

# **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 Hilton Garden Inn Hattiesburg on:

**August 22, 2018**

Be it remembered that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of August, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in a regular meeting at Hilton Garden Inn Hattiesburg, being a place fixed by law for such meetings. Frank James, Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 11:40 a.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

**PRESENT**

Bonnie Warren  
Frank James  
Fei Xue, Ph.D.  
Anthony Harris  
Torksy Williams

**ABSENT**

Adrienne Hicks-Garanich  
Marshall Bell

**ALSO PRESENT**

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

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

Upon motion made by Anthony Harris, duly seconded by Bonnie Warren, there was a favorable vote of the Board to approve the minutes from the most recent meeting held on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

### **Financial Report**

Marlo Dorsey presented the financial report. Included was a document with updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy. The report showed a \$60,000 deficit in hotel tax income for FY2018. With hotel tax checks still due for August and September 2018, this shortfall should be satisfied for the fiscal year. In addition, the most recent STR report overviewing census figures of overnight stays in Hattiesburg was presented, which indicated a total shortfall of \$751,148 in hotel tax collection accumulated over the past 36 months. Marlo continues to work with the MS Department of Revenue to remedy this shortfall, and each month the reports are showing more consistency to the true tax amount owed. These updated figures were presented on the overall FY2018 budget, approved by the Board prior to Marlo Dorsey's appointment as Executive Director.

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

Marlo then presented reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission liquid assets through July 31, 2018 and a claims docket for the months of June and July 2018. Marlo stated she would make recommendations at the

October Board Meeting on banking procedures, accounts, and investments for FY2019.

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

The FY2019 Tourism Commission budget was presented by Marlo Dorsey and Frank James to Hattiesburg City Council in August. The proposed budget was approved by City Council and will be presented to the Board for final approval at the October meeting.

### **Old Business**

Vision2020, a proposed short-term strategic plan of VisitHattiesburg, was initially introduced to the Board during the June meeting. In August, Marlo and Frank presented the vision to the Hattiesburg City Council with favorable feedback. Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren and duly seconded by Anthony Harris, there was a unanimous favorable vote to officially adopt Vision2020 as the 18-month, short-term strategic plan for VisitHattiesburg.

With the Board in agreement regarding the 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, the process will begin with a Request for Proposal to be completed in early 2019. All submitted proposals will be presented to the Board for review before a final selection is made.

Kristen Brock provided preliminary reports for the 2018 Miss Hospitality program. On June 22, Anna McDaniel of Meridian was crowned 2018 Mississippi Miss Hospitality. Also during competition week, the new Little Miss Hospitality program was unveiled and US Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith presented Bonnie Warren with the program's inaugural "Women of Distinction" honor. A financial overview of the 2018 program highlighted significant income growth and listed goals for 2019.

### **New Business**

Marlo presented highlights of the most recent regional marketing campaign which advertised Hattiesburg's offerings to areas including Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Slidell, Memphis and Mobile. The target audience was based on geographic and behavioral marketing techniques, and the reach and responsiveness from these campaigns continues to grow.

Paige Hunt provided a Sales and Visitor Services activities report. VisitHattiesburg continues to hold quarterly meetings of the Hattiesburg Hotel and Lodging Association and attend industry trade shows, the most recent of which was Spotlight on the Southeast which reaches regional tour operators bringing bus groups through Mississippi. Paige also presented an update on Hattiesburg Restaurant Week, to be held October 7-13. It was announced that VisitHattiesburg will be awarded for 2018 Tourism Achievement at the Mississippi Tourism Association annual Governors Conference on Tourism to be held in September.

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. Also presented were plans for assisting the Longleaf Trace in rebranding, website redesign, and wayfinding signage, all designed to be more user-friendly for visitors planning a bicycle tourism trip to Hattiesburg. The initial phase of Longleaf Trace updates is expected to be complete in early 2019, at which time Bonnie Warren requested results be presented to the Forrest & Lamar County Boards of Supervisors and the Hattiesburg City Council.

Paige shared plans for rebranding and signage upgrades to 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. Completion of the project is expected by October 1, 2018.

Marlo presented a copy of the updated Community Calendar, where community partners can add their events to create one, central place to record planned tourism-related events in Hattiesburg.

In a call for other new business, Frank James asked the Board to form a committee focused on creating a new framework for evaluating the performance of the Commission's Executive Director. Marlo's anniversary is approaching. Antony Harris, Frank James and Fue Xue volunteered to serve on the committee and will present their recommendations to the full Board prior to October's meeting and Marlo's evaluation. David Ott will sit on the committee for legal guidance.

Counselor Ott provided a legal update that did not require entering Executive Session. He acknowledged that since he began providing counsel to the Commission in October of 2016, his goal has been to make sure the Board has been diligent in addressing and complying with all legal requirements and best practices. Over the last year, working with Marlo, significant progress has been made and they continue to work on it moving forward. As a part of trying to achieve this, Ott filed a lawsuit as authorized on the evening of August 20, 2018 on behalf of the Commission and the six current and former commissioners subject to the auditor demand, naming United Sates Liability Insurance Co. as the defendant. The suit seeks coverage for the informal demand made on current and former Board members by the MS State Auditor's Office over payments of bonuses and retroactive salary to the former executive director and staff of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission in the years 2008-2013. Commissioners at the time had no legal counsel and were unaware of the legalities surrounding these payments when the decisions were made between 2008 and 2013. Some of the current Commissioners were present during the decision to file suit was made, and appropriate minutes from the special called meeting will be provided to the full Board at a future date.

The next scheduled meeting of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission is set for October 24, 2018 at 11:30 am inside Hattiesburg's Hotel Indigo. At that time, 2019 meeting dates will be decided and then provided to Hattiesburg City Hall as required.

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