

DRAFT

The Future Role of Petersburg As a Coast Guard Homeport

Petersburg, Alaska currently serves as the Coast Guard homeport for the Island Class Cutter USCGC *ANACAPA* and the Inland Buoy Tender USCGC *ELDERBERRY*. The *ANACAPA* is very important to the community and its fleet given its ability to carry out search and rescue, and fisheries enforcement. The Coast Guard is in the final stages of planning a substantial reorganization of its operations in the State of Alaska that will include retirement of many of its existing assets. The selection of homeports for various replacement craft has not yet been finalized. These craft include the National Security Cutter, the Offshore Patrol Cutter, and the Fast Response Cutter ("FRC"). The FRC has been pegged to replace the Island Class Cutter ("WPB") for operation in the Gulf of Alaska. The Coast Guard has already begun this process. The agency's current plan is to retire all seven of the existing WPBs by 2022-2023 with six FRCs. The WPBs are currently homeported in Petersburg, Ketchikan (2), Homer, Seward, Juneau, and Valdez. The Coast Guard has designated two future FRCs to be homeported in Ketchikan. The future homeport sites of the remaining four FRCs have not been made public.

The Coast Guard currently operates a mooring station located off of Petersburg's Port Dock. The agency purchased the mooring float in the 1980s. The float is 100' long. The inside of the float currently houses the 65' *ELDERBERRY* and the outside houses the 110' *ANACAPA*. The Coast Guard has a 50 year lease expiring in 2027 which includes the current mooring float, a maintenance building, and work yard. The Coast Guard has also made major investments in housing. Petersburg is a family duty station. The Coast Guard owns eight duplex units for families, and five houses for Officer's Quarter family housing. Additionally, the Coast Guard owns a building for unmarried Coast Guard personnel. Some of these units are currently vacant.

The Coast Guard has indicated that the FRC range is currently 1.5 times that of an Island Class Cutter at cruising speed. The agency has said that five FRCs are roughly equivalent to seven WPBs, with the sixth planned FRC providing 20 percent capacity increase for patrolling the Gulf of Alaska and the southeastern portion of the Aleutian Islands. The Coast Guard believes that such coverage can be obtained by homeporting two FRCs in Ketchikan, and the remaining four FRCs in Southcentral Alaska.

Alternatively, patrol coverage could be expanded by doing a one-for-one replacement of the WPBs with the FRCs, adding a seventh FRC to the Gulf of Alaska and Aleutian Islands. By doing so, the Coast Guard can put an FRC in each of the six communities that currently homeport of the existing WPBs, with two craft remaining in Ketchikan.

Petersburg believes that it can accommodate an FRC once the *ANACAPA* is decommissioned. The existing Coast Guard float in the Petersburg harbor could be extended as far as 135'. This would allow the mooring of a 154' FRC outside of the Coast Guard float, with the inner station reserved for the *ELDERBERRY*. Existing housing is sufficient for additional crew without the need for more investment. The Petersburg Borough is committed to working with the Coast Guard to identify space for additional upland facilities to handle the larger craft.

The community is concerned about recent reports that the Coast Guard is seeking to homeport the FRCs in pairs to reduce the cost of shoreside infrastructure and support personnel dedicated to the deployment of the new class of vessel. If homeporting the FRCs in pairs is in fact the agency's plan, the Gulf of Alaska homeports will drop from six communities to three communities. Petersburg would retain only the Inland Buoy Tender *ELDERBERRY*. We believe that the Coast Guard will eventually consolidate the *ELDERBERRY* with other 17th District assets and closing down the Petersburg mooring station in a subsequent phase of the deployment reorganization. Losing the Coast Guard presence would be a tremendous blow to both the Petersburg economy and the morale of its citizens.

The current crew complement for the WPB is 16 (2 officers and 14 crew). The crew complement for the FRC is 22 (2 officers and 20 crew). This means that there will be an additional 12 Coast Guard personnel (and families) assigned to man the FRCs in the Ketchikan homeport. Petersburg will, in contrast, lose 16 Coast Guard personnel (and families). There needs to be some consideration given to the impact on Petersburg and its citizens during this reorganization. The Coast Guard should evaluate options for minimizing this impact.

One option is to shift the Small Boat Unit from Ketchikan to Petersburg as part of the shift in deployment of assets in Southeast Alaska. The Ketchikan Small Boat Unit is comprised of two Response Boat-Medium craft and one Response Boat-Small craft. Each of these vessels has a four-man crew complement. The existing Mooring Station float facility, the support building, and the work yard are sufficient to handle the needs of the Small Boat Unit without major investments. Housing would not be an issue. Sixteen crew and their families would be replaced by twelve crew and their families, leaving a housing surplus in Petersburg which could accommodate any future Small Boat Unit expansion plans. While Petersburg would suffer a small net loss of Coast Guard personnel, the community would continue to maintain the robust Coast Guard presence so vital to its residents.

The shift of the Small Boat Unit to Petersburg would also take housing pressure off the Coast Guard in Ketchikan. The FRC requires the housing for an additional 12 crew and their families in Ketchikan. The shift of the 12 crew assigned to the Small Boat Unit would free up existing housing and relieve the agency of making major long-term investments in replacement housing.

Petersburg is requesting that the Coast Guard adopt a "one-for-one" replacement policy by deploying seven FRCs in Alaska and homeporting them under the current deployment configuration. Alternatively, the impacts on Petersburg should be mitigated by potentially shifting other assets and/or missions to Petersburg if the Coast Guard is determined to homeport the FRCs in pairs and discontinue the cutter presence in Petersburg.