

MINUTES OF THE HATTIESBURG TOURISM COMMISSION BOARD MEMBERS & MANAGEMENT

Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, was held via teleconference on the GoToMeeting platform on:

June 23, 2021

Be it remembered that on the 23rd day of June, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met at the Hattiesburg Train Depot and via teleconference due to the gathering restrictions of COVID-19. Frank James, Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT

Frank James
Fei Xue, Ph.D. (virtual)
Melanie Archer
Michael Marks
Shawn Lowrey

ABSENT

Bonnie Warren
Anthony Harris

ALSO PRESENT

Marlo Dorsey, Management
Kristen Brock, Staff
David Ott, Counsel

Citizens Forum

With no public guests present, citizens forum was not held.

Minutes from Previous Board Meetings

After full review and upon motion by Melanie Archer, duly seconded by Michael Marks, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve May 2021 meeting minutes.

Financial Report

Marlo presented the financial report. Included was a document with updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy. As of June, the report showed year-to-date revenue at \$518,053. With a 30% budgeted decrease in income this fiscal year due to travel disruptions from Covid-19, year-to-date income is currently only down by 7% and Hattiesburg is performing higher overall compared to other parts of the nation. Recent numbers reflect an increase in leisure and group business.

The claims dockets for the months of April and May 2021 were presented. Budgeted expenditures were provided in full detail by line item, along with Tourism Recovery Fund expenses which were recorded and presented separately.

Reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission assets through May 31, 2021 were presented with a total balance of \$1,696,224. These funds include TRF, umbrella accounts, and recouped funds from previous years' tax collections. Since the last report, HTC also received Round 2 of PPP funding, which will be considered a liability until forgiven.

Included on the report were details of each account with financial institution, current interest rates, and maturity dates listed. All accounts have been reconciled by accountants at McArthur, Slay, & Dews, PLLC.

A detailed Tourism Recovery Fund budget report was also provided. The grant should be completed by the end of July 2021. These funds have allowed staff to aggressively approach marketing and sales campaigns to mitigate tourism losses during Covid-19.

After a full discussion and upon a motion made by Michael Marks and duly seconded by Melanie Archer, there was a unanimous favorable vote to approve the financial update.

Old Business

Marlo provided an update on the FY2020 audit, which is being prepared by King CPA. Staff with the auditing agency are working to complete final reports by August, at which time results will be reported to the board and Hattiesburg City Council, as legislatively mandated.

The MS Department of Revenue has been in contact with Marlo regarding reporting issues of hotel and restaurant tax revenue in Hattiesburg. After a full audit of hotels, each property is now listed correctly and there has already been a slight increase in monthly collections.

New Business

Marlo shared a comprehensive report on Hattiesburg's portion of Mississippi Tourism Recovery grant funds. "Safely Open for You" campaign expenses have totaled nearly \$600,000, using TRF funding and allocations from the FY2021 operating budget, more than has ever been spent marketing Hattiesburg as a destination. Campaign analytics have been closely monitored, and spending is allocated based on results from Hattiesburg's 2020 strategic plan process. From the campaign, 392,873,255 total impressions have reached visitors so far.

Marlo continues to work with other state tourism leaders to seek additional funding for Mississippi's tourism industry through the American Rescue Plan. In addition, separate funding is being requested for destination development across Mississippi.

Marlo provided a brief overview of current sales efforts, as work resumes to bring group business to Hattiesburg. Groups are beginning to rebook corporate and convention business for late 2021 and into 2022 and outdoor sporting events have increased significantly, with large-scale tournaments filling hotels in Hattiesburg.

Kristen presented a Programs & Promotions update, reminding the board that the Mississippi Miss Hospitality competition will return to an in-person format in July 2021 following all local and state safety and gathering guidelines. Work also continues on Hattiesburg's public art offerings, with HAPA unveiling the large-scale "Welcome to Midtown" mural in June along with 12 of 22 Phase 2 utility boxes. Future projects include the continuation of the Midtown Murals series, design of the Longleaf Trace Tunnel mural, a recovery mural in partnership with the Forrest County Board of Supervisors, and a mural located adjacent to the Sixth Street Museum District and Longleaf Trace.

A staffing update was provided by Marlo, who informed the board that applications are currently being accepted for a Communications and Promotions Manager position. She and Kristen will continue to operate sales for now, although adding a salesperson is desired as funding allows. After full review of staffing needs and upon motion by Shawn Lowrey, duly seconded by Melanie Archer, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve this staffing plan.

Being no other business, and upon motion by Michael Marks, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, the meeting was adjourned at 1:18 p.m.

Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:

Frank James, Board Chair

Marlo Dorsey, Executive Director

