

Tourism & Recreation Services Focus Group Meeting

Project Name: Waterfront and Economic Development Plan
Project No.: WHI-24-01
Prepared By: Linda Pringle
Date: 12/10/2024
Time: 4:00 pm

Project Team:

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Focus Group:

| Name | Organization | Contact |
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Discussion:

Item Topic

1.0 Introductions

Lazy Otter Charters

- Have two storefronts on the harbor and three boats that provide water taxi service and sightseeing. They currently use Smitty's Cove and the Small Boat Harbor as well as a parking and launch area that they lease west of the ferry terminal.

United States Forest Service (USFS)

- The USFS considers Whittier as a trailhead to a vast landscape of almost 2,000 miles of coastline where people can access the Chugach National Forest for hunting, fishing, camping, recreating, etc.

Chenega Regional Development Group

- It is the gateway to Chenega's marine route. Their task is to preserve the culture, build infrastructure, and develop industry in Prince William Sound (PWS).

Huna Totem Corporation

- Huna Totem is also owner of Alaska Coach Tours and will be servicing Whittier this year.

Phillips Cruise and Tours

- Operates mostly out of Cliffside Marina and occasionally from the Ocean Dock. It is a growing business that would like to see opportunities available in Whittier and are interested in what improvements may be available.

2.0 Limitations or Barriers to Service

Kelly Bender: Overall improving the waterfront: signage is a big one, upgrades in the harbor. Better bathrooms, better trash, better boardwalks, friendlier access. Major barrier is the lack of land. Lazy Otter Charters has four lots with one being used for storage. This isn't very visually friendly, but there isn't another place to put their equipment.

- Would like to see more marine services, buy gear, get mechanical help. No land or places to do this. Made some improvements on the harbor along the Triangle, putting sidewalk and boardwalk in. Love to see this in the rest of the harbor. Near harbormaster office, this is nice boardwalk as well. Other areas, not clean, not maintained, needs to be more consistent.
- Having more business resources would be helpful.

David Borg: User group separation is key, there are a lot of different user groups that are all shoved into the same location.

Kelly Bender: long time need or want is a launch ramp for kayaks. Spaces that they had are gone now and Head of the Bay (HOB) is too far away at this point, but maybe some development down there will mitigate this distance. Harbor is too dangerous and is a choke point with the boat ramp.

- The Whittier Chamber of Commerce is starting to troubleshoot how to move people back and forth from the HOB. Or how to move people from parking to a launch site.
- Moving people around, getting people to the right locations, and doing this faster. On May 8, 2025, three cruise ships will be unloading into Whittier and every Wednesday two ships will be in Whittier. People from the HOB will be bringing them into town to spend money in shops, but how are they getting them there and where will they drop them off?

Tim Lydon: Hear a lot about kayak launch issues. The best management practices (BMP) are great discussion points, but these mostly have to do with behaviors. A lot of these issues come from infrastructure.

Tor Wallen: one thing Whittier is used to is guests coming off the ship and jumping on transportation to head out of town. The goal with ships coming into the new dock is to bring them into Whittier to spend time and enjoy Whittier, then catch the bus or train out of town.

- Where is the bus stop or pick up/drop off locations for people getting from HOB to Whittier.
- Offering more tour options in town will put more stress on infrastructure and establishments in Whittier and on the surrounding trails. There is definitely an interest to keep people in town, but there will be challenges to figure out how to mitigate the impacts of additional people on the town.
- They are seeing interest in Anchorage businesses to come into Whittier and set up operations at the new terminal. This will bring in more people and vehicles to work at these places.
- Huna Totem is planning to add employee parking lot, but this will also place more pressure on tunnel traffic and infrastructure in Whittier.

Tim Lydon: Tunnel and capacity are a huge part of the functionality and the access that the waterfront provides.

Cody Hannah: They are at their maximum capacity for their size of vessels at Cliffside Marina. They have outgrown this area in regards to waiting areas and where they stage their passengers. Currently, they put up a fabric tarp on Princess lands to provide staging. Most of the time, people are standing in line and waiting in the rain.

- Buses are coming and dropping off right where train depot is. People are crossing the street without crosswalks to access loading areas.
- The new cruise ship dock will put more congestion on their parking/staging areas.
- They would like to grow their business, but they don't have any more slips inside Cliffside Marina that will fit their vessel (another 80-90' vessel slip).
- They spend \$10,000 per boat to haul over to Seward to haul them out. Also, if there is an engine failure, they have to get to Seward to lift boat out to fix it.

3.0 Opportunities

Cody Hannah: Ideally, City of Whittier will move towards a haul out facility (similar to Seward), This offers so much opportunity. A 300-ton lift, 35' wide to draw in all the fisherman that don't want to go around the gulf into Seward. It could provide the opportunity to bring in contractors (welders, electricians, etc.) from Anchorage. It is a large investment, but could be a 10-year plan that the City is budgeting and putting money towards.

- Ocean Dock in disrepair. If they have an engine failure and it is windy, their slip isn't accessible, they will go to the Ocean Dock, but it isn't a floating dock. Would be nice if it was or if it had shore power.
- They have been paying transient moorage fees, but might be a waste of money. Better line management and offloading passengers.
- Marina across from the fuel dock, spots where a lot of fishing vessels are tying up, if this could become available, having a slip there inside the marina would be an opportunity.
- More covered walkways from the main parking lot in Whittier. Keep people covered and out of the pouring rain. People have a better experience dry compared with waiting an hour in the pouring rain, impacting their moods for the tour.
- Bathroom along this walkway rather than the other side of the water.
- Limited parking is first come first serve.
- Passenger comfort for pre-boarding process would be key.

Tim Lydon: Agree with a lot of what Cody said for needs of vessel owners, including the USFS. As a visitor standpoint, a lot of the things that Cody brings up they hear and see a lot of. Whittier parks and recreation have made a lot of effort to enhance the hiking, skiing, snowmachining opportunities in Whittier. With anticipated new levels of visitation and congestion, these opportunities may help to pull these people off of the waterfront. Signage is a major component to identifying these opportunities and directing people to the trails and recreational experiences. Trail enhancement and parking situation, links in with the waterfront pull that gives people somewhere to go for a few hours.

- Parking in the springtime on a good winter when snowmachining overlaps with shrimp season causes congestion and parking demand issues. Messaging for snowmachine parking would be beneficial.

End of Meeting