ASSEMBLY STANDING COMMITTEE
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Meeting Minutes – January 11, 2021

The Assembly Committee of the Whole meeting, held virtually via Zoom webinar, was called to order by Deputy Mayor Loren Jones at 6:02p.m.

I. ROLL CALL

Assemblymembers Present: Maria Gladziszewski, Wade Bryson, Michelle Hale, Carole Triem, Alicia Hughes-Skandijs, Greg Smith, Christine Woll, Loren Jones, and Mayor Weldon.

Assemblymembers Absent: None.

Staff Present: City Manager Rorie Watt, Deputy City Manager Mila Cosgrove, City Attorney Robert Palmer, Municipal Clerk Beth McEwen, Deputy Clerk Diane Cathcart, Finance Director Jeff Rogers, Public Works Director Katie Koester, Lands Manager Dan Bleidorn, Community Development Department (CDD) Director Jill Maclean, CDD Planning Manager Alexandra Pierce, CDD Senior Planner Irene Gallion, Parks and Recreation Deputy Director Michele Elfers

II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved as presented.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. August 10, 2020 Assembly Committee of the Whole Draft Minutes
Hearing no objections, the minutes of the August 10, 2020 COW meeting were approved.

B. September 14, 2020 Assembly Committee of the Whole Draft Minutes
Hearing no objections, the minutes of the September 14, 2020 COW meeting were approved.

IV. AGENDA TOPICS

A. Visitor Industry Task Force (VITF) Report

Mr. Watt thanked everyone who volunteered to participate in the VITF, and complimented Ms. Pierce and Ms. Elfers for doing a great job in staffing a thorough public process. He shared that a lot of people contributed a lot of time and effort into this project starting in January/February 2020.

Ms. Elfers and Ms. Pierce shared a presentation of the VITF report. Ms. Elfers described the VITF process, beginning with the task force's establishment in October 2019 through Mayor Weldon's charging document. Between October 2019 and April 2020, the VITF met twelve times to discuss tourism management. The VITF held public testimony meetings on January 11, 2020, and February 1, 2020, where they received 156 written testimonies, and 43 public comment testimonies. The last VITF meeting was in April 2020 where they finalized their report, and delivered the finished report to the Assembly.

Visitor Industry Task Force Recommendations:

1. Regarding Management of the Visitor Industry:
    - The VITF advocated for the centralization of Visitor Industry management.
    - Improvement of operations and dock scheduling in partnership with Cruise Line Agencies.
    - Improvement of infrastructure and a direct focus on transportation and dock electrification.
2. Regarding reviewing and updating the Long Range Waterfront Plan (LRWP):
    - The VITF decided that the current plan does not need a huge overall in updating the LRWP, and instead encouraged CBJ to focus on other priorities related to management.
    - In addition, the VITF recommended the completion of Seawalk development.
3. Regarding the idea of a restriction on the number of visitors, or a Visitor "Cap"
    - VITF discussed this with the City Attorney, and found that a "visitor cap" could be legally questionable and logistically impractical. They believe that limitation can be achieved through other measures, such as:
        - Limitation through infrastructure
        - Limits on ship scheduling
        - Limit by negotiation
        - Financial incentives/disincentives
4. Considering Methods for Collecting Public Opinion:
    - The VITF recommended engaging a third party contractor to complete a public opinion survey for Juneau residents at the end of 2021 cruise season.
    - Depending on the utility of a survey, additional surveys should be planned to gauge how management strategies are influencing public perception.
    - The VITF also considered collecting data on the effects of hot berthing, or when one ship is immediately replaced by another ship in the same dock.
5. Subport Development/NCL Dock Proposal:
    - The VITF recommended supporting a dock if the following conditions are met, recognizing some are beyond NCL's control, the task force submitted these items for Assembly consideration:
        1. One larger ship per day using one side of the facility.
        2. Maximum of five larger ships in port per day.
        3. No hot berthing at the new facility.
        4. No larger ships allowed to anchor as a sixth (6^{th}) ship in town.
        5. High quality uplands development for community and visitors.
        6. Year round development orientation.
        7. CBJ manages the dock to some extent.
        8. The dock is electrified.

