

Minutes
Bar Harbor Cruise Ship Committee
Council Chambers
Thursday, August 5, 2021 @ 3:00 PM

Attendance:

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

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

Dr. Jane Disney and Police Chief Jim Willis were excused.

- I. CALL TO ORDER— 3:00 p.m.**
- II. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD (UP TO 15 MINUTES)–**
Ten people were present choosing not to speak at this time.
- III. APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES (July 23, 2021)**
Minutes were approved by straw poll, with Mr. Salvatore abstaining.
- IV. STAFF REPORTS**
Harbor Master Chris Wharff reported that not much had changed since the last meeting except for Town Council Workshop. He has been creating a user-friendly spreadsheet and putting numbers together with the help of Sara Flink. They have put together an overview to summarize past years cruise ship seasons. Mr. Wharff thanked Ms. Flynk for all her assistance in the project. For the 2021 cruise ship season, Crystal ships have cancelled, as well as Symphony and most of the bigger cruise lines. Only American Cruise Line has not cancelled.

There were not any other staff reports.
- V. REGULAR BUSINESS**
 - a. Election of Officers-** Mr. Smith made the motion to continue the same slate of officers. Mr. McFarland seconded the motion. Eben Salvatore would continue as Chairperson, Martha Searchfield as Vice Chairperson, and Deputy Clerk as Secretary. Motion carried with 5 approvals and 1 abstention.
 - b. Continue Survey Review—**Last Cruise Ship Committee meeting involved a round table discussion of the survey. Since that time, the Town Council meeting and the

first workshop were held and Mr. Salvatore felt that they were very productive with good discussion. Those meetings determined that information would be conveyed to this committee. The Cruise Ship Committee plans to wait for further information and direction to come from Town Council regarding how visitation should proceed in the future, pending the August 10th workshop.

- c. **Possible Council Action**—Cruise Line representatives were present to address the Committee. Ms. Powers helped organized this with the various industries in order to help address the many questions concerning the 2022 season and what is actually booked. Mr. Salvatore made a number correction regarding 50,000 that actually came in 2019 which was being compared to the bookings for 2022. Preliminary 2019 bookings compared to preliminary 2022 bookings increased by 24%. The number 50,000 was accurate when comparing what actually came to port in 2019, and what was booked for 2022. A more accurate comparison is of the 200,068 booked for 2019, to 200,092 passengers currently booked for 2022. This information was presented in today's news article that he had seen.

Ms. Powers was then invited to speak. It was her understanding that the Town Council has been talking not only about the 2022 season, but also 2023 season and beyond for long term planning. Knowing that the industry representatives would be present and having also attended the workshop, she requested to ask some specific questions focusing on the 2022 season in order to help inform the Town Council. Mr. Salvatore agreed. Ms. Powers then introduced industry representatives present in the room. Paul Tacilet of American Cruise Line/Pearl Seas Cruises, Captain Thomas Hinderhofer and Russel Benfold representing Royal Caribbean group. Ms. Powers first question was to Paul. Commenting on how well the company lines had been doing, she asked if he could provide the community with an overview of where the company lines are since the pandemic began? Mr. Tacilet reported that the American line was fully back in service throughout the country and US flag vessels are fully operational. The Pearl Seas brand however, since Canada's border closure, have suspended the 2022 season. The Independence is the ship scheduled to visit Bar Harbor with 19 stops this season; 18 or 19 for 2022 season. The American Constitution is visiting Maine this season but is visiting Bucksport and bringing passengers to Bar Harbor by coach this season. Probably continue to do that for next season as well. 2023 season will see an introduction of new vessels to Maine. Five new vessels to be constructed, each with a capacity of 109 passengers. The focus will be to make as small an impact on communities as possible. Mr. Tacilet thanked the Committee for working with them and collaborating.

