

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, held at Hattiesburg's Hotel Indigo on:

October 24, 2018

Be it remembered that on the 24nd day of October, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in a regular meeting in the conference room of Hotel Indigo Hattiesburg, being a place fixed by law for such meetings. Frank James, Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 11:53 a.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT

Bonnie Warren
Frank James
Fei Xue, Ph.D.
Marshall Bell

ABSENT

Adrienne Hicks-Garanich
Torksy Williams
Anthony Harris

ALSO PRESENT

Marlo Dorsey, Management
David Ott, Counsel
Paige Hunt, Sales and Visitor Services
Kristen Brock, Programs and Promotions

Citizen's Forum

Marlo Dorsey introduced Bob Cox, DJ Preiss, and Ross Brent as leadership of the brand-new Holiday Inn opening on Highway 49 in Hattiesburg. As Hattiesburg's newest hotel, the staff provided the Board with an overview of the property, which will feature 128 rooms, 2,100 square feet of meeting space, and a new restaurant and bar concept named Burger Theory. The Holiday Inn is expected to open the last week of October. Upon completion of the presentation, the Holiday Inn staff was thanked and left the room, ending Citizen's Forum.

Minutes from Previous Board Meetings

Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren, duly seconded by Marshall Bell, there was a favorable vote of the Board to approve the minutes from the most recent meeting held on August 22nd, 2018.

Financial Report

Marlo presented the financial report. Included was a document with updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy. The report showed \$111,056 received in October 2018, which includes past-due tax payments collected from the MS Department of Revenue from two delinquent hotels. Marlo continues to work with the Department of Revenue to remedy any remaining shortfall, and each month the reports are showing more consistency to the true tax amount owed. In addition, the most recent STR report overviewing census figures of overnight stays in Hattiesburg was presented, which showed \$47,612,828 in hotel revenue for the most recent 12 months in Hattiesburg, demonstrating growth of 8.6% from the previous year. Frank James reported a positive update on the hotel industry's

relationship with VisitHattiesburg staff, to which he attributed some of the growth.

A Claims Docket for the months of August, September, and October to-date was also presented along with reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission liquid assets through September 30, 2018, showing a net cash position of \$1,149,414.08.

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

Marlo then presented a Final Budget Report for FY2018, which included total income and expenditures for the year. The projected income for FY2018 was \$1,635 and actual income was \$85,984.77, totaling a revenue significantly higher than projected. Marlo also provided the accountant's final figures by category for FY2018.

Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren and duly seconded by Fei Xue, there was a unanimous favorable vote to approve the final amended budget for FY2018 as presented.

The FY2019 Tourism Commission budget was presented with a line-item breakdown containing individual category account numbers so expenditures can be planned and tracked more efficiently.

Upon motion made by Marshall Bell and duly seconded by Bonnie Warren, there was a unanimous favorable vote to formally adopt the FY2019 budget.

Old Business

Paige Hunt and Kristen Brock provided an update on Hattiesburg's first ever restaurant week, held October 7-14, 2018. The kickoff event, Culinary Crawl, incorporated local hotels to the week and saw 40 participants visit Hotel Indigo, Courtyard by Marriott, Double Tree, and Hilton Garden Inn. More than 25 restaurants participated in the overall week with daily themes and specials. Feedback from participating businesses showed a strong desire to make this an annual event.

New Business

Marlo presented the new "Hattiesburg Hotspots" map, a one-page guide highlighting the hottest things for visitors to see and do in Hattiesburg. Bonnie suggested these be delivered to the USM Alumni House and Camp Shelby.

VisitHattiesburg recently contributed \$2,000 of in-kind marketing support to the new Pinebelt Blueways attraction. Kristen spoke of this sponsorship and VisitHattiesburg's commitment to promoting eco-tourism in the community.

Marlo presented highlights of Hattiesburg's regional market campaign which targeted specific audiences in geographical areas including Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Slidell, Memphis, and Mobile. Over the past year, there have been over 2.5 million impressions to the target market based on geographic and behavioral marketing techniques, and the reach and responsiveness from these campaigns saw steady growth throughout the 12-month campaign. Also presented were a few hundred new brand photos taken by local photographer Jesse Johnson, which will be used across future marketing campaigns.