<u>Recommended Assembly Action:</u>

- Direct the City Manager to develop an implementation strategy for the recommendations of the VITF
- Consider the VITF's input as subport permits are reviewed.

Ms. Elfers and Ms. Pierce ended their presentation and opened the floor for questions from the Assembly.

Ms. Hale asked with respect to the daily limit of five ships if Ms. Pierce could clarify how many ships were typically in port during "big ship days" in 2019. Ms. Pierce explained that the daily ship limit would only restrict ships to the current capacity, it would not allow for an additional ship to be at anchor with the addition of a new dock. Ms. Hale expressed her concern regarding the five ship limit. She said that local residents have shared similar concerns with her, and said they can feel overwhelmed when five ships are in town. She added that one week prior, she felt that it was appropriate for the COW to consider these recommendations. However, at this point in time, she said it would be difficult to give this issue the attention that it needs. Ms. Hale suggested that the Assembly take this up again at a future COW meeting, due to feeling that she has not been able to give this the consideration it deserves.

Mr. Bryson disagreed with Ms. Hale. Mr. Bryson said that there are businesses in the community who are currently trying to make plans for this upcoming tourism season. He added that every delayed action the Assembly makes will be detrimental and harmful to businesses and the community. Mr. Bryson told the Assembly that there are businesses who need them to take action, so that the businesses in the community can know how to operate this summer.

Ms. Triem mentioned that the recommendations in this report would require Assembly action to move forward. She said that if the Assembly approved the recommendations, it does not mean that every action will move forward without additional Assembly action. Ms. Triem reminded the Assembly to keep that caveat in mind when moving forward with this discussion.

Ms. Hale said that she does not believe that delaying Assembly action would harm local businesses, adding that businesses have been impacted by COVID-19, not by inaction of the Assembly. She believes that the Assembly is doing everything they can to help local businesses, however, there are a lot of items in the report that the Assembly has not yet discussed. Ms. Hale also mentioned that there is not anything in this report that would impact the 2021 summer season, as these recommendations are long-term objectives.

Ms. Hughes-Skandijs asked if the City Manager believed there was merit to Mr. Bryson's concerns that this report would drastically affect local tourism businesses. She also asked if there could be a way to produce a high-level implementation plan.

Mr. Watt said that Mr. Bryson's concerns are more related to the next agenda topic. He said that in regards to the VITF report, the intention of tonight's meeting is to receive the report, and thank the VITF for their recommendations. He does not think the Assembly would be adopting anything tonight. Mr. Watt anticipated the Assembly would discuss the order of the VITF's recommendations, and then provide direction to the City Manager to work on the items they might want to implement. Mr. Watt explained that whatever action the Assembly decides, they will ultimately bring it back to the public for testimony on any ordinances that come about from those implementing actions.

Ms. Gladziszewski echoed Mr. Watt's explanation, and said that Assembly should focus on accepting the report and then go through it piece by piece with CBJ staff.

Mayor Weldon thanked those who served on the Visitor Industry Task Force, as well as the staff and the public who participated. She agreed with Ms. Gladziszewski comments, describing the process as similar to the Assembly's approach of the proposed recommendations for Child Care some time ago.

Ms. Woll said that she agreed with the Mayor's comments, and mentioned that she would like to consider discussing the subport issues separately, as she did not want that issue to be addressed too far down the road. Mr. Watt explained the Assembly has many options available when making a decision regarding the subport. He added that the Assembly wears many hats: as the land owner, the permitting agency, the appeal quasi-judicial body, etc. He explained that the Assembly is also the appeal body on anything coming from the Planning Commission. He would anticipate staff provides a process map to the Assembly so that they can see the whole spectrum. Ms. Pierce agreed with Mr. Watt's explanation, and added that the logical next step would be to develop an implementation plan to set priorities and help the Assembly process all of the information presented in the report.

