



January 11, 2016

Dear Madam Mayor and Haines Assembly,

As I will not be present at the Jan. 12th Assembly meeting, I would like to submit my comments to you for your folders to add clarification to questions I have received. I would like to thank the Finance Committee for their time and understanding of both areas of consideration in the Tourism budget amendment. I would like to clarify that there are two separate budget items presented for Tourism. As both are related to online or web-based marketing, they could be confused. I would like to ask that the two areas are considered separately for several reasons.

First, and most importantly, the first ask is to simply restore the levels of the Tourism budget to or near the FY15 budget. In FY16 all departments cut budgets by 6%, however, as the Tourism budget is part of Fund 23 it should not be affected by borough wide cuts. As well as significant part of the Tourism Advertising fund -more precisely, the web-based marketing line items - were moved to Economic Development by Mr. Mandeville for a larger online marketing project he envisioned. This project was never started, yet there is still a vital need for an online marketing campaign to continue for Tourism and Economic Development. This is a budget that has always been in Tourism and my request is to return these funds so we can continue and improve our current online advertising accounts – simply the most important part of the Tourism Marketing budget. So this first request is simply reallocating funds from Economic Development back to Tourism where they have been in past budgets bringing the advertising budget back to the \$102,000 level of FY15. It is good to note that even this amount is very low for a CVB advertising budget.

The second request is a new and limited ask to fund an audit, consultation, and strategic plan for our entire online presence. This includes website, mobile, social media, and online advertising. This is a strategy to strengthen our online presence, ensure our advertising dollars are placed strategically, study our use of GoogleAd words, search engine optimization (SEO), and make sure that we have a cohesive marketing plan. Many organizations and CVB's have audits every 3 months if not once a year. Haines has, to my knowledge, never had an encompassing study of our online presence. After the initial audit, I will be seeking support from local and regional PR and Marketing firms to assist us in content marketing and creation of a daily, weekly, monthly and annual plan for a robust online marketing program. As well I will be seeking training for myself and my staff to assure we are capable required to keep Haines competitive in today's market.

I believe it is necessary to have a professional company outside of Haines assist in the audit and consultation. After this process I will be depending on local partners for web development, bloggers, videos and online content. Both firms I have recently been working with, Thompson PR and Spawn Marketing, are Alaska firms – giving them an outside view of Haines but understanding the unique needs of marketing rural Alaska. As well, the Tourism Dept. will create an overview of our findings to share will local businesses and organizations so that all of Haines can benefit from analysis and training in online marketing.

Thank you for considering both of these portions of the Tourism Budget. Online and web marketing is the fastest growing type of advertising yet, and Haines Tourism needs to remain competitive.

I am available for any questions.

Leslie Ross

Tourism Director, Haines Borough