

**MINUTES OF THE  
HATTIESBURG TOURISM COMMISSION  
BOARD MEMBERS & MANAGEMENT**

Minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at the Hotel Indigo board room on:

**February 28, 2024**

Be it remembered that on the 28<sup>th</sup> day of February, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in person at the Hattiesburg Hotel Indigo board room. Anthony Harris, Vice Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 12:06 p.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

**PRESENT**

Anthony Harris  
Michael Marks  
Bonnie Warren  
Shawn Lowrey

**ABSENT**

Melanie Archer  
Frank James  
Dr. Joe Paul

**ALSO PRESENT**

Marlo Dorsey, Management  
Kristen Brock, Staff  
Paige Robertson, Staff  
David Ott, Counsel  
Betsy Rowell, Guest

**Citizens Forum**

Marlo Dorsey welcomed Betsy Rowell, special guest for the meeting. A presentation regarding her attendance was made during New Business.

**Minutes from Previous Board Meetings**

After full review and upon motion by Michael Marks, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve December 2023 meeting minutes as presented.

**Financial Report**

Dorsey presented the financial report. Included was a document showing updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy. For the first four months of FY24, collections are down 16% YOY. While a reduction was anticipated in the budget, Dorsey noted that actual tax collections from the MS Department of Revenue do not match projected occupancy-based revenue from national reporting firm Smith Travel Research. The cumulative gap in anticipated vs. received revenue totals \$156,323 over the last seven months. Dorsey has been in communication with the Department of Revenue to investigate the discrepancies and will report back to the board.

A 12-month overview of tax revenue from January 2023 to January 2024 was also presented, showing hotel collections down 2.45% over the last 12 months, while restaurant collections are 3.06% higher in comparison to the previous year.

Claims dockets for the months of December 2023 and January 2024 were presented. A listing of all ARPA and non-ARPA expenditures was provided in full detail by line item, which were all budgeted expenses. The board was also provided with reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission assets through January 31, 2024, showing a total balance of \$4,797,358.33. Included on the report were details for each account, all of which have been reconciled by accountants at McArthur, Slay, & Dews, PLLC.

Dorsey presented a FY24 statement of financial position and budget update. All figures were found to be in line with the board-approved budget. After full review and upon motion made by Michael Marks and duly seconded by Bonnie Warren, there was unanimous favorable vote to approve the financial update as presented.

### **Old Business**

Dorsey provided an update on procurement and expenses for ARPA funding. Campaigns using Round 2 funds are well underway with procurements already made for more than half of the grant funds. Now that Round 3 funding has been secured, additional procurements will begin in May 2024 ahead of the December 2024 deadline.

An update on the Main Street Revitalization grant process was also provided by Dorsey. She stated that recommended funding for the program is currently being reviewed by the MS legislature with final decisions expected no later than April.

### **New Business**

Dorsey and Brock presented a proposal to move operations of Visit Hattiesburg's sales, visitor services, HAPA, and Miss Hospitality to downtown Hattiesburg's Turner Building through at least the end of the year due to a lack of professional space available at the Train Depot. The Turner Building will provide two offices, a conference room, 24-hour access, and full utilities. Upon motion by Bonnie Warren, duly seconded by Michael Marks, there was unanimous approval to enter a lease agreement for office space at the Turner Building.

Dorsey presented the board with a strategic initiatives contract for review, focused on Visit Hattiesburg's strategic plan implementation. She proposed the board enter a short-term consulting contract through September 2024 with Betsy Rowell, retired Downtown Hattiesburg Association and Stone County Economic Development Partnership director. Rowell's focus will be aimed at advancing and achieving the overall goals and objectives of the organization's 2020-2025 strategic plan. Upon motion by Michael Marks to enter a 6-month consulting agreement with Rowell valued at up to \$30,000, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, there was unanimous board approval.

At 12:38 p.m. Bonnie Warren exited the meeting. All action items on the agenda had already been completed. The meeting continued with informational updates.

Brock presented a Sales & Visitor Services update overviewing current groups being served by the department along with recent sales efforts. More than 6,000 event attendees have already been serviced through Red Carpet Services in FY24, exceeding the totality of 2023's services rendered and indicating an uptick in group travel to Hattiesburg. She also updated the board on recent and upcoming HAPA projects, which includes several new large-scale murals. A Mississippi Miss Hospitality update was also provided in anticipation of July's 75<sup>th</sup> Diamond Jubilee celebration.

Robertson provided the board with marketing and communications updates. An analytics overview of website and social media visitation showed more than 40,000 users to the Visit Hattiesburg website in both December 2023 and January 2024 and more than one million digital campaign impressions each month.

Robertson also gave an overview of current marketing campaigns and public relations efforts, including a sneak peek of the new [visithburg.org](http://visithburg.org) website, which is set to launch in April 2024 with upgraded technology and capability features, and a new video series focused on highlighting unique stories of locals. While the digital campaign took a pause in January to prepare for relaunched designs, public relations efforts remained strong with features in two national sports publications valued at more than \$1.77 million in earned media.

The board was also presented with a branding and philosophy guide by Hattiesburg-based RARE ad agency, which was hired with ARPA funding to work on an updated brand audit and identity for Hattiesburg.

Being no other business, and upon motion by Michael Marks, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, the meeting was adjourned at 1:27 p.m.

**Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:**

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Anthony Harris, Board Vice Chair

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Marlo Dorsey, Executive Director