Mr. Jones suggested that Mr. Watt ensure that the small cruise ship plans that Docks & Harbors are currently working on are included in this process.

Ms. Gladziszewski made a comment regarding Ms. Woll's comments on the NCL proposal. She believes that there should be an implementation plan so that the Assembly and public can each know when they can insert themselves into the process without jeopardizing any portion of the process.

MOTION by Mayor Weldon for the Assembly to accept the VITF report and request the Manager to develop an implementation strategy in conjunction with the Port Director and the Docks & Harbors Board as appropriate, then to bring it back to the appropriate body. She asked for unanimous consent.

Mayor Weldon clarified that this motion is accepting the report, not adopting the report, and anything the Assembly does will come back to the body and will be set for public hearing.

Mr. Smith asked for clarification on the Docks & Harbors Board aspect of the motion.

Mayor Weldon explained that this motion would ask the City Manager to work in coordination with the Port Director and Docks and Harbors Board as appropriate, as the cruise ship docks are directly involved with the Docks & Harbors Board.

Madame Clerk McEwen asked Mayor Weldon to clarify which body the implementation strategy will be brought back to. Mayor Weldon and Mr. Jones clarified that the implementation strategy will be referred to whichever body the City Manager deems appropriate.

Hearing no objections, the motion passed by unanimous consent.

B. Cruise Ship COVID Protocol Discussion Update

Mr. Watt explained that for the past few months, Mayors and Managers from Southeast communities have been in contact with each other, and this has evolved into a group discussion which involves most all of the ports in Southeast Alaska. He described the general goal of the cruise ship industry is for the port towns of Southeast Alaska to develop a cohesive and unified approach for the cruise ship season. He said that they have come up with a beta version dashboard which shows COVID-19 levels in the various communities. Cruise ships are required by the CDC to get approval from the ports, which Mr. Watt said would open up discussions about medical capacity in port towns.

Mr. Watt explained that the discussion has not yet advanced much further due to the fact that they do not yet know what the CDC protocols and requirements will be. He addressed the palpable anxiety in the industry, the concern that once the agreements have been made, cruise ships will not have enough time to book cruises, hire staff, and prepare ships for the cruise ship season. There is also concern amongst retailers in port towns that a delayed cruise ship season would lead to loss of income and problems with staffing. Mr. Watt said that there was nothing the Assembly can do at this point. He mentioned that our regional neighbors suggested each community draft a letter; they volunteered Mr. Watt to write that letter to ask CDC to advance strategic planning. He told the Assembly that if there were to be an ultimate agreement to come about, it would be brought before the Assembly before implementation.

Mayor Weldon shared that the Mayors throughout Southeast Alaska had a teleconference with the Governor, and she encouraged advocating the CDC to come up with an implementation strategy plan.

Ms. Gladziszewski appreciated this update, and asked Mr. Watt if he could update the listening public on the current plan in place, particularly which cruise companies have delayed sailing. Mr. Watt said that he did not have a definitive list of all cruise ship companies' decisions, but added that Holland America, Princess Group, and Carnival have all delayed until at least mid-May, which comprises about 60% of their sailings.

Ms. Triem asked for clarification on the start of the season, as mid-May is relatively close to the regular start of the cruise ship season.

Mr. Watt explained that there are considerable hurdles in many aspects of resuming sailing, which involves marketing cruises, if the general public is ready to resume sailing, port town agreements, and CDC requirements for "test sailings" to monitor how cruises could operate. Mr. Watt expects a soft cruise ship season opening, and that the opening heavily depends on the availability of vaccines. He also mentioned that 2022 seems like a strong year for cruise ship sailings, as many people have expressed desire to go on vacation in 2022. In general, the opening of the cruise ship season largely depends on how our country as a whole handles the pandemic.

