

# 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 Hattiesburg's Hotel Indigo on:

**February 27, 2019**

Be it remembered that on the 27<sup>th</sup> day of February, 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 11:42 a.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

**PRESENT**

Bonnie Warren  
Frank James  
Fei Xue, Ph.D.  
Marshall Bell  
Torsky Williams  
Anthony Harris

**ABSENT**

**ALSO PRESENT**

Marlo Dorsey, Management  
David Ott, Counsel  
Kristen Brock, Programs and Promotions  
Andrea Saffle, Downtown Hattiesburg Association

**Citizens Forum**

Marlo introduced Andrea Saffle. As executive Director of the Downtown Hattiesburg Association (DHA), Andrea gave a brief update on Downtown Hattiesburg and announced she would provide further information on the partnership between DHA and VisitHattiesburg later in the meeting.

**Minutes from Previous Board Meetings**

Upon motion made by Anthony Harris, duly seconded by Marshall Bell, there was a favorable vote of the Board to approve minutes from the most recent meeting held on December 12, 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 a significant increase in collections in December 2018, accounting for backlog of payments from properties previously not correctly submitting the special hotel tax levy. January 2019 was on-par with previous collections. While February 2019 appears to be slightly down, soccer tournaments and several conferences are expected to help those collections significantly.

Frank James, representing the Hattiesburg hotel industry, provided a brief industry update. He reported that hotels are seeing an increase in small meetings of 40-60, which help supplement slower times of the year. Marlo responded by illustrating VisitHattiesburg's work to increase both small meetings and larger conventions to Hattiesburg and presented a boxed direct mailer that will be sent to targeted group meeting organizations throughout Mississippi.

The claims dockets for the months of December and January were presented, along with reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission assets through January 31, 2019. This also showed a \$303,500 increase in the Great Southern National Bank Money Market, accounting for the recent auditor settlement from the insurance company. A three-month budget update for FY2019 was also presented, showing where funds have been invested so far this year. These financial items were within the forecasted budget for FY2019.

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

### **Old Business**

Marlo provided an update on the Mississippi Auditor's demand, that resulted in a \$303,500 settlement from the HTC insurance company. As previously stated, these funds would be set aside for special long-range purposes following the outcome of the strategic plan. After reviewing public fund CD rates in the community, Marlo shared that Regions bank had the highest return at 2.54% annualized over a year, renewing every 120 days with no fees associated. The insurance settlement funds were transferred to Regions Bank and will continue to be monitored.

Because the current investments of HTC are yielding little, the Board determined that Marlo and Frank James should determine how to best reallocated funds based on the return on interest provided at varying institutions. Due to very low return on Money Market currently held at Citizens National Bank, Torsky Williams made the motion to transfer those funds of \$226,831.52 to a CD with a better public fund rate. Seconded by Bonnie Warren, there was unanimous favorable vote to transfer money as deemed most beneficial for yielded returns.

Marlo reported she would follow up with the Auditor's Office on an invoice for their associated fees of approximately \$6,500.

An update was given on the Freedom Summer Trail unveiling held at the end of January. Press coverage was provided for review, and it was reported that the project received significant media coverage and has gotten positive reviews from the community and visitors. Bonnie Warren provided feedback from the ribbon cutting, emphasizing the cultural and historical impact this project has on Hattiesburg.

Andrea Saffle provided an update on the Downtown Association Annual Meeting, held February 20 and featuring national best-selling authors James and Deb Fallows. Marlo was presented the Leadership Award for her outstanding contributions to Downtown Hattiesburg over the past year. In addition to the meeting, the Fallows' visit included a City Hall visit with leadership, a leadership and educational roundtable held at USM, a leadership dinner, windshield tour of Hattiesburg, and a tour of The Accelerator. The event sold out, and the Fallows have committed to come back to Hattiesburg later this year to further investigate the successes and areas of improvements for the community.

