



Southeast Conference Visitor Industry Committee Meeting
Thursday June 4th, 2020
2:00-3:00 PM

Minutes

Call to Order/Opening Remarks: Chair KC Hostetler opened the meeting at 2:02 pm via Zoom with more than 30 participants, including Kirby Day, Mike Tibbles, Dan Blanchard, Holly Johnson, Alana Peterson, Deborah Hayden, Danielle Doyle, Liz Perry, Carol Rushmore, Laurie Booyse, Rachel Roy, Cody Jennings, Sarah Leonard, Bobbie Meszaros, Carole Triem, Greg Smith, Daryl Tseu, Drew Green, Ashley Snookes, Chelsea Goucher, Rick Harris, Mario Fulmer, Emily Edenshaw, James Cheng, Tanguy Libbrecht, Meilani Schijvens, Jessica Bovitz, Heather Holt, Sarah Woodruff and others.

Committee Chair KC Hostetler welcomed participants. She gave broad-level sector updates including AK Cares Act, Spruce Root, SWAT analysis.

Sarah Leonard, president of ATIA, reported that the State of Alaska's FY21 budget for marketing and tourism was not addressed in the legislative session so there is no change in funding. ATIA is helping businesses that want to open to both in-state and out of state clients, providing tools and resources. They have also been in contact with the Governor's office regarding safety protocols and with Dr. Zink, regarding the airports and command centers to make sure ATIA is complementing the state's message. Leonard also highlighted the "Show Up for Alaska" campaign, encouraging Alaskans to support local businesses, offering resident discounts.

A number of participants had questions for Leonard. Dan Blanchard asked what ATIA knew about Covid testing at the airports, specifically SETAC and ANC. Leonard said SETAC is offering testing but not requiring it. Rapid testing is available at the ANC Airport. Emily Edenshaw from the AK Heritage Center asked if Dr. Zink had info regarding a potential spike of Covid cases in the fall. Leonard said she had not heard this addressed but there is potential for Dr. Zink to participate in a webinar with the tourism industry. Kirby Day with Princess asked if ATIA is aware of any other communities with stricter mitigation policies than those recommended from the Governor's office. Leonard said she wasn't aware of any. She said there is rapid testing available once passengers land in Alaska, but results can take anywhere from 30 min. to 72 hours and visitors are required to quarantine until results are back. The official recommendation is for all travelers to get tested prior to arriving in Alaska. Laurie Booyse said that Sitka will follow the State's recommendations. Liz Perry said that many metro areas don't have testing available for non-symptomatic people.

Dan Blanchard, with Uncruise, gave an update from the cruise sector. EOC has developed a policy for small ships (US Flagged Vessels). Some of the smaller ships are slated to begin this summer; July 18th for AK Dream Cruises which carry 8-12 passengers, June 26 for American Cruiselines, July 5 for Lindblad. He said there was no indication that larger foreign ships will operate. Kirby Day asked if Uncruise is planning to follow the state's recommended Covid testing plan. Blanchard said they are asking that visitors get tested prior. He also said they are considering picking passengers up in Seattle and/or isolating them to the boat.

Mike Tibbles with CLIA also addressed the cruise sector. He reported that March 13, the industry ships were suspended by the CDC, starting with 30 days and eventually extending into July. At this point, 627 pre-Covid voyages are cancelled, translating into a 1.22 million passenger capacity. At this time, Norwegian, Oceanna, Regency are still on schedule, however, Canada has prohibited any ships with more than 100 passengers until Oct 31. Tibbles anticipates a gradual return for the bigger ships. Rick Harris asked if there is also a decline in yacht travel through SE Alaska? Tibbles said no, that he anticipates as many or more yachts this year. Drew Green with Cruiseline Agency confirmed that he has also seen a lot of interest in yacht travel to Southeast Alaska.

Kirby Day from Princess spoke about the TBMP Program. He encouraged operators to continue to follow the guidelines. He said that the hotline is active, and people are watching.

Mario Fulmer from CCTHITA gave an update from Tlingit and Haida. He reported that cafes and catering have been able to operate. Development of the Cultural Immersion Center is pressing forward. There are many needs within social services. Fulmer said they are focusing on supporting artists and helping them get their products and creative ideas to market.

Bobbie Meszaros with the Sealaska Heritage Institute spoke about breaking ground in June 2020 on the new Cultural Arts Campus which will provide 50 new jobs for Juneau. The Walter Soboleff building exhibits and store is closed to the public and staff is working remotely. Online store sales are available. She said that cultural and interpretive programs are currently on hold. Celebration has been shifted to a virtual platform supported by KTOO and aired on YouTube June 10-14.

Emily Edenshaw with the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage reported that they sent out a survey via survey monkey in April regarding Covid-19 to their leaders in an effort to share information. ANHC applied for an EDA grant to develop a cultural tourism plan. ANHC is planning to open on June 12 with 20 interns.

Ashley Snookes from Spruce Root spoke about the upcoming online workshops via Zoom focused on assistance in navigating the tourism industry in the midst of Covid-19. Registration is at spruceroot.com.

Meilani Schijvens with Rain Coast Data presented a power point SWOT Analysis (available on SEC website). She also reported that the Business climate survey went out today and encouraged business owners to take it.

Danielle Doyle AMHS Marketing said there are 2 small vessels in service, and they are in the process of adding more. Efforts to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 include restricting passenger numbers and screening all passengers prior to boarding. The Kennicott and Matanuska are scheduled to begin service in late June/early July, leaving from Bellingham and providing minimal service for SE Alaska.

Liz Perry with Travel Juneau spoke about the Juneau Solstice Sale which is an online sale to encourage locals to staycation. They are encouraging tourism business to offer “specials” to locals. She also informed the group that the UA Regents board voted to explore the option of absorbing UAS into the UA system.

KC Hostetler updated the committee that the board is in the process of figuring out what format SEC’s Annual Conference will take. She mentioned that there is a question added to the annual Business Climate survey addressing this so that everyone would have the opportunity to weigh in.

With no other new business to discuss, the Chair announced the next meeting of the Visitor Industry Committee is tentatively set for August 26th.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:08 pm