Ms. Hale said that she has heard from community members who are worried about cruise ships bringing COVID, as well as those who are worried about the impacts that the lack of cruise ships will have on local businesses.

Mayor Weldon gave kudos to Mr. Watt for taking the lead on this issue, and added that she would appreciate hearing his comments regarding Canada's restrictions.

Mr. Watt spoke to Jones Act, a federal requirement that bans foreign ships from embarking on cruises that only call at U.S. ports. With Canadian ports being closed, it is uncertain if there is a legal way to pursue an itinerary for U.S. ports, and it would most likely take federal action to implement any changes.

Ms. Woll shared that she heard comments from the industry about the possible need for holding "space" to hold guests as part of potential mitigation measures.

Mr. Watt anticipates that the CDC requirements for cruise ships will include reduce capacity, and isolated areas in the ship reserved for quarantining guests who test positive for COVID-19. He mentioned an additional concern regarding screening guests after they return from shoreside excursions. Presumably, Mr. Watt said that there would be protocols in place for guests when they embark, additional testing and screening measures conducted while sailing, then screening guests before and after disembarkation at each port. Mr. Watt also addressed the seasonal workforce and the mitigation measures that might need to be implemented for their safety and the safety of the community.

Mr. Jones shared that his friends in Europe have advised against traveling to Europe in 2021; and said that Europe might not be open for tourism until mid-2022.

The COW took a break at 7:01p.m. and reconvened at 7:10p.m.

C. Juneau Economic Plan (JEP) Update

Ms. Cosgrove provided an update on the Juneau Economic Plan, the contents of which were included in tonight's packet. The plan featured a Housing Action Plan Update provided by Chief Housing Officer Scott Ciambor from the most recent Lands Committee meeting. She noted that community partners such as JEDC, Chamber of Commerce, and others were hoping to revisit and update the JEP. There are a lot of things happening in the background, and she said it would be beneficial for the Assembly to consider funding an update of the plan, as it is now over five years old.

Mr. Jones said that Ms. Cosgrove was going to work with McDowell to look into the potential costs of updating the JEP. Ms. Cosgrove said that she has not yet been able to get that information back to the Assembly. She also informed Mr. Jones that the McDowell Group has changed its name to McKinley Research, and that she will continue to try to get that information.

Ms. Hale said that given the current economic climate and the uncertified surrounding economic revitalization, it might be too early to restart looking at this plan. Mr. Jones asked Ms. Triem if she had any comments as the certified economist and the chair of AFC. Ms. Triem agreed with Ms. Hale's comments, although she assumed that they would take that into account when developing future plans.

Ms. Hughes-Skandijs had similar concerns regarding whether it might be too soon to revisit the JEP, but said that would be part of the planning process of figuring that out. She described this as an unprecedented situation in terms of scope, and many of the assumptions they would start with would be difficult to gauge.

Ms. Triem thought it would be interesting to start working on the changing role of state government in Juneau's economy. She noted it is as a trend that is already happening, but it as an important thing that the Assembly should be aware of and concerned about. Ms. Hale thanked Ms. Triem for raising such a critical point. She suggested that Ms. Triem may want to reach out to Nils Andreessen at Alaska Municipal League, as they have been working on objectives that address that exact concern.

D. Other Items

Mayor Weldon reminded the Assembly of the Special Assembly meeting with the Legislative Delegation on January 12.

Ms. Hale gave a shout-out to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and the team who has been working on the vaccine rollout. Ms. Cosgrove gave a shout-out to Mr. Barr for his leadership in the rollout of the vaccine workshop. Ms. Gladziszewski expressed gratitude and appreciation for the extra information provided during the registration for the vaccine.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Minutes drafted by Administrative Assistant Lacey Davis and respectfully submitted by Municipal Clerk Beth McEwen this 15th day of March, 2021.