### **New Business**

Marlo presented the Visitors Center lease for review by the Board. The lease is for a period of one year and is the same as the previous lease except any reference to Miss Hospitality has been taken out and placed in a separate agreement. Bonnie requested that the Mayor's office be apprised of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission's

requests listed in the Miss Hospitality agreement, along with the Saenger's ticket and concession profits from hosting the Miss Hospitality competition.

Marlo recommended that the Visitors Center lease be renewed for 1 year at which time the possibility of moving facilities would need to be addressed. The Board asked Marlo to be proactive in searching for appropriate office space for VisitHattiesburg, securing a new facility prior to the expiration of the 2019 contract. A 90-day notice will be provided to the Convention Commission prior to vacating the current space.

Upon motion made by Anthony Harris and duly seconded by Marshall Bell, there was a unanimous favorable vote to renew a one-year lease for the Hattiesburg Visitors Center.

During the lease discussion, safety issues at the Visitors Center were discussed, including an increase of homeless traffic and suspected drug use of a visitor(s) inside the restrooms. There are no security measures offered or in place by the lessor, and only one entrance / exit to the facility. Due to safety concerns, if the threat becomes sufficient enough, the Board approves Marlo to respond through hiring security and asking the Convention Commission to cover the costs. In the meantime, Marlo will ask the City for increase patrol of the complex and Paige Hunt will forward to Andy Stetelman an email sent to Rick Taylor regarding safety concerns.

Marlo then provided a brief update on tourism legislation at the state capitol, where the House is currently voting on record tourism funding on the state level, which would be first time that significant tourism funding was passed for the State of Mississippi.

Marlo gave a complete Sales and Visitor Services activities report, as Paige Hunt and Paige Crane are currently attending the TravelSouth Showcase tradeshow, marketing bus travel in Hattiesburg to trip planners and travel writers from across the Southeast. The report included recent activity in the meeting & convention and group tour markets along with coverage from two travel writers who recently visited Hattiesburg and published their experiences in Louisiana Life & Desoto magazines and at NOLA.com.

The youth sports market continues to grow in Hattiesburg, as reported by Marlo. Plans are underway to host the MS Youth Soccer State Tournament and the Hub City Classic Soccer Tournament just finished. Before the tournament - which hosted 143 out-of-town soccer teams - began, new signage at Tatum Park was unveiled as a part of VisitHattiesburg's new Tourism Grant Program. In addition to soccer, Hattiesburg will host the Dixie Youth Baseball 8u State Tournament but was not awarded the Dixie Youth World Series.

Marlo and Andrea presented an updated cooperative agreement between VisitHattiesburg and the Downtown Hattiesburg Association. For 2019, no changes were made from the 2018 agreement other than the dates. Upon motion made by Bonnie Warren and duly seconded by Torsky Williams, there was a unanimous favorable vote to re-enter a cooperative agreement with Downtown Hattiesburg in 2019.

Marlo provided an update on the strategic plan process for VisitHattiesburg. In 2018, the Board approved a \$50,000 allocation to be spent on a long-term strategic plan process for Hattiesburg and the Request for Proposal process for this project has begun with responses due no later than March 1. A review committee of 7 participants will be formed, including representation from the hotel and restaurant industries in Hattiesburg. The final 2 proposals will be presented to the Commission prior to an agreement being entered.

Kristen Brock provided a Programs and Promotions update, which included updates on the Tourism Grant Program for FY2019. Three projects, the Rise n Shine Half Marathon (April 6), Hattie100 Race (April 27), and State Soccer Tournament (May 3-5) are upcoming. In addition, the special grant for the Longleaf Trace has allowed for work on a

new, mobile-responsive website and signage to be produced, a sample of which was provided to the Board.

A report was given by Kristen on the Mississippi Miss Hospitality program, with an announcement that the program has seen significant growth for 2019 including 16 new programs and an increase of more than 20 contestants over the past two years.

Being no other regularly scheduled business, it was decided to enter Executive Session for legal and personnel updates.

During Executive Session, \_\_\_\_\_.

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