Showcasing key activities of VisitHattiesburg from August through October 2018, Hattiesburg Highlight updates featured partnership in the Hattiesburg Rise N Shine Half Marathon press conference, Here's Hattiesburg ad buy for distribution to Welcome Centers and other regional feeder markets, newly installed lightpole banners in the District at Midtown, support of Eaglepalooza 2018 and Mobile St. Renaissance Festival, and a 30-minute Hattiesburg feature

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on Mississippi Public Broadcasting's "Best of MS" radio show.

Paige Hunt provided a Sales and Visitor Services activities report. VisitHattiesburg continues to hold quarterly meetings of the Hattiesburg Hotel and Hospitality Association and attend industry trade shows, the most recent of which was sponsorship of September's MS Society of Association Executive's Lunch and Learn, which promoted Hattiesburg as a meeting destination and featured MS Insurance Commissioner Mike Chaney.

Paige also reported the youth sports market continues to be a focus of the Sales and Visitor Services department, with VisitHattiesburg bidding on both the MS Youth Soccer Association's state tournament and Dixie Youth Baseball's Invitational World Series in 2019. Paige asked that a \$5,000 allocation of the FY2019 budget be set aside for outdoor signage and upgrades at Tatum Park, where both of these tournaments will take place if held in Hattiesburg.

Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren and duly seconded by Fei Xue, there was a unanimous favorable vote to allocate \$5,000 of the FY2019 budget to signage upgrades at Tatum Park.

Paige reported that rebranding and upgrades continue for the 1964 Freedom Summer Trail, a tourism product overseen by VisitHattiesburg. Improvements include a new logo, mobile-reactive website, re-recording of the audio tour, and first-ever phone app, all of which will better tell the story of Freedom Summer in Hattiesburg and enhance the overall experience for visitors of the Trail. A group of students from USM will assist with research, writing, and photography on this project as a part of their Capstone course. Completion of the project is expected to coincide with Black History Month in February 2019.

Marlo provided an update on the strategic plan for VisitHattiesburg. In 2018, the Board approved a \$50,000 allocation to be spent on a long-term strategic plan process for Hattiesburg. The Request for Proposal process for this project will begin in 2019, and Marlo asked the Board to begin considering members to sit on a committee to review submitted proposals. It was discussed that potential committee members may include members of the Board along with representatives from local hotels, universities, and City officials.

Upon motion made by Fei Xue and duly seconded by Bonnie Warren, there was a unanimous favorable vote to grant authority to Marlo Dorsey and Frank James for final selection of committee members from the categories discussed.

Kristen Brock provided a Programs and Promotions update, which included information on the Tourism Grant Program that will competitively award financial support to tourism-generating projects in FY2019. Seventeen applications were submitted for funding this year, and a review panel of four professionals independently scored each application. The FY2019 budget allocated \$25,000 for the TGP program, but because of the number and quality of applicants, Kristen requested the Board consider an additional \$5,000 be taken from reserves for the TGP program.

Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren and duly seconded by Marshall Bell, there was a unanimous favorable vote move \$5,000 from reserves to the Tourism Grant Program in the FY2019 budget.

An update was provided on the 2018 Mississippi Miss Hospitality program. Two new advisory board members, Michael Marks and Michelle Hopson, have been added for 2019. Progress continues to be made on the new Miss Hospitality website and recruiting is in action for the 2019 program, which has a goal of 36 contestants. Marlo reported having complete oversight of the program and presented a 2018 budget overview, which has been reconciled by the accountant, along with a 2019 budget proposal.

Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren and duly seconded by Marshall Bell, there was a unanimous favorable vote accept the reconciled 2018 budget and 2019 budget as presented.

Marlo announced 2019 meeting dates of the Board and noted the December 2018 would be moved from December 20 to December 12.

Upon motion made by Fei Xue and duly seconded by Marshall Bell, there was a unanimous favorable vote to considering entering Executive Session for the purpose of legal updates.

After discussion and upon motion by Marshall Bell, duly seconded by Fei Xue, there was a unanimous favorable vote to enter Executive Session.

Being no other business for General Session, the meeting was adjourned to Executive Session.

Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:

Frank James, Board Chair

Attested:

Marlo Dorsey, Executive Director