Ms. Powers asked what the anticipated capacity would be for the 2022 season? Mr. Tacilet expected the Independence (90-96) and the Constitution (173) would run at full capacity. She also asked whether crew members openly come and go for port call? Mr. Tacilet responded that crew members were free to come and go as they please. All the crew work very hard and are very busy with their work schedule but they definitely have opportunities to go ashore. And it is easier since crew are all American citizens for them to go ashore. Ms. Powers asked if all the crew were vaccinated? Mr. Tacilet explained that for the 2021 season they were working with

all vaccinated guests and striving towards completely vaccinated crew members by September 15. Mr. Salvatore asked how many Bucksport calls were there? It was believed to be 6-7.

Thomas Hinderhofer, Director of Northeast Port Operations was the next representative to present an overview of where the company lines are since the pandemic. Travel started last fall from Singapore with protocols in place and there are now protocols in place for US sailing with home porting out of the Caribbean. CDC had new conditional sail orders and updates to go along with the other conditional sail orders that allowed home porting out of the United States. Starting last January, we were able to work with home ports using an eight-part document and memorandums setting out safety standards, allowing the line to work with each port's safety standards. There was some guess work "when we think we can cruise vessels and start our itinerary." A vaccination strategy was also included along with the company's own protocol which is accepted in European ports. July 2 was the first US port opening in Miami, followed by 14 other homeports opening.

Ms. Powers then asked a question in regards to dry docking. Mr. Hinderhofer commented how the dry dock schedule was definitely impacted; explaining the procedure not only looks at the aesthetics but the longevity of a vessel and took advantage of the time and anything needing to be done as with wet dock. This period has still been a busy time. The Miami cruise terminal, which acted as a service station to other ships in the Caribbean. Mail delivery, medical supplies and staff members are transported to other ships there.

Mr. Salvatore asked whether there was a foreseeable visitation and volume carrying over into the 2022 season? Mr. Hinderhofer answered that now there are sailing caps of 35-40% capacity. If the 2022 season opens up to full capacity it would be that. Ms. Powers then asked about protocols that would be taken? The conditional sail order is set to expire November 1st. So we are thinking strategically what if it doesn't? We are looking ahead to get port agreements to other ports not a regular stop, and what are the regulatory requirements. Letting passengers know about their health regulations-masks, social distancing-will probably continue into next year.

Because of the Delta variant, passengers are now required to test three days prior to sailing. Vaccinated passengers also are required to show proof. This was not CDC mandate. Mr. Salvatore asked if this would continue into the 2022 season? As this had begun as a return to service plan; yes would continue into 2022. Mr. Salvatore then asked if there were any unnoticeable changes to the 2022 season that the Council should know about? Mr. Hinderhofer remarked how this port was unique due to the tendering, which affected various aspects, one being social distancing. This cruise line always wants to work with the tender operators here with masking, social distancing and any other protocols. Ms. Powers asked about protocol for the crew; while crew members are being treated same as passengers, they are asked right now not to go ashore or are contained in an excursion "bubble," where they stay together and are not exposed to others. Because of the tight quarters and work environment is very important to maintain health of crew, passengers and surrounding community.

The approach is to take each port as a case by case basis. CBP is actually neutral regarding crew and guest and the CBP is the next step regarding day to day guidelines for crew, even without COVID.

Mr. Salvatore asked what does the itinerary look like for the 2022 season. Itinerary planning focuses on ports that are popular as “nice ports.” Also look at custom satisfaction, deployment issues i.e. speed, fuel, weather season and conflicts with other lines. Really a big puzzle.

Mr. Kelly shared an update from Acadia National Park. While unable to share much due to ANP negotiating a federal contract. The transportation plan is focusing on bus tours to eventually replace commercial busing. The marketing analysis that was planned for last year has had to be redone and is another reason for the delay. Unable to give specific dates, ANP is hoping to get this underway as soon as possible. The issue of vehicle size would be transitional. Contract obligations and transitions would be gradual so as not to cut off CUA holders. Mr. Salvatore explained that a 50 ft. motor coach would be scaled down to a 38ft. motor coach. So school bus size and the Island Explorer with bike racks extended is 38ft. Ms. Cough inquired how CUAs worked? Mr. Kelly explained that they are a yearly permit and applying for one is now a very different process. They are acquired on a yearly basis and that company has to abide by any rules that apply. It’s not a contract as bus contracts last ten years. That relationship is much tighter with better control, and better expectation by the business. Ms. Cough asked whether a cap would apply and whether small businesses be cut out of this process? Mr. Kelly replies that yes there would be a cap but small business would still get a CUA. Over time CUAs for the larger vehicles and the bus tours would transition to contracts. And only contracted bus tours will be allowed in the park. Ms. Powers asked if the number of contracts issued was mentioned, but Mr. Kelly was not at liberty to say. While many details were still to be worked out, one benefit would adequate bus parking spaces when a set number is established, and not subject to the reservation system.

