



Feb. 14, 2020

Ms. Carole Triem
Chair, Visitor Industry Task Force
City and Borough of Juneau
255 S. Seward Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Ms. Triem and Members of the Visitor Industry Task Force:

May I first commend you and members of the task force for committing yourself to assess the overall issues surrounding the visitor industry and working to provide sound advice to the Assembly and its management team.

In the last several years, the Sealaska Heritage Institute has worked very closely with the City Manager and CBJ staff in the planning and construction of the Walter Soboleff Building and now the Sealaska Heritage Arts Campus. Through this period, we have come to appreciate the city's excellent work and timely responses to our needs. A critical observation---germane to the city's continuing ability to meet its responsibility in the visitor industry---is that with the growing visitor industry and the increasing demands on the city management that we have observed, it is our hope that they will be able to continue to provide the same excellent service that we have enjoyed.

In my capacity as the President of the Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI), I am writing to encourage your support of cultural heritage tourism, one of the fastest-growing sectors of the travel industry and one that has already had a significant positive effect on Juneau and the region.

Cultural heritage tourism is a key component of our goal to promote cross-cultural understanding by educating the public about Native cultures and art; supporting the survival of Native cultures and art; and bringing economic benefits to artists, the Juneau community and beyond.

In 2015, SHI opened its Walter Soboleff Building, a research and educational center and a visitors' attraction in the heart of downtown Juneau. Our visitors enjoy the immersive experiences in Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian cultures and SHI openly welcomes the visitors. The facility, which includes exhibits, a clan house and monumental and spectacular Northwest Coast art, has been a draw for cultural-heritage tourists without the negative impacts that we've heard raised by others.

The construction of the Arts Campus adjacent to the Walter Soboleff Building will house both indoor and outdoor space for visual and performing arts. The campus will also include a totem pole and five large bronze masks representing Alaska's major cultural groups called "Faces of Alaska," which is poised to be another iconic monumental art installation in Juneau. We have worked with various cruise lines and more recently have been discussing artistic and cultural endeavors with the Norwegian Cruise Line to further enhance our cultural tourism efforts. It is our hope that the area designated "Heritage Square" by the City and Borough of Juneau in 2018 will make Heritage Square a destination for visitors who are seeking a cultural heritage experience. It is our further hope that our two facilities along with other efforts will bring us closer to our goals to make Juneau the Northwest Coast arts capital of the world and to promote cross-cultural understanding.

Critical to the assessment of tourism is outlining its economic benefits. The Walter Soboleff Building has been an economic benefit for Juneau particularly significant in the face of the State's fiscal situation and its impact on the City of Juneau. In 2018, SHI's direct expenditures in Juneau totaled \$4.8 million for the purchase of goods and services from Juneau vendors and contractors, SHI payroll, and Sealaska scholarship recipients' educational expenditures in Juneau. And, SHI expended \$2.1 million for goods and services from Juneau vendors and contractors, according to *The Economic and Value-Added Impacts of SHI, 2018*, by the McDowell Group. Our economic growth has also supported our ability to contribute millions of dollars into local institutions, including \$3.1 million to the Juneau School District, \$4.4 million to the University of Alaska Southeast, and \$1.1 million to the Southeast Regional Resource Center. The building of the campus will create further financial benefits for Juneau, as the \$12.7 million project will add 55 jobs during construction and contribute \$5.5 million in labor income. The operation of the campus is projected to continuing economic benefits.

Even before SHI built the Walter Soboleff Building, we were offering cultural tourism through Celebration, a biennial dance-and-culture festival that draws approximately 5,000 people to Juneau. In 2018, Celebration generated \$2.1 million in visitor spending in Juneau (including indirect and induced impacts), according to the McDowell study.

We hope that if the Long Range Waterfront Plan is updated that you consider incorporating a recommendation to include Northwest Coast art along the sea walk that would be accessible to locals year round. Such a project would add to the beauty and cultural richness of Juneau for visitors and residents alike. SHI has further considered the possibility of a Totem Pole Trail conceivably that could be a major feature along the sea walk.

In closing, I would be remiss if I didn't comment on the discussion surrounding the restriction on visitorship. As I noted earlier, we are in the heart of downtown Juneau. The Walter Soboleff Building has been a draw for visitors in the last three years. We have not experienced the negativity from visitorship that we've heard raised by others and I would not anticipate that an increased visitorship with the addition of the Arts Campus would



negatively impact our community. On the contrary, it would be our hope that we would draw additional visitors.

We represent the First Peoples of this state. While we were not always enthralled with the early immigrants, who appropriated our lands and suppressed our arts and culture, through our strong cultural values and resilience, we were able to adapt and to propose and implement changes to make the increasing population in Alaska mutually beneficial for both the newcomers and ourselves. At an ideological level, we would not want to replicate what we see happening at the national level in closing our borders. We learned from the initial attempts to restrict the state's Permanent Fund to Alaskan citizens that it was illegal. I would venture that attempts to impose a restriction on the number of visitors would be determined to be illegal. I have complete confidence that we have the means within our City and with our City Assembly and managers that we can develop solutions to mitigate negative impacts from an increased visitor industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rosita Worl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Rosita" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Worl".

Rosita Kaaháni Worl, Ph.D.
President

Enclosure: SHI Visitors Policy



Sealaska Heritage Institute

Visitors Policy

Sealaska Heritage Institute's mission is to perpetuate and enhance Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian cultures with goals of fostering cross-cultural understanding, educating the public about Native cultures, languages and sustaining Native arts.

Sealaska Heritage supports and encourages tourism as an opportunity to educate visitors about Alaska Native cultures and to strengthen local regional sustainable economies.

Sealaska Heritage will maintain its position as a leader in cultural tourism in Alaska in collaboration with other cultural and Native entities.

SHI's goals are to:

1. host, support and encourage opportunities for cross-cultural understanding through its authentic representations of Native cultures through its exhibitions, arts, publications, media and cultural orientations.
2. welcome locals and visitors alike to be active participants in learning and embracing the history, culture, lifestyle and values of Native people.
3. promote economic and employment opportunities that directly benefit Alaska Native artists and entrepreneurs.
4. strengthen the local and regional economy through cultural tourism endeavors.
5. embrace our cultural value of Haa Aaní and our ancestral role as environmental stewards, following values of sustainability and respect for the environment.



Rosita Kaaháni Worl, Ph.D.
President

October 28, 2019