

Minutes
Bar Harbor Cruise Ship Committee
Council Chambers
Thursday, July 22, 2021 @ 3:30 PM

Attendance:

Chair Eben Salvatore and committee members Martha Searchfield (by phone), Matt Hochman, Sandy McFarland, Jeremy Dougherty, Jennifer Cough, Ken Smith (by phone) attended part of the meeting; Greg Gordon, Police Chief Jim Willis, Harbormaster Chris Wharff, Sarah Flink, John Kelly, Larry Sweet, Amy Powers, Skip Strong, Jane Disney (by phone) and Lynn Kenison Higgins. Town Manager Cornell Knight attended part of the meeting as well.

Chris Wharff, Greg Gordon, Sarah Flink, Skip Strong and Amy Powers are non-voting members. Lynn Kenison Higgins did not vote. The voting membership for the meeting was nine.

- I. CALL TO ORDER— 3:30 p.m.**
- II. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD (UP TO 15 MINUTES)—**Two people present choosing not to speak at this time.
- III. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES (June 17, 2021)**

Chief Willis raised the issue that he should be added while striking Charlie Phippen from the list of non-voting members. Mr. Smith made the motion to accept after corrections made and Mr. Kelly seconded. Motion carried.
- IV. STAFF REPORTS**

Harbor Master Chris Wharff shared that there are 10 bookings for the Independence for the rest of the summer and there are still 21 other ships remaining on the schedule. We're fairly sure most of those will be cancelled but they're technically still booked as we haven't received a cancellation notice for those yet. Just recently Crystal Cruise Lines has asked for 3 reservations for this Oct-Nov; we're in the very early stages of that. There are a lot of hoops they need to jump through before we can consider that an option.

Currently, 174 cruise ships are booked for the 2022 season, most of which were booked by Charlie Phippen before he left; 123 booked for 2023, 59 for 2024, and a few bookings as far as 2033. Crystal has small cruise ships with 200-1,000 passengers. Ms. Flink said that port agreements, CDC, medical and hotel agreements all play a part in determining bookings for this season.

Ms. Powers asked Mr. Wharff about his process following the Town Council's action this week that all new reservations will be tentative. Mr. Wharff said the reservations will stay in "requested" status in PortCall and will be time-stamped as they come in. When we have a decision on when we can book ships we'll have to go back in and figure out first-come, first-served, and book the ones that were in first.

V. **REGULAR BUSINESS**

a. **2021 season update**—Town Council meeting last Tuesday agreed on a workshop Monday August 2nd, possibly finalizing any actions on the 3rd. Mr. Gordon raised the question of whether the workshop was open to the public as the Survey had been posted for the public. Mr. Salvatore felt more discussion would be needed following the workshop.

b. **Survey Review**

Ms. Cough pointed out the chart on page 53 that illustrated # people vs. #of cruise ships. That the chart also illustrated Sep/Oct. chart shows how businesses being most affected. Mr. Smith and Mr. Strong said they did not find any of the survey surprising. Mr. Strong did feel the survey lacked distinction and accuracy on "ship" size. He pointed out that the Town Council needed to distinguish between managing vs. banning. The town attorney has clarified that the ships anchor in State, not Town waters. Ms. Cough mentioned that "managing" may need to focus on vehicle traffic, not just cruise ships. Mr. Salvatore remarked that the percentage of people saying to ban cruise ships was lower than he expected. He said balance needed to be attained as any attempt to ban could affect businesses and potentially cause a lawsuit.

Mr. McFarland expressed concern for tax payers and their increasing taxes. Mr. Salvatore remarked about a need to look at reduction of ships and how that would impact taxes. And how would lessen stress to the town. There was also comment that the environmental impact section did not seem as big as some thought it might. Mr. Salvatore reminded everyone of July 5, 2019 when ANP was overwhelmed with vehicles. Then pandemic changed everything. Still trying to implement suggestions. Ms. Flink mentioned page 39 of the survey and the concern about land based vehicle traffic. Suggested possible tools for managing cruise ships, such as staggering arrivals.

Mr. Sweet mentioned concerns for employees, such as lack of affordable housing, lack of parking, over-crowding in town as well as in ANP. Chief Willis spoke about facilities being stretched too thin; lack of PD staffing, ambulance, parking attendants. Ms. Powers felt there should be more communication as there is a lack of understanding by the public of the committee's goals. Mr. Hochman agreed that

more collaboration was needed between town and businesses. Essentially any proposed changes had been stopped by COVID.

Mr. Dougherty felt there weren't any surprise results from the survey given the timing. He felt the argument of cruise ships extending the tourist season was no longer applicable. September and October have developed into very busy seasons with cruise ships on top of that. Mr. Kelly shared how ANP has also seen a shifting impact of fall visitations.

- VI. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD (UP TO 15 MINUTES)** David Witham spoke about importance of achieving balance and spreading the tourist season beyond October. Felt there needed to be a cap on the number of passengers rather than number of cruise ships. Also felt tax increase was necessary to maintain the quality of Bar Harbor and to protect the "Golden Goose." The Town of Bar Harbor however, should not be dependent on the revenue generated by cruise ships for maintenance when passengers land on "earth" (pier, travel by bus or walking in town.)

Valerie Peacock (council member) shared how complex it is to try to manage needs of the town and the community, as well as effects that occur to specific industries and people. Lots of thought regarding what tools may be applied, ripple effects and unexpected consequences.

VII. COMMITTEE COMMENTS AND REQUESTS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- a. The Town Council will have a facilitated workshop to be held August 2 in Council Chambers at 5:30 pm. Ideas and strategy discussion to follow as more information comes from the Town Council.
- b. Possible ballot issues for September 3rd.

The next meeting was set for August 5 at 3 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT— 5:07 p.m.

Mr. Gordon made the motion, with a second to adjourn. Motion passed unanimously.

Lynn Kenison Higgins, Deputy Clerk