



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: March 8, 2022

TO: Mayor and Councilmembers

FROM: Administrative Division, Waterfront Department

SUBJECT: Santa Barbara Cruise Ship Program Update

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council receive a presentation from Waterfront Department staff on the current status of the Cruise Ship Program, and provide recommendations to staff as necessary.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Waterfront Department has had a successful Cruise Ship Program for twenty years. The program has been paused for two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With cases on the decline and readily accessible vaccines, the department is looking to resume the program with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department.

BACKGROUND:

The Waterfront Department established a Cruise Ship Program in 2002. Since that time, Santa Barbara has successfully hosted nearly 200 cruise ship calls. In a typical year Santa Barbara plays host to anywhere from 20 to 30 cruise ship visits. These ships range in size from 200 passengers to 3,500 passengers.

The majority of ships visiting Santa Barbara are on short West Coast trips originating in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Long Beach. Typical stops on these routes include: Santa Barbara, Monterey, Catalina Island, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Ensenada. The average cruise ship call lasts eight hours with typical arrivals occurring between 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. Additionally, at the City's request, cruise ship visits are only scheduled in the off-peak tourist season from September through May with no visits scheduled in the busier summer months.

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. Tendered passengers disembark at Santa Barbara Landing's facility and are welcomed into a hospitality area which includes site security, restrooms, hand sanitizing stations, information booths, and various pre-arranged transportation options.

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 (SBPD) 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.

DISCUSSION:

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, cruise ship visits to Santa Barbara have been suspended for the last two years with the last visit occurring on March 4, 2020. When the 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. Due to the No Sail Order, 24 calls to Santa Barbara were canceled in 2020.

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 includes rigorous COVID protocols and procedures. Although the CDC allowed cruise ship operations to resume under the CSO, after consulting with the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, the Waterfront Department cancelled all 21 calls in 2021 out of an abundance of caution.

The CSO became voluntary on January 15, 2021. Cruise lines choosing to opt into this program are required to follow all recommendations and guidance as a condition of their participation in the program. So far all of the major cruise lines have opted into the program.

CDC COVID requirements for cruise ships participating in the CSO include:

- Three Cruise Ship Vaccination Classifications:
 - Not Highly Vaccinated – less than 95% of passengers and crew fully vaccinated
 - Highly Vaccinated – at least 95% of passengers and crew are fully vaccinated, but with less than 95% of passengers and crew who are up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines (boosted)
 - Vaccination Standard of Excellence – at least 95% of passengers and crew are up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines (fully vaccinated and boosted)
- All passengers and crew must provide negative COVID test taken within 48-hours of embarkation
- COVID-19 response plan which includes all requirements per the CDC guidelines
- Quarantine and isolation capabilities and requirements for all ships
- Onboard medical care facilities equipped with testing and treatment capabilities

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department, in conjunction with other California Port City/County Health Departments, has weighed in and provided a signed memo of agreement (MOA) with the following recommendations to safely resume cruise ship visits:

- Visiting cruise lines must opt-in to the new CDC CSO and follow all of its requirements
- Cruise ships visiting Santa Barbara must meet the requirements of “Highly Vaccinated,” which requires 95% of passengers and crew to be fully vaccinated.
- Any passengers who are not fully vaccinated must provide a negative COVID test taken within 24-hours of coming ashore in Santa Barbara

It should be noted that all ships visiting Santa Barbara will be required to follow the recommendations laid out by both Santa Barbara County Health and the CDC.

Additional Waterfront Department’s protocols include:

- 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

Additionally, Santa Barbara is not considered a Home Port, which means Santa Barbara area medical facilities would not be utilized to treat cruise ship passengers or crew in the event of an outbreak or incident. Any ship involved in the unfortunate event of an outbreak or major medical issue would be re-routed to its homeport or the nearest facility capable of handling the necessary quarantining, screening, disembarkation and transportation. Of course, in the event of a life threatening incident of any kind that needs immediate attention, Cottage would be utilized as the closest hospital. This would be a decision made by the emergency response provider.

After two years of cancelled visits, the Waterfront Department currently has 17 cruise ship calls on the schedule for Spring 2022, which the department hopes to keep on schedule if the current downward trend in COVID-19 case count continues. The first call of the season is March 16, 2022.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The Cruise Ship Program 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.

Additionally, the Waterfront Department budget receives passenger landing fees from visiting cruise ships. For Fiscal Year 2023 the Waterfront Department has budgeted \$500,000 in revenue from cruise line passenger fees. The Waterfront Department has lost roughly \$700k in revenue as a result of suspending the cruise ship program over the last two years.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

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

PREPARED BY: Chris Bell, Administrative Analyst

SUBMITTED BY: Mike Wiltshire, Waterfront Director

APPROVED BY: City Administrator's Office