Mr. Hochman then presented to the representatives some of the goals from the cruise ship committee; to make the season more manageable for the town, less overwhelming for the residents and more spread-out. Working with the industries while honoring residents request, keeping local businesses and port healthy—how do we work together to achieve goals and balance? Mr. McFarland mentioned how the Committee has been working with the focus of number of people verses number of cruise ships.

Mr. Dougherty asked if reducing the number of days or establishing sanctuary days would help? The cruise line representative said sanctuary days are extremely hard to work with. Ship size and passenger caps are easier for scheduling purposes and port destination. While 2022 season is established, any changes would apply to possibly 2023 season and the future. The various cruise ship industries do not plan their itineraries together; any changes that a particular port makes would be adjusted into the itinerary.

Mr. Dougherty then presented an example if passenger cap of 3000 existed and a particular cruise ship had the capacity of 3500, would a change to a different ship happen? It is very difficult for ships to change regions for numerous, with specific ships going to specific Northeast regions. Passengers are purchasing specific itineraries. COVID changed that and what ships were available. Cap size would help to set a limit. But a lines itinerary would not necessarily change due to any of Bar Harbor region changes.

Mr. Strong made the point of staggering the arrival and departure of multiple ships on the same day, and more efficient use of facilities operating at the time. Mr. Hochman said that information from the industry lines of what actual capacity a ship has would help with decision making. The various cruise lines do want to work with the town of Bar Harbor and not totally lose business. There have been times when different lines worked with various regions to improve conditions for all. Felt the workshop was a good approach for all to figure it out and fix this problem. This sort of meeting would need to be under the umbrella of CLIA so there wouldn't be any violations.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD (UP TO 15 MINUTES) - Council member Goldthwait stressed the point that this summer was unlike any that anyone has seen. The community has been very unhappy. If the 2022 season repeats the intensity experienced this year, the community is not going to accept this. Mr. Kelly also shared how capacity number of ANP needs to be considered as well. One community member questioned how the survey would affect the 2022 season, and how the cruise ships were already booked. Mr. Salvatore explained that the survey would not affect the 2022 season, it was directing the meetings conversation, and how the Town would proceed 2023 and the future. He said the survey generated a lot of good data. It also showed that a number of people held the belief that less cruise ships would mean less people in town; 2021 season has shown this isn't totally true.

VII. Mr. Witham was very appreciative of the industry representatives for being so informative and willing to work with the Town and community. This opinion was shared by most in the room, with one lady questioning the role of CLIA and the Town moving forward. Another shared his concerns regarding the Town's ability to serve community members as well as visitors. The Island Explorer bus system was the example of low staffing and services being spread out or eliminated. Dealing with the fluctuations and demands have been addressed in the past by both the Town and the Island Explorer. A woman expressed concern about the lack of workers and staffing for businesses were a major issue this 2021 season with the land-based visitors. How can the Town handle the 2022 cruise ship season in addition to a repeat of this season's visitors? Mr. Hochman shared that it is the focus of the Town Council to provide relief.

VIII. COMMITTEE COMMENTS AND REQUESTS FOR FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Ms. Powers requested a meeting between the Town Council and CLIA be held via ZOOM if that was possible.

The next meeting was set for September 16, 2021 at 3:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

IX. ADJOURNMENT— 5:00 p.m.

Lynn Kenison Higgins, Deputy Clerk