

Mayor's Report 12_1_2022

Rockslide Mitigation and the 2023 Cruise Season

Reports indicate that rockslide mitigation efforts are going very well. Scaling along the rockslide chute is proceeding as planned and when the work is completed, attenuators (fancy word for big fences) will be installed to catch and/or slow down rockfall, if there are any more slides in 2023.

The Municipality continues to pursue a BRIC grant (Building Resilient Infrastructure Communities), which would help pay for a larger project intended to virtually eliminate rockslides (Item 9C on the agenda).

The plan for the Railroad Dock in 2023, is to dock larger ships (Oasis & Breakaway class ships) on Railroad Aft and then use buses to safely transport passengers off the dock, and to tender passengers from Railroad Forward. To achieve this, the rockslide area must meet highway rockfall safety standard. Because the scaling is going so well, engineers believe this standard will be achieved.

As buses transport passengers beneath the slide area, spotters will vigilantly monitor the slope. Any sign of rockfall activity can be instantaneously reported so that the area can be cleared. This is an extra safety protocol to ensure that passengers and dock workers aren't at risk.

The Railroad Forward berth will house smaller ships. Passengers will tender into the small boat harbor. The Broadway and Ore Dock will be used as in the past, although it's likely that more ships will use these docks when possible to eliminate the need to tender passengers to and from Railroad Forward. Ultimately, the Port of Skagway will have the capability to berth four ships in port at one time.

Anyone who knows me will tell you, I am not much of an optimist, but I am a realist. I firmly believe that we will host a record number of cruise passengers in 2023. If not, we will be close.

I believe it's vital that Skagway continue to pursue long-term development of the Broadway Peninsula by moving the Ferry Terminal and Dock to the Ore Peninsula. Yes, there are a number of engineering and design questions that must be answered, but Skagway simply cannot forego the opportunity to increase its usable waterfront area by 40% and the opportunity to develop marine and uplands infrastructure.

If I've learned anything over the past three difficult years, it's that Skagway must be better at long-term development planning. Acquiring and developing the Broadway Peninsula ensures we have that opportunity. Skagway government officials should immediately begin seeking partners for Broadway Peninsula development so that we have a plan in place as new Ferry Dock engineering progresses.

Final Reading of Budget

I applaud the Assembly for your diligence in regard to the 2023 budget. It took three Assembly of the Whole Committee meetings and three regular meetings to finalize this budget during yet another difficult year for the municipality.

Sales Tax Increase

I've spoken with a large number of business owners about this proposed tax increase, and I have a few concerns. First, if the tax goes into effect during the 2023 season, tour operators won't have the opportunity to renegotiate their rates with the cruise lines, so the extra one percent will come out of their bottom line. I recommend an amendment to change the effective date of the tax increase (if ratified by voters) to April 2024.

Second, and most importantly, the ordinance does not outline what the additional one percent of revenue will pay for. I realize that it goes into the general fund but I doubt many voters are eager to approve a tax increase when there isn't any real plan for the money other than collecting more revenue. If the Assembly wants to bring this tax increase to voters, I recommend clarifying the ordinance to clearly indicate what the additional revenue will be used for.

There are many options. The clinic is a black hole of subsidized funding that is likely to skyrocket in the coming months and years. The school budget has increased significantly over the past eight years. At virtually every meeting, residents request the Assembly consider constructing a pool. Clearly defining where the money will go not only allows voters an opportunity to better understand how the money will be spent, it provides valuable information to the Assembly when various budget requests are made from the clinic, school, or whomever.

- Andrew Cremata