

Dear Visitor Industry Task Force:

What is quality of life? This is a sticky question. It's also subjective. For some residents, it is defined by their own experiences on our streets, trails, in our stores, etc. For others, it's defined by economics.

For me, it's opportunity.

I am a tour operator and I love my city. So much in fact, that I was able to create a business telling visitors, and an occasional resident with visiting friends or relatives, about the history and food scene in Juneau. I build relationships with other businesses so that I can help share their stories of creativity, ingenuity, entrepreneurship, and tenacity – all things that make Alaska and Juneau so special.

I recently attended a Visitors Task Force meeting at which one person said the group needed a mission statement that included maintaining quality of life. My question is, who determines what quality of life looks like for each individual? I would imagine it is very different for most of us. For some, it's the ability to live away from downtown and not have to interact with visitors on a daily basis. I can see the appeal. For others, it's the ability to hike at Mendenhall Glacier whenever they want without having to share with commercial groups. Again, I can see the appeal.

For many of us, quality of life is determined by the ability to be self-sufficient, entrepreneurs, create a living for ourselves and others, and to give back to our community. This is most appealing to me. I never have, nor do I ever want to, work for the state or city, our biggest employers. I am an entrepreneur. I am privileged to have the opportunity to create an experience that connects people to our community. I tell our story, and the stories of others. I respect Juneau residents' opinions and, I only hire Juneau residents to help share our community. No one tells our story better than us.

But, some residents feel overwhelmed with our quiet town becoming so busy in the summer. They're overwhelmed by the number of excited and happy visitors wanting to experience Alaska, spend money in our community, support our economy, and help us create jobs. Yes, that can be overwhelming. But creating jobs and having a strong economy is vital for the Capital City.

The question of overtourism is real and needs a real conversation. The community needs to work together to help define what is best and how we continue to manage the visitor industry so that we can all benefit from the positive impacts. I think as we dive into this subject, we should bear in mind that we're all affected. ALL of us. Whether one likes the current volume of visitors or not really isn't the question. It's whether we like roads, schools, a strong economy, the arts, small businesses, a vibrant downtown, and a safe city. These are the things that create quality of life for many as well. Without good infrastructure and a strong economy, Juneau will die on the vine. The visitor industry not only financially supports our city through sales tax, it does so with donations and contributions to non-profits, school groups, volunteer time, and significant local spending for supplies to operate our businesses.

Finally, I would also suppose that just about all of us have traveled and been a visitor to another city or country. How were you met? Did you feel welcomed, or put aside? Did you want to go back? I'll never proclaim the glacier is mine, or a certain trail belongs only to locals, or only residents can eat in a certain restaurant. Not only is that rather discriminatory, it's just downright rude. I think we as a city are better than that and can work together to make Juneau a great place to visit AND a great place to live.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts.

Sincerely,

Midgi Moore, CCTP  
CEO, Juneau Food Tours