



# CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

September 15, 2023

### Analyzing the Impacts of Tourism

I want to emphasize to the community that I have been and will continue to be deeply committed to addressing the concerns surrounding cruise tourism in our community. Since the initial announcement of our post-COVID “tourism boom,” I have actively engaged in discussions, attended public hearings, and collaborated with various stakeholders to find balanced and sustainable solutions to the cruise industry in Sitka. This is evident in the creation of one of Sitka’s Strategic Plan Action Items which states, “review the impacts and benefits of tourism, and develop policies that prioritize the quality of life for all Sitkans.” My dedication to this issue stems from a genuine desire to preserve our environment and our town, protect everyone’s constitutional rights, and support our local economy.

As your Municipal Administrator, I have consistently sought input from experts, residents, and businesses to ensure that our decisions reflect the diverse needs and perspectives within our community. I firmly believe in an inclusive and transparent approach that allows everyone to have a voice in shaping our future. The creation of our Tourism Task Force is a great step toward achieving this goal.

I understand the complexity of this issue and the need for a comprehensive strategy that takes into account environmental, legal, and economic considerations. My commitment to finding common ground remains unwavering, and I will continue to advocate for solutions that strike a fair balance between these crucial factors.

I’d also like to bring your attention to a matter that has the potential to significantly impact our local economy and the fundamental constitutional rights of our fellow citizens, business owners, and visitors: a citizens’ initiative aimed at limiting cruise tourism in our community through a ballot proposition. While it is essential to consider the environmental, infrastructural, and quality of life concerns associated with this industry, it is equally crucial to examine the potential legal consequences and the broader implications for our economy and individual rights.

**Lawsuit Risk:** Implementing strict limitations on cruise tourism through a ballot initiative may expose our community to a substantial lawsuit risk. Cruise companies and related businesses have invested considerable resources in our region, and abrupt restrictions could violate existing contracts and legal agreements. Litigation costs could burden our taxpayers, potentially diverting resources away from essential community needs such as education, public safety, and infrastructure improvements.

**Constitutional Right to Travel:** We must also consider the constitutional right to travel. The United States Constitution recognizes the fundamental right of citizens to move freely between states and within the country. While reasonable regulations can be imposed, overly restrictive measures

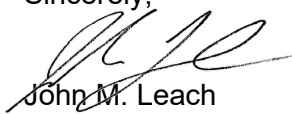
that limit the ability of individuals to travel freely may raise legal challenges and infringements on this constitutional right. We must ensure that any proposed limitations on cruise tourism are balanced and constitutionally sound.

Economic Impact: Cruise tourism is one of the few remaining economic sectors that have consistently contributed to our community's financial well-being. It provides jobs, generates revenue, and supports local businesses. Restricting this industry without a comprehensive plan for economic diversification could have dire consequences, including job loss, business closures, and decreased property values. We must carefully consider how we can transition to a more sustainable future without causing harm to the livelihoods of our fellow citizens.

We must approach the issue of limiting cruise tourism with caution and consideration for the potential legal ramifications, the constitutional right to travel, and the economic well-being of our community. While it is paramount to address environmental, infrastructural, and quality of life concerns, we must do so in a way that respects our legal obligations, individual rights, and the livelihoods of our citizens.

Let's engage in thoughtful dialogue and work collaboratively to find solutions that protect our environment, uphold our constitutional rights, and ensure the continued prosperity of our community.

Sincerely,



John M. Leach  
Municipal Administrator

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