



MEMORANDUM

Resolution 24-048, A Resolution of the City Council of Homer, Alaska, Providing Direction to the Port and Harbor Advisory Commission and the Economic Development Advisory Commission Regarding Cruise Ships in Homer

Item Type: Backup Memorandum
Prepared For: Mayor Castner and Homer City Council
Date: April 22, 2024
From: Council Members Erickson and Lord

The 2024 cruise ship season is quickly approaching, and with it will come a large ship to Homer that cannot tie up to our deep water dock. Other cruise ships had requested coming to Harbor earlier in the season, and they were told we do not have the operational capacity to safely accommodate them. This has highlighted a number of issues that the Port & Harbor Advisory Commission (PHC) can consider, and additional broader issues that the City should better understand when considering any policy making from the business and overall community.

There is potential for additional cruise ships, including larger cruise ships, to have interest in docking in Homer in the future. As itineraries are developed early, it is prudent for the City to understand our infrastructure and staffing capacity, and the community to broadly understand their interest and appetite for cruise ships sooner rather than later. We understand the turnaround time on these requests to the PHC and the Economic Development Advisory Commission (EDC) may feel tight, but we'd encourage the Commissions to engage in this dialogue and provide a summary of what they are able to cover - including where more time and information may be needed, and/or any immediate policy recommendations for the Council to consider.

To facilitate a dialogue, we are asking the Port and Harbor Advisory Commission to engage in this topic with staff to understand:

- The capacity of our current docks for different size classes of large vessels
- Passenger lightering considerations, including moorage and safety
- What responsibilities and potential liabilities the Port and Harbor has for accepting cruise ships of any size, including what amenities we share with companies requesting these services
- What the emergency response plan is for potential tsunami evacuation

- What are the costs and effects of cruise ship landings on our EMS and HPD staff
- What increased staffing considerations are made by Harbor operations staff to address additional trash and restroom cleaning needs
- What criteria are used currently for deciding capacity to accept a cruise ship, including when there is passenger lightering required, and are those criteria adequate
- How this topic will be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan
- Revenue and expense considerations surrounding cruise ship business at the Port
- The broad legal landscape of local policies around the cruise ship industry

Additionally, we would like to encourage the Chamber of Commerce to engage with Homer-area businesses to better understand the limitations and opportunities within the private sector around cruise ship tourism in Homer. We believe this conversation needs to be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan process, and would like the Economic Development Advisory Commission to begin having conversations with stakeholders to better inform the City Council on policy options and the pros/cons of different City cruise ship policies.

For an interesting reference, look up Bar Harbor, Maine and their long-standing and recent municipal policies surrounding cruise ships. They see much higher passenger counts than Homer does, similar to Juneau and other Southeast communities, but news articles and documents from the Town of Bar Harbor are interesting to review.

The City and Borough of Juneau reached an agreement with CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association) to limit the number of ships to no more than five per day starting this year. An article in the Petersburg Pilot from January 2024 is titled: "*Wrangell assembly raises rates for lightering cruise passengers to shore.*" These are offered as references of conversations other municipalities have been having around cruise ship impact.