

Some people perceive my attempt to get a vote on the harbor expansion as an effort to “shut down” the harbor project. Nothing could be further from the truth. I was seeking a vote that could reconcile differing and conflicting opinions about the project’s DESIGN, following a public process that was very flawed.

Further, I have no issue with fishermen or boat owners. They were handed the keys to this project early on and they drove it to where they thought best.

My issue is with the Haines Borough, which turned over a borough public project on a giant piece of community infrastructure to the Ports and Harbors Advisory Committee, which could be defined as possibly the project’s most self-interested interest group: boat owners. In fact, until a year ago, you could serve on this committee only if you owned a boat.

Such one-sided advisory board composition is not new for the Haines Borough, nor is it wise. This is my point.

The borough’s Tourism Advisory Board is comprised entirely of tourism businesses. Right now, a TAB subcommittee is reviewing local regulations on tourism that were written 15 years ago by the Tourism Planning Committee, its predecessor, a more balanced, six-member group that included only two tourism business owners, two private citizens not affiliated with tourism, plus a local grocer and a local lumberyard owner. Is it any wonder?

The borough’s Heliski Map Committee is comprised 40 percent by the town’s two major heliski operators. Membership that lopsided has required the borough to call in its attorney to try to sort out conflicts of interest.

The borough’s advisory committees – if they are to function as balanced representatives of the citizenry, which is their only practical use to the assembly – must be comprised of a membership that reflects the ENTIRE community.

A Tourism Advisory Board comprised solely of tour operators may as well be renamed that Haines Chamber of Commerce or the Haines ATIA. A Ports and Harbors Advisory Committee comprised of boat owners would have been more properly named the Haines Boat Owners’ Association.

Why is this important?

Consider for a minute that the Haines Borough received \$10 million for a new swimming pool. The borough turns over responsibility for designing the new pool to the Pool Committee, a group composed entirely of swimmers? And what if the Pool Committee returned to the borough with a plan for a \$15 million pool? And if four members of the assembly loved it? Would the \$15 million pool receive the blessing of the citizenry? Would the Pool Committee say to critics, "We had dozens of meetings about this. You could have come to any of our meetings. Where were you?"

No. This is ludicrous, but it's exactly what happened with the harbor expansion project.

It has been established that the Haines Borough Planning Commission, the borough's sole planning body, was sidestepped in the planning of this project.

The planning commission's handbook states: "Community-wide consensus has not been reached if a plan is drawn up by a small group of people who basically agree with each other. It is only when differing viewpoints and values are brought together, and the forces of negotiation, persuasion, and compromise are at work, that true planning takes place. Consensus in this context means the formulation of goals about which a majority (or more) of the community will agree."

True planning didn't happen on this project. But given that the design of this project was led by a narrowly defined interest group, it was incumbent on the Haines Borough to at least take the design out for a larger, general public discussion at major decision points, such as whether to have a rubble mound or a steel wall, and whether to fill nearly four acres of waterfront with car and boat parking. These are the legacy elements of the harbor project, the elements that would forever – or at least in our lifetimes – change the face of our waterfront.

They were also among the most expensive elements.

But instead, decisions on those elements also were made at the Ports and Harbors Advisory Committee level, based on committee assumptions of what the people of the Haines Borough wanted, and what the people of the Haines Borough were willing to pay for.

Even more basic questions raised by two assembly members – including whether this project's benefits matched its cost, a standard applied by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers before they build breakwaters – were not addressed.

Are people upset about this process? You bet they are. Do they have a right to be? You bet they do.

The Haines Borough is about to embark on a \$25 or \$35 million project that people had few meaningful opportunities to influence. Sure they could have gone to Ports and Harbors Committee meetings, but what sway would they have had in a room full of boat owners?

Those who have raised questions about this project, or the about the process that led to the current design have now been painted into a corner by timelines, by money spent, and by a process guided by hubris, assumptions and self-interest.

But we need some version of a harbor expansion and our assembly has other borough business that needs attending.

Tonight we're being asked to spend \$13 million on the most controversial and unsettled elements of this project.

I don't know if that's the right decision. I don't know if it's a good decision. I've been told it's the expedient decision, but I fear that embarking on a \$30 million project for the sake of expediency is folly. With the utmost reluctance and the gravest fear that this project will be damned by our descendants, I will cast a vote for Phase 1.

You could delay this project but I don't see a clear path if we do without a vote, at the fpl