

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 teleconference via GoToMeeting platform during COVID-19 on:

December 16, 2020

Be it remembered that on the 16th day of December, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in a regular meeting in person and via teleconference due to the gathering restrictions of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Frank James, Chairman of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT

Frank James
Anthony Harris
Fei Xue, Ph.D.
Melanie Archer
Michael Marks
Shawn Lowrey

ABSENT

Bonnie Warren

ALSO PRESENT

Marlo Dorsey, Management
David Ott, Counsel

Citizens Forum

With no public guests present, citizens forum was not held.

Minutes from Previous Board Meetings

After full review and upon motion by Michael Marks, duly seconded by Anthony Harris, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve the October 2020 meeting minutes.

Financial Report

Marlo presented the financial report. Included was a document with updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy for the first quarter of FY2021. The report showed year-to-date received revenue at \$200,219, which came in 20% higher than budgeting projections. The Tourism Recovery Funding (TRF) provided through CARES Act (HB1790, 1791) was yielding significant returns on investment for Hattiesburg and the other Mississippi destinations. National STR reporting (Smith Travel Research) showed Mississippi in the #1 position nationally for RevPAR and second in Occupancy percentages. Added to higher than anticipated leisure sector demand was a busy hurricane weather season. As a result of these two factors, Hattiesburg hotels were performing stronger than most other destinations in the state, and the country as a whole. Of note, the economic recovery is still a top priority for Hattiesburg's hotel and restaurant sectors and the TRF funds were being strategically invested in Hattiesburg's 'Safely Open for You' campaign where visitors were encouraged to come to Hattiesburg and #VisitMSResponsibly. Bookings looked promising for early December and were expected to drop off as Christmas and the New Year approach. Additional analytics would be closely monitored, and adjustments would be made if necessary, to maximize marketing efforts and safely attract visitors to Hattiesburg.

The claims dockets for the months of October and November were presented. Budgeted expenditures were provided in full detail by line item, along with Tourism Recovery Fund expenses, which were recorded and presented separately. It was planned for all remaining TRF funds would be spent by December 31, 2020 per state and federal guidelines. However, a new initiative at the federal level had begun with discussions to extend the deadline. The team would follow this closely and report back. Monthly reports to the Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) have continued successfully, and they will continue through the terms of the grant.

Reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission assets through November 30, 2020 were presented with a total amount of \$2,029,425.50. These funds include TRF, PPP, and recouped funds from previous years' tax collections. Included on the report were details of each account with financial institution, current interest rates, and maturity dates listed. All accounts have been reconciled by accountants at McArthur, Slay, & Dews, PLLC through November 30, 2020.

After full review and upon motion by Michael Marks, duly seconded by Fei Xue, there was a unanimous favorable vote to approve expenditures and financial balances as presented.

An FY2021 budget update and forecast was then shared noting \$322,318.77 had been invested in TRF monies for the 'Safely Open for You' marketing campaign. Key drive markets were highlighted with analytics shared for digital impressions and conversions. The Expedia buy had generated 1,600 room nights in Hattiesburg to date. After a full discussion on the importance of promoting safe travel and being diligent on tourism recovery, and upon a motion made by Anthony Harris and duly seconded by Melanie Archer, there was a unanimous favorable vote to approve the financial report as presented.

Old Business

Marlo provided an update on the City of Hattiesburg's offer to Visit Hattiesburg to move to the Hattiesburg Train Depot for their new office location. The HCC had extended the courtesy of allowing Visit Hattiesburg to stay through the month of January 2021 as these details were presented to City Council and officially approved.

After a full discussion and upon a motion made by Michael marks and duly second by Melanie Archer, there was a unanimous favorable vote to enter the lease with the City, move in January when the Depot became available, and make a request to the HCC to purchase the existing furniture at a fair price since the Depot office spaces would be furnished. Marlo was also asked, as a matter of courtesy, to convey the commission's sincere gratitude to the City for this opportunity.

Marlo provided an update on the new Regions account, sharing the fund transfer was forthcoming and had been delayed due to high work volume on her part and the need for both her and Frank to be in person for this transfer to occur. An update on these funds would be provided following the office location move.

New Business

Marlo shared a comprehensive update on Hattiesburg's portion of the Mississippi Tourism Recovery grant funds with the commissioners, showing an expense report of how the grant dollars through CARES ACT funding have been spent through November 30, 2020. A plan for the remaining funds was also presented, noting the financial benefits of the campaign had been presented under the financial report.

Commissioners were also provided with an update on legislative efforts for the upcoming session, where it was the goal of all destination marketing directors throughout the state to share the overwhelmingly positive results of the CARES Act funds allocated to tourism. The month of January would be spent following up with key state leadership on the importance of tourism funding and continued recovery efforts.

With public art being a primary strategic focus of continued destination building for Hattiesburg, the commissioners were presented with the recent public art additions. HAPA, operating under the umbrella of the commission, would successfully complete nine murals in 2020. An HBURG Public Art Trail campaign was being finalized, complete with videos, signage, and maps, with the goal of publishing it by March 2021. Noting the pinned-up demand for leisure travel for families, Hattiesburg's public art sector development was being well-received and has shown significant visitor buy-in.

A brief update was given on the Mississippi Miss Hospitality competition with dates for the event being shared. Local winners have done a standout job of promoting tourism in a safe way and have made it a priority to support their local small businesses during this time. Our current state title holder, McKay Lee Bray, has had several appearances and these are expected to ramp up this spring at the welcome centers and other outdoor events.

In conclusion, Marlo asked the commission to be on standby in the event of a special called meeting for January to close out the TRF grant. In the event Congress extended the grant deadline, this meeting would not need to be called.

Being no other business, and upon motion by Melanie Archer, duly seconded by Fei Xue, the meeting was adjourned at 1:59 p.m.

Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:

Frank James, Board Chair

Attested:

Marlo Dorsey, Executive Director