

## CITY OF SANTA BARBARA WATERFRONT DEPARTMENT

### MEMORANDUM

**Date:** January 20, 2022  
**To:** Harbor Commission  
**From:** Mike Wiltshire, Waterfront Director  
**Subject:** **Santa Barbara Cruise Ship Program Update**

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#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That Harbor Commission receive a presentation on the current status of the Cruise Ship Program, discuss, and provide recommendations to staff as necessary.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The Waterfront Department established a Cruise Ship Program in 2002. Since that time, Santa Barbara has hosted nearly 200 cruise ship calls. With few exceptions, cruise ship visits are limited to the non-peak tourist season of September through May.

In addition to being an important part of the Waterfront Department budget, the Cruise Ship Program also has a significant positive impact on the local economy. In 2013 Visit Santa Barbara commissioned a cruise ship visitor survey and respondents said they enjoyed Santa Barbara's weather, architecture, shopping, and restaurants. The survey found cruise ship visitors from the 21 ships that called that year had an estimated \$2.4 million dollar impact on the local economy. The survey also noted that 41% of the passengers who had never been to Santa Barbara before said they were likely to return within 24 months, which could lead to an additional \$6.3 million in direct visitor spending. Cruise ship visits continue to receive the strong support of the Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce, Visit Santa Barbara, Downtown Santa Barbara, and the Waterfront Merchants.

Cruise ships that visit Santa Barbara come from around the globe but the most popular itineraries involving Santa Barbara are short West Coast trips originating in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Long Beach. Currently, the largest cruise ships calling on Santa Barbara carry around 3,500 passengers while the smallest carry around 200. The Waterfront Department charges a \$7 Passenger Landing Fee for every passenger on the manifest, regardless of whether they come ashore or not. The average cruise ship call lasts eight hours with typical arrivals occurring between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m.

Since our harbor has neither the depth nor the infrastructure for cruise ships to dock, the ships anchor about a mile offshore and passengers are tendered to shore in boats that seat about 100 people. These trips take about 15-20 minutes each way.

Security during cruise ship visits is a team effort. As the designated Facility Security Officer, Santa Barbara Landing is responsible for securing the docks that cruise ship

tenders use as well as the Passenger Staging Area. Securing this area is contracted out to US Coast Guard approved firms specializing in this activity. The Waterfront Department also requires every visiting cruise ship to pay for two uniformed Santa Barbara Police Department officers to be on site while passengers are present.

Once outside of the Secured Area, cruise ship passengers are welcomed to a Hospitality Area by Cruise Ship Ambassadors. The Cruise Ship Ambassador Program was established to facilitate traffic flow and enhance the visitor experience. Staffed by volunteers from the Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce, Ambassadors welcome cruise ship visitors, give directions, hand out brochures, and answer questions. The Waterfront Department provides tents for the Hospitality Area, directional signage, and coffee for the volunteers.

Many cruise ship passengers depart the Hospitality Area on pre-paid excursions. To increase traffic safety and facilitate ingress and egress of excursion buses, trolleys, and shuttles during cruise ship visits, SBPD officers close one eastbound lane of Cabrillo Boulevard adjacent to West Beach.

For those not taking an excursion, the Waterfront Department offers free transportation to a number of locations throughout downtown. This service has proved invaluable in getting cruise ship passengers to the doorsteps of local businesses.

The Waterfront Department requires the captain of every ship calling on Santa Barbara to sign a declaration stating their ship will abide by a number of environmental requirements, which include:

- No discharge of garbage, raw sewage, treated sewage, nor grey water within 12 nautical miles of Santa Barbara
- No use of ship's incinerator within such limits
- Notification in the event of accidental discharge

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a No Sail Order on March 14, 2020 effectively shutting down the cruise industry. The last cruise ship to visit Santa Barbara was on March 4, 2020. Due to the No Sail Order, 24 calls were canceled in 2020 and 21 were canceled in 2021 resulting in a loss of nearly \$850,000 in passenger landing fees alone.

On October 31, 2020 the CDC No Sail Order transitioned to a Conditional Sailing Order (CSO) that laid out a phased framework for cruise lines to return ships to service. This framework included rigorous COVID protocols and procedures as well as simulated voyages to test them. The CSO became voluntary on January 15, 2021.

Some of the COVID-related protocols and procedures that cruise lines have adopted include:

- All passengers are required to be fully vaccinated
- All passengers must provide negative test (PCR or antigen) taken within two days of embarkation
- Face masks required indoors at all times and outdoors when physical distancing cannot be maintained
- Enhanced air filtration
- Onboard medical care facilities equipped with testing and treatment capabilities

Additionally, Santa Barbara is not considered a Home Port, which means we would not provide medical services or receive any passengers in the event of an outbreak or incident. Any ships involved in the unfortunate event of an outbreak or major medical issue would be re-routed to Los Angeles, which is the nearest Home Port.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

After two years of cancelled visits, the Waterfront Department currently has 24 cruise ship calls on the schedule for this spring. The first call of the season is March 16, 2022. In addition to new health and safety protocols and procedures instituted by the cruise lines, the Waterfront Department is initiating new shore side protocols including:

- Requiring masks be worn by all staff and volunteers
- Strongly recommending COVID vaccinations and boosters for all staff and volunteers involved in the Cruise Ship Program
- Installation of hand sanitizing stations in the Cruise Ship Area
- Requiring rental of portable restrooms for ships over 1000-person capacity

The Waterfront Department continues to work with the Cruise Industry and our local and state health authorities to fully evaluate when it is safe to resume the cruise ship program in Santa Barbara.

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