

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes  
December 4, 2013

The following individuals were in attendance:

Commission Members – Tourism Commission Chair and Council Secretary Mary Knight, Mayor Rick Meehan, Councilman Dennis Dare, Buck Mann, Chamber of Commerce; Michael James, EDC; Chris Trimper, HMRA . Staff members present were Donna Abbott, Tourism Director; Larry Noccolino, Convention Center Director; Lisa Osman, Tourism Department; Tom Shuster, Recreation and Parks Director; Frank Miller, Special Events; Jennie Knapp, Budget Manager. Also present were Melanie Pursel, Chamber; Susan Jones, HMRA; Andy Malis and Alison Fiorelli, MGH; Cliff Sutherland and Mike Alexander, OC Bikefest.

Mary Knight called the meeting to order at 3 p.m. She announced that we would go into a closed session at the end of the meeting to discuss next year's campaign.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the October 11, 2013 meeting by Buck Mann, seconded by Dennis Dare and approved unanimously.

Updates from other Departments & Organizations

Larry Noccolino announced that Phase 2 construction started on October 21 and will continue over the next 14 months. The approximate completion date will be November 2014. For the first show in the Performing Arts Center, Larry would like to have a promoter-sponsored kick-off performance to be held on Saturday, November 29, 2014. That date falls on Thanksgiving weekend, so many visitors will be in town for the holiday. Larry is also planning to have the Mid-Atlantic Symphony Orchestra and the OC Stars chorus perform on Saturday, January 18, 2014, which is the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend. This would start a concert series with the Mid-Atlantic Symphony Orchestra to perform five shows throughout 2014 and ending with a Christmas Show in December. Larry also mentioned that the OC Bikefest may be interested in using the Performing Arts Center during their events in the future.

Melanie Pursel submitted a planning grant proposal for \$8000 to Wor-Wic Community College for industry-led training, which she feels very confident about. During the months of January, February and March she will be putting together a group of business leaders to identify some of the workforce needs. The Chamber's Holiday Business After-Hours is this Friday, December 6, at the Clarion Hotel. Anyone attending is asked to bring an unwrapped toy for Toys for Tots. The Chamber is now accepting applications for their Eunice Q. Sorin Scholarship Program. They set and approved all of their legislative priorities at their last meeting. Melanie mentioned that the Task Force for Post-Labor Day school start date met. The 2014 Vacation Guide is currently at the printer. She hopes to begin distribution within the next week or two. Melanie thanked Donna and the Tourism Department for their assistance with editing the Guide. The

Chamber will attend the Great American Outdoor Show in Harrisburg the first week of February. They plan to distribute 2500 pre-made bags at the show. Melanie mentioned the Chamber of Lights Program has started, which includes judging of indoor, outdoor, residential, and commercial Christmas light decorations.

Michael James mentioned that morning's EDC meeting at the Captain's Table, noting an excellent presentation by UMES and their hospitality programs.

Susan Jones and a group of leaders from Ocean City had a very successful meeting with Senator Mikulski on Monday to speak about the J1 Visa Program, Section 179 Tax Depreciation, and Obamacare. HMRA's dinner meeting will be held on December 19 at the Captain's Table. Chief Buzzaro will attend the next HMRA Board Meeting in January for a follow-up discussion on several issues. Susan held a lodging round-table a few weeks ago to discuss how to build direct bookings and deal with online travel agencies, which mainly focused on the smaller hotels. The next lodging round-table will be held in January. The HMRA's accommodations guide and Inside Ocean City book are both at the press.

Donna Abbott spoke about Rodney the Lifeguard, and how he walked a bride down the aisle at her wedding in Ocean City. This gave Ocean City some positive, national publicity in USA Today as well as in local and regional media. She is working on finalizing the October Metrics Report. According to the Smith Travel Report for October, the occupancy was up .3% while room tax was up 12 % and food tax up 24%. Donna will be going before the Council on December 16 with a draft RFP for the Tourism Strategic Plan to get their input. She also mentioned that Ocean City is the recipient of the State Tourism Economic Engine Award for the Ocean City Dew Tour. Donna accepted the award at the Tourism Conference in November. She also announced that she recently received official notification from the State Tourism Office that Ocean City has been awarded a \$450,000 grant, the largest tourism grant in the state in FY2014. The grant is allocated based on FY2013 allowable expenditures and on growth of FY 2013 Comptroller-determined tourism tax revenues collected in FY2012.

Tom Shuster stated that Winterfest of Lights has gotten off to a great start this year with 25,238 riders as of December 3. Over 18,000 of those riders were during the four-day Thanksgiving weekend. He also mentioned that the OC Parade will be held this Saturday, December 7, and the Jingle Bell Fun Run will be held under the Winterfest of Lights this Sunday, December 8. There will be a midnight fireworks display on New Year's Eve at Northside Park again this year. Last year was the first time for the fireworks display and it was a very popular event.

Frank Miller mentioned that there are 400 lighted displays this year in the Winterfest of Lights. He also stated that attendance over the four-day Thanksgiving weekend was up from last year.

The Mayor mentioned that he met with Cliff Sutherland and Mike Alexander of OC Bikefest earlier in the day. The two happened to be in town and stopped by to discuss how successful OC Bikefest was in 2013.

Mary made a motion to go into closed session to discuss the 2014 advertising campaign.

The commission voted unanimously to forward campaign creative and interactive projects proposed to the Mayor and Council for review and approval.

The next meeting will be held on January 13 at 3 p.m. in Room 214 at the Convention Center.