Industry Task Force (VITF) and like any strategy, as you are implementing it, there are some things that may need adjustment. She said that for 2026 and beyond, they need to think of their strategy and she provided a list of issues that they may want to look at and different mechanisms that they might use for addressing the impacts of tourism on the community. The direction she is hoping the Assembly will provide will help her determine what next steps they should be taking. Ms. Pierce said that the Assembly will be seeing a lot of her as she brings updates on what is happening and to see if there are any course corrections the Assembly wants her take.

Ms. Woll said that we know at this stage that if we are maintain the current tools in use, we will be seeing a flattening of the numbers over the next two years. She asked Ms. Pierce, if they basically do nothing more, does she think they will continue to see growth. Ms. Pierce said that would be a variable answer depending on how many cruise ship docks are in operation. Speaking in more detail, Ms. Pierce said ships are getting bigger and Alaska is a premium market and Juneau drives the numbers for Alaskan cruising. Vancouver and Seattle are two hub ports and Vancouver is considering adding an additional berth. What we do in Juneau makes a big difference in their decision. Because we are geographically the center of cruise network, she has been told anecdotally by the cruise industry that they can't sell Alaska without Juneau. She said that she thinks we will see growth, whether due to ship size or based on increased home port capacity. She said that if Juneau does end up having an additional facility that would accommodate large ships will mean we will see more visitor number increases.

Assemblymembers asked Ms. Pierce if she could speak to the numbers of tourists that were here during April and October out of the 1.638 million, how many landed during those shoulder months. They also asked her to speak to operator capacity or lack of operator capacity impacts things during these higher numbers.

Ms. Pierce said to address the shoulder season numbers, she didn't have those numbers handy but would email them later to the Assembly. She said that the April and October early and late ships are just one line and are just a couple of ships and it has only expanded by a week earlier and later in 2019, 2022, and 2023. She said that she doesn't think it is a huge number in the tens of thousands rather than the hundreds of thousands. She said she doesn't think the shoulder season have had a major, measurable impact. She has received a lot of feedback with discomfort about the extended season from both businesses and residents but she doesn't think it has a major impact on numbers. She said that as they look at the numbers and the impacts of those numbers, she said it is actually better to look at the daily numbers as opposed to a season-wide number. The questions she is asking are: "How did our days feel? What were the impacts? and, What can we work to change?"

Ms. Pierce said that with respect to the operator capacity question, while some of the operators may be able to handle a little more capacity but based on the public and operator feedback, they are close to the limits of capacity for the high volume activities. There has been a lot of discussion about whale watching, fi that industry turns back on more, that might mean more boats, and more impacts. The helicopter market hasn't really grown or shrunk much since the early 2000s. They're working off the same Forest Service permit that they've had since 2001, and while it impacts some residents a lot, it hasn't changed much over the last two decades. Glacier tours saw a huge impact this year because they had operators running out of their permits in mid-July so the bottleneck there wasn't necessarily operator capacity, it

was the number of permits issued by the Forest Service. The tram was really busy this year. She said that there is certainly room in our shore excursion market for operators to turn back to but there isn't much room to increase those high volume items mentioned above. She said as the Forest Service completes its planning and implementation of a new parking lot and trails in 2026 and Eaglecrest coming online with perhaps some new opportunities for growth beyond those she has already mentioned.

Ms. Hughes-Skandijs asked Ms. Pierce if she could speak to the status of the whale watching group and if there is any progress towards a limited entry process for that group. Ms. Pierce said that the group is still meeting and while she doesn't currently have any updated information on that, she will be speaking with Mr. Palmer and that group and keep the Assembly informed as that process evolves.

Ms. Pierce answered additional questions about the lower daily numbers in the coming year being attributed mostly to the five ship/day limit but also due to her ability to influence the scheduling of which ships will be using which docks. When asked about the results of the annual tourism survey, she said that she will be receiving the survey results at the end of November and hope to present those to the Assembly in early December in time for the retreat. Both residents and visitors alike were surveyed and an economic impact study was part of the visitor survey. Those results are a little bit delayed because the consultant is waiting on sales tax data.

Deputy Mayor Hale said that Ms. Pierce mentioned in her memo the ramifications of what Juneau decisions have on other communities and asked if she could speak to that more.

Ms. Pierce said that there has been a loose group of port communities in Alaska that started meeting during COVID and has been meeting approximately monthly. It is driven by the communities that get big visitor numbers such as Juneau, Skagway, Ketchikan and Sitka and they have been joined by staff from other communities drifting in and out as things are relevant to them. She said that they met during Southeast Conference and discussed the possibility of formalizing their organization, likely under AML. Ms. Hughes-Skandijs has been helping Ms. Pierce in her day job capacity with the idea that they would have a centralized group that could potentially hold contracts such as their survey contract. She said that if they were to formalize a "Port Communities of Alaska" group, they could contract for a wider visitor survey across the region. She said that most of the other cruise tourism destinations in the world have organizations of this type which are formalized in different ways, depending on the model. She said that we are unique in that we haven't had an organized body to this point. Ms. Pierce said that Juneau is the big port and we are geographically central and we get 99% of the ships so the things that we do affect other communities. She said that anything that happens in one of the regional communities affects the other communities in the region. She gave the example of a possible Sitka ballot initiatives that would cut visitation in half, that would have big ramifications for other ports in the region. She said it is important that we work together to make these decisions in a collaborative way and try to collectively figure out what a sustainable tourism industry in Southeast Alaska looks like. She thinks after formalizing the group, the big meaty question for the group would be where do we go from here and what is sustainability. She said they have been having that conversation here in Juneau but that conversation needs to move to the regional level.

Ms. Hale thanked Ms. Pierce for her answers and said that rather than do a formal motion, she would like to do a thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumbs sideways to give Ms. Pierce broad direction so she can come back to the Assembly retreat on December 2 with details about how we might go about the directions she would take.

Ms. Hale asked members to give a thumbs up if they are OK with seeing growth, thumbs sideways if they want to maintain as is, or thumbs down if they want to see a decrease in visitor numbers.

Mr. Smith said he has a process question. During candidate forums, there are always those yes/no questions that truly have some nuanced answers. He said that if he were to vote as "maintain" for this, it is with the nuance that really means "Maintain while continuing to aggressively manage tourism to reduce impacts on residents."

Ms. Hale said they will take that as the interpretation of “maintain.

The THUMB VOTE was taken as follows:

**THUMBS UP: None.**

**THUMBS SIDEWAYS (Maintain):** Mayor Weldon, Greg Smith, Wade Bryson

**THUMBS DOWN:** Christine Woll, 'Wáahlaal Gidaag, Michelle Hale, Alicia Hughes-Skandijs, Paul Kelly, Ella Adkison

Ms. Hale said she didn't think they would be voting in that manner in the future but she thanked Ms. Pierce and said they look forward to having more robust discussions on tourism in the future.

**G. STAFF REPORTS**

**H. COMMITTEE MEMBER / LIAISON COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS**

Mayor Weldon noted that for the Assembly retreat, while the start time hasn't been officially set, it will be early. She also told members to be sure to watch their emails as Mr. Barr will be sending them information on goals that they will need to respond to.

**I. NEXT MEETING DATE: December 18, 2023 6:00p.m.**

**J. SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS**

**K. ADJOURNMENT**

*There being no further business to come before the body, the meeting adjourned at 7:59p.m.*