

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

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Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at the Lake Terrace Convention Center on:

**June 27, 2018**

Be it remembered that on the 27th day of June, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in a regular meeting at Lake Terrace Convention Center, being a place fixed for such meetings. Frank James, Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

**PRESENT**

Bonnie Warren  
Frank James  
Adrienne Hicks-Garanich  
Anthony Harris

**ABSENT**

Torksy Williams  
Marshall Bell  
Fei Xue, Ph.D.

**ALSO PRESENT**

Marlo Dorsey, Management  
David Ott, Counsel  
Paige Hunt, Sales and Visitor Services  
Kristen Brock, Programs and Promotions  
Paige Crane, Communications and Digital Strategies  
Rhonda Cunningham, Hotel Indigo  
Kelsey Barrett, Hotel Indigo

### **Minutes from Previous Board Meetings**

Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren, duly seconded by Anthony Harris, there was a favorable vote of the Board to approve the minutes from the most recent meeting held on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

### **Financial Report**

Marlo Dorsey presented the financial report. Included were updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy and the most recent STR report overviewing census figures of overnight stays in Hattiesburg. It was noted that Marlo continues to work with the MS Department of Revenue (DOR), which now has a complete list of Hattiesburg hotels for accurate collections. The MS DOR will continue to recover a portion of the tax shortfall from the past 36 months, which will be included in regularly scheduled monthly tax checks upon collection. The DOR stated that reports and payments should be more accurate beginning in September 2018.

Marlo then presented reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission liquid assets through May 31, 2018, an updated copy of the previously approved 2018 FYE 2018 budget, and the claims docket for the months of April and May 2018 since the previous commission meeting.

Upon motion made by Anthony Harris and duly seconded by Bonnie Warren, there was a unanimous favorable vote to approve the financial reports as presented.

### **Old Business**

Marlo provided an overview of National Travel and Tourism Week, held in Hattiesburg from May 6-12, 2018. A complete report of the week was given, including highlights of a well-attended Shining Stars Luncheon that received heavy media coverage and awarded 35 hospitality partners, a proclamation from Mayor Toby Barker officially recognizing Hattiesburg's National Travel and Tourism Week, and co-sponsorship of the ADP's 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday Breakfast along with Hotel Indigo.

Marlo reported that a 1-year lease agreement was entered with the Hattiesburg Convention Commission for the Tourism Commission to occupy space in the Hattiesburg Visitors Center, as previously approved by the commissioners.

### **New Business**

Rhonda Cunningham, General Manager of the soon-to-be-opened Hotel Indigo, along with Kelsey Barrett, the property's Director of Sales, were invited to share updates on the new hotel the Hattiesburg Tourism Commissioners. Ms. Cunningham reported on the new facility's progress and her organization's work with the VisitHattiesburg team on publicizing this new addition to Hattiesburg. The hotel is expected to open on July 17 in the Midtown development, and the Hattiesburg Tourism Commissioners shared their enthusiasm to Ms. Cunningham of this new addition to Hattiesburg's tourism offerings.

Marlo presented tourism and hotel sales updates including highlights of the most recent regional marketing campaign which advertised Hattiesburg's festival season to target feeder markets including Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Slidell, Memphis and Mobile. A statewide study reports that \$12 is returned for every \$1 spent in such marketing campaigns, and VisitHattiesburg began receiving weekly hotel occupancy data for Hattiesburg in June to study success of marketing strategies.

Paige Hunt reported results of a two-day Sales Blitz held in Jackson in May in conjunction with Hattiesburg hotel partners. Forty-two associations were visited and the return on investment is already being realized with new business booked. Another Sales Blitz is scheduled for the Fall.

Also reported by Marlo Dorsey were plans for the development of a Room Rebate Program, which will incentivize groups to book business overnight in Hattiesburg. This service is already being offered in similar sized cities.

Marlo shared plans for Hattiesburg Restaurant Week, which is proposed for one week a year to showcase local eateries and promote culinary tourism in Hattiesburg. Logos were presented along with the goals of Hattiesburg Restaurant Week to further promote the city's thriving culinary sector to visitors.

A motion was made by Anthony Harris, duly seconded by Bonnie Warren, to adopt one of the logos presented and to accept Restaurant week as an official program of VisitHattiesburg. After full discussion, the motion unanimously passed with favorable vote.

As there currently is not a roadmap for short-term vision for tourism in Hattiesburg, Marlo presented Vision 2020, which illustrates VisitHattiesburg's planned focus for the next 18 months. The plan includes a mission, vision, values and four focus areas through the year 2020. Approval of this plan will be voted on during the August 2018 board meeting, giving the Tourism Commissioners copies for their final review.

Despite a short-term plan being developed, there is still a need for a long-term strategic plan for tourism in Hattiesburg, to be developed by a company that understands research and logistics for strategic plans in the tourism industry. Marlo requested that the board consider taking up to \$50,000 from reserved allocations in the 2019 budget to put towards a long-term strategic planning process. The process will include a Request for Proposal to begin in late 2018 and run through early 2019, which will be overseen by a panel of industry stakeholders. At the end of the process, a 3-5 year strategic plan will be presented to the commission.

Upon motion made by Adrienne Hicks-Garanich and duly seconded by Anthony Harris, there was a unanimous favorable vote to allow the VisitHattiesburg staff to enter the RFP process and allocate up to \$50,000 out of reserves in the 2019 budget for the development of a strategic plan. Attorney Ott ensured all state purchasing laws and any subsequent bids or notices would in followed correctly throughout this process.

Marlo presented samples of wayfinding signage for a new blueway planned for Hattiesburg's Chain Park and the Leaf River proximity. The VisitHattiesburg staff provided in-kind graphic work for this tourism development. The staff is also continuing work on budgeted signage for the Longleaf Trace.

An update was provided on the Mississippi Miss Hospitality Competition, which will host 31 contestants in Hattiesburg July 15-21. Board members were invited to attend special events throughout the week and competition on July 20 and 21, 2018.

Marlo will meet with Mayor Toby Barker on July 10, 2018 to discuss commission updates as well as her budget presentation to Hattiesburg City Council on August 6, 2018 at 4pm. Commissioners were invited to attend the August 6<sup>th</sup> City Council presentation.

David Ott provided a legal update that did not require entering Executive Session. He suggested that Board Members consider writing a letter recognizing Mr. Bud Kirkpatrick's many years of service to the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission. Upon motion made by Anthony Harris, duly seconded by Adrienne Hicks-Garanich, there was a favorable vote of the Board for Marlo to present a letter to Mrs. Virginia Kirkpatrick on behalf of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commissioners.

Counselor Ott also reported that he was asked by Marlo to research the frequency of an outside audit for the Commission. After contact with the Mississippi Secretary of State, it was found that an audit is required as it's fed into the overall audit for the City of Hattiesburg. Ott recommended the audit frequency be conducted on an annual basis, even though an outside accounting firm still oversaw the monthly receivables and payables.

Being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

**Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:**

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Frank James, Board Chair

**Attested:**

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Marlo Dorsey, Executive Director