



**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION FROM THE MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON
CRUISE SHIP COMMITTEE
November 2007**

Establishment and Role of Committee

In August 2007, the Portsmouth City Council established the Blue Ribbon Committee on Cruise Ships. Members of the committee were appointed by the Mayor and included City Councilor Ken Smith, NH Division of Ports and Harbors Director Geno Marconi; Portsmouth resident and Piscataqua Maritime Commission Committee Board Member Donald Coker; PJ Johnson of Portsmouth Pilots; Robin Whitaker of Isles of Shoals Steamship Company; and ex-officio members City Manager John Bohenko and Economic Development Program Manager Nancy Carmer. City Councilor Smith was elected chair of the committee which was charged with answering the following three questions and reporting back to the City Council in December 2007:

- 1) What is the feasibility of cruise ships docking in Portsmouth harbor?
- 2) If feasible, where will they dock?
- 3) Who should/will be responsible for marketing the city to and interfacing with cruise lines?

The committee met regularly from September through November to research and respond to the above questions and to develop a report and make a recommendation to the City Council. This report summarizes the committee's work and provides a recommendation based on its findings.

Analysis

In order to understand the potential cruise ship market, the subcommittee did the following:

- Reviewed the physical, logistical, operational security and political constraints for bringing cruise vessels in to Portsmouth harbor.
- Reviewed the number and schedules of cruise ships that are currently trading in New England.
- Reviewed existing state legislation governing cruise ships as it relates to gambling.
- Discussed potential docking sites for small cruise vessels.
- Reviewed the past practice and responsibilities for attracting cruise ships and hosting visits at the port.

Findings

Local Constraints

Ships entering Portsmouth Harbor are constrained by the following:

1. Constraints to ship particulars including length, breadth, draft and air draft. These parameters as they relate to the two lift bridges and the turning basin.
2. Stages of the river current advantageous to ship docking including a limited tide schedule around daily slack tides.
3. Pilot recency (i.e. level of river pilot familiarity and documented experience with Portsmouth Harbor.)
4. Limited docking facilities of appropriate length docks
5. State legislation governing gambling on certain size cruise ships

Potential Market

Currently there are about 12 passenger vessels trading in the New England market and given the limitations imposed by the Piscataqua River tides, turning basin, the height of the lift bridges, and the depth of the river, only a small percentage of these can port here in Portsmouth. The larger the vessel, the less likely the ship can be accommodated in Portsmouth Harbor. Anchorage offshore with a 4.5- mile tender trip is a possibility, but open anchorages in rough seas make a stopover less attractive to cruise lines. Also, cruise lines like to adhere to early morning arrival in port and late afternoon departure. Local tides do not often match this preference.

The American Canadian Cruise Line (ACCL) has several classes of ships that could be accommodated in Portsmouth and the company has shown interest in visiting. These ships average about 100 passengers with 62% customer repeat business. For these vessels there is not an issue with origination or customs. Based on additional correspondence and information provided by Mr. Marconi it has been determined that the American Cruise Lines, the American Canadian Cruise Lines and Cruise West Lines and potentially two or three other lines could sail into Portsmouth Harbor. Of these companies, American Cruise Lines, the American Canadian Cruise Lines and Cruise West Lines have had conversations with Mr. Marconi and are interested in visiting. The American Canadian Caribbean Line (ACCL) is planning to stop in Portsmouth from July 9-10 and August 15-16, 2007.

Currently there are ships trading in the New England Market that are unable to call in NH because of state regulations governing gambling and ship size. One line that is interested in Portsmouth is the Seaborne line; however, the casinos onboard preclude them from stopping here. Should the law be changed there may be several more ships interested in stopping in Portsmouth harbor.

Potential Docking Sites

The committee identified the following six sites as potential docking areas for the class of small cruise ships identified above:

- 1) The Port of New Hampshire main pier
- 2) The Port of New Hampshire barge pier
- 3) Harbor Place
- 4) Wentworth by the Sea Marina
- 5) Granite State Minerals Pier
- 6) The UNH pier in New Castle (the former US Coast Guard Pier)

Of the six sites identified above, the Port has previously successfully hosted small cruise vessels and the owners of the Harbor Place dock were contacted by the Chairman Smith and they are interested in further discussions on the concept. The other three sites are not currently optimal given conflicting uses, proximity to downtown, security or physical condition of dock.

Past Practice for Hosting Cruise Ships

Historically, the effort to bring cruise ships to the port involved a partnership between the Chamber of Commerce and the Port Authority. Representatives of each organization attended the Seatrade Cruise Ship convention in Miami, Fla. to recruit ships to the city. Although the Portsmouth contingent was successful in bringing a few small ships to Portsmouth (approximately 3-6 per year), ultimately the fees and travel trips to Miami became too expensive (\$10,000 to \$13,000 per year) to continue attending. The Chamber Tourism Committee determined that for less cost it could attract several bus trips that bring more people into the city more regularly.

When the ships came to the city they were welcomed by the Granite State Ambassadors and brought into town by trolleys for shopping, tours and entertainment. The passengers reportedly loved Portsmouth. However after 9/11, interest in cruise travel suffered a downturn and the Chamber and the Port stopped efforts to recruit ships to Portsmouth.

Committee Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the information provided above, the Mayors Blue Ribbon Committee on Cruise Ships submits the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. It is feasible for a class of small cruise ships currently trading in the New England market to enter and stopover in Portsmouth harbor.
2. Of the available dock facilities in Portsmouth Harbor, the most appropriate sites are at the NH State Port piers on Market Street or at Harbor Place on Daniel Street.
3. With regard to who should be responsible for recruiting and marketing the city to cruise lines, the Committee recommends a public/private partnership approach involving the NH State Division of Ports and Harbors, the City's Economic Development Department, the Chamber of Commerce and members of the Downtown Business Associations with the Port and city taking the lead.
4. Given the relatively small number of vessels that could logistically and legally call on Portsmouth, the first line of communication with the cruise companies will be with the Director of the Division of Ports and Harbors to determine if the vessel can meet the physical, logistical, operational requirements of the river and port. If the vessel passes this requirement, the Director passes the information on to the City's Economic Development Program Manager for coordination with the cruise company and the Chamber's Tourism Manager and Downtown Business Associations' representatives. These organizations would then arrange for welcome events and passenger activities.
5. This process would require minimal modifications to the existing tourism promotional materials from the city and state, as well as the current outreach to cruise ships which is being done primarily by the Port Director.
6. Should the number of small cruise ships calling on Portsmouth increase significantly; the recommended process should be revisited.
7. The State Division of Ports and Harbors should continue its conceptual planning efforts for development of a docking facility in the south cove area of the port facility for small cruise ships and tall ships and for public access to a river and port overlook for education and interpretive purposes. The City Manager and City Council should follow the progress and encourage the Pease Development Authority in the development of this concept.

The rationale for these recommendations is supported by committee's findings and on its goals of:

1. Tapping into the existing small cruise ship business in the western North Atlantic to increase use of and revenues to the NH State Port facility and raise the visibility of Portsmouth as a memorable and exciting port of call similar to the way the port and Piscataqua Maritime Commission has done with the recent tall ship visits.
2. Enhancement of the existing land side tourism efforts.
3. Additional economic benefit to local vendors, retailer and restaurants from cruise ship visits.
4. A desire to capitalize on the current framework for dealing with visiting passenger and tall ships and to refrain from creating another committee.
5. Development of additional small/tall ship docking and public access to the port for education of the city's maritime history and water-dependent commerce.