

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 the Hotel Indigo board room on:

October 25, 2023

Be it remembered that on the 25th day of October, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in person at the Hattiesburg Hotel Indigo board room. Frank James, Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 12:07 p.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT

Melanie Archer
Frank James
Shawn Lowrey
Bonnie Warren
Anthony Harris
Michael Marks

ABSENT

Dr. Joe Paul

ALSO PRESENT

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

Citizens Forum

With no members of the public present, Citizens Forum was not held.

Minutes from Previous Board Meetings

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

Financial Report

Dorsey presented the financial report. Included was a document with updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy. Closing out FY23, \$961,806 was collected, totaling \$83,087 less than FY22 tax revenue. The board budgeted for an anticipated 15% reduction in hotel revenue for FY23 due to national forecasting models with pandemic recovery and inflation, and the actual annual decrease was 8%. A 12-month overview of tax revenue from September 2022 to August 2023 was also presented, showing hotel collections down 3.9% for the year, while restaurant collections are 3.49% higher than the previous year.

Claims dockets for the months of August and September 2023 were presented. A listing of all expenditures was provided in full detail by line item, which were all budgeted expenses.

Reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission assets through September 30, 2023 were presented, showing a total balance of \$3,865,164.86. Included on the report were details of each account with financial institution, current interest rates, and maturity dates listed. The overall balance includes ARPA funds from round 2 of the Tourism Recovery Fund (TRF), as awarded to the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission by the Mississippi legislature, which is being accounted for separately at Hancock Whitney Bank in a checking and money market sweep account. A claims docket of ARPA funding expenditures was also presented. All accounts have been reconciled by accountants at McArthur, Slay, & Dews, PLLC.

After a full review and upon a motion made by Michael Marks and duly seconded by Bonnie Warren, there was a unanimous favorable vote to approve the financial report as presented.

Dorsey presented a 12-month FY23 comparative analysis from the accountant to close out the fiscal year, which was in line with the board-approved budget. After full review and upon motion made by Melanie Archer and duly seconded by Michael Marks, there was unanimous favorable vote to approve the FY23 budget closeout as presented.

Old Business

Dorsey provided an update on round two of the Tourism Recovery Fund (TRF), administered through the Department of Finance and Administration. All YTD expenses were reviewed, noting that a Request for Proposal was recently sent to local agencies to help supplement larger TRF contracts already in place. Applications are open for round three TRF funding and approved allocations are expected to be distributed in the next few months.

Dorsey reported that Hattiesburg's project was one of 19 recommended to receive funding under the Mississippi Main Street Association's Revitalization Grant. The final recommendations will be presented to the Mississippi legislature and negotiations for the purchase of the project's property will continue as previously approved by the board.

New Business

Kristen Brock presented a Sales & Visitor Services update overviewing current groups being served by the department and recent sales efforts. The report also provided an update on the sports tourism consultation underway with D&D Consulting, which continues to explore ways to elevate Hattiesburg's position in the tournament and sports tourism market. Dorsey will present initial recommendations from the consultation to the Hattiesburg City Council in November.

Brock also presented a list of FY24 Tourism Grant Program recipients, totaling \$49,750 in support to dozens of organizations and events. The overwhelming success of the grant program was then discussed and reviewed. A list of HAPA ribbon cuttings and upcoming projects was provided for the next several months with numerous projects in the works.

A comprehensive budget for the 2024 Mississippi Miss Hospitality competition was provided by Brock. After fully discussing all line items of the document, Melanie Archer made a motion to approve the 2024 budget as presented. Duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, there was unanimous favorable vote.

Paige Robertson presented the board with marketing and communications updates. An analytics overview of website and social media visitation showed significant growth in digital exposure in key markets for Hattiesburg. An overview of current marketing campaigns and public relations efforts was also presented.

Robertson also announced that Hattiesburg received a \$480,000 grant from the newly established MS Outdoor Stewardship Trust program to enhance the Pinebelt Blueways launch area at Sims Road into an improved public waterway access point complete with ADA compliance. This was a collaborative grant project with the City of Hattiesburg and other partners. It was noted the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission created the logo, website, and signage for the trail when it was initially established and regularly markets the Blueways as part of its outdoor recreation assets. More details will be forthcoming once construction begins.

Being no other business, and upon motion by Melanie Archer, duly seconded by Anthony Harris, the meeting was adjourned at 1:40 p.m.

Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:

Frank James, Board Chair

Marlo Dorsey, Executive Director