

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes  
February 10, 2014

The following individuals were in attendance:

Commission Members – Tourism Commission Chair and Council Secretary Mary Knight, Mayor Rick Meehan, Councilmember Dennis Dare; Chris Trimper, HMRA; Michael James, EDC; Greg Shockley, MTDB; Todd Ferrante, OCDC. Staff members present were City Manager David Recor, Donna Abbott, Tourism Director; Larry Noccolino, Convention Center Director; Lisa Osman, Tourism Department; Tom Shuster, Recreation and Parks Director; Frank Miller, Special Events. Also present were John Gehrig, Chamber of Commerce; Susan Jones, HMRA; Christina Nokes, Wine in the Park. Media representatives present were Zach Hoopes, Ocean City Today; and Joanne Shriner, Maryland Coast Dispatch.

Council Secretary and Tourism Commission Chair Mary Knight called the meeting to order at 3 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Councilmember Dennis Dare made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 13 meeting, seconded by Chris Trimper. The vote was unanimous.

Christina Nokes from Wine in the Park announced that Wine in the Park will be held the same weekend as Art's Alive, June 13-15. She mentioned that any help with marketing the event would be greatly appreciated.

Interactive Projects update

Donna Abbott presented an update on interactive projects that were presented to the commission in December and approved, including the development of a new mobile site for ococean to address the increasing use of mobile devices. In the process of addressing the mobile website along with other updates to the ococean website, she said it became apparent it was time to refresh and update the overall look of the tourism website and incorporate more photos and video content. The functionality of the site will remain. It has been five years since the website was redesigned. The new content management system now in place will enable us to increase the amount of photos and videos. The site will also incorporate the collection of photos that have been posted on the Ocean City Instagram site by visitors sharing their vacations in Ocean City. A video section will have YouTube videos about events and attractions. We will also be updating the Beach Weddings page. The plan is to unveil the website and the mobile site by the week of May 19.

Interactive projects also include new landing page templates for all of our signature events, along with a redesigned "Boardtalk" newsletter that is sent to over 70,000 people. We will be updating the golf section as well, making it more user-friendly to request

quotes from golf packagers. Additional projects will be a Facebook application as part of this year's campaign and updates to the Insiders' section. There were no concerns voiced by the Tourism Commission with these projects. Funding for the projects is available in the production line item of the advertising budget.

#### Tourism Strategic Plan update

Donna presented an update of the tourism strategic plan process. Eight proposals were submitted and she is in the process of reviewing them. Preliminary review shows a wide range of prices and a varied approach by respondents.

#### Updates from other Departments & Organizations:

##### Chamber of Commerce

John Gehrig reported that the legislative session is in full force in Annapolis. He distributed a list of Chamber events to all attendees. He also reported that the Chamber is in the process of updating their website.

##### Economic Development Committee (EDC)

Michael James reported this month's EDC meeting was well attended and that it was a positive exchange with the Worcester County School Superintendent by the business community who all want the schools to have a post-Labor Day start date.

##### Greg Shockley

Greg spoke about the post-Labor Day school start date task force. He said they're trying to make superintendents realize that it is not their intention to shorten the time children go to school. His group has offered different options, such as lengthening the school day by 10 minutes. He does not believe a bill will be introduced in this session to mandate the post Labor Day start as the task force did not yet finalize its report at its last meeting. The task force will now have a final report to the Governor by June 30 and a bill may be introduced in the next session to mandate the post Labor Day school start.

##### HMRA

Susan Jones reported that the Chamber and HMRA are working with the EDC on a workforce grant that is administered through the state. They were able to receive a planning grant, so they have been able to pull together some businesses to see what the gap is in workforce needs. Wor-Wic Community College is working with them to write the grant. The Restaurant Association of the Year did their nominations and Travis Wright is in the running for Chef of the Year. HMRA has partnered with RAM this year to co-sponsor the Awards Gala, which will be held at the Hyatt for the next two years. The banquet will be held on April 6. They are hoping to bring it to Ocean City in the future. The HMRA dinner meeting is next week. HMRA's Trade Show will be held March 9-10 at the Convention Center with 400 exhibit booths.

##### OCDC

Todd Ferrante reported that OCDC has completed 146 façade projects, with nine more underway. OCDC has completed more façade projects than any other organization in the

state, including Baltimore City. They are finalizing their special events program for Sunset Park, which will kick off in June. 98.1 will be a sponsor again this year. They are planning to go before the Mayor and City Council to discuss a public art project. The Public Art Committee will have a fundraiser in March to help kick off this event, which will be held at the Captain's Table Restaurant on March 22. OCDC has applied for a grant from the Community Foundation for bicycle racks for the boardwalk. Their annual newsletter will go out in the spring with the Town's newsletter.

### Tourism

Donna Abbott announced that the new television spots will be in production the first week of March. On January 23, we sent out an eblast to promote winter deals and the new visitor guide, and it drove the highest number of single day site visits to ocean for the month of January. Facebook continues to grow. Our number of fans grew in January by over 13,000 to 637,531 fans.

### Convention Center

Larry Noccolino reported that construction is going as scheduled. The concrete floor will be removed between March 12 - April 1, and will be about a three-week process. We are continuing to speak to promoters and in-house groups regarding the Performing Arts Center. We have booking requests that are two years out now into 2016. The Convention Center will host the Maryland Travel and Tourism Summit November 12-14, 2014.

### Recreation and Parks

Tom Shuster reported that his department is currently working on Splash, the Recreation and Parks publication that comes out annually. They will have it ready to go to print by the end of the month and plan to distribute it in March.

### Special Events

Frank Miller announced that there are some big changes coming in the Special Events Division. As Tom Shuster retires, there will be a restructuring of the division, and the division will be reporting directly to the City Manager as of April 1. They will be looking at relocating to the Convention Center in the future. Springfest planning is well under way. They are also working on the Halloween in Ocean City collaborative effort.

Mary announced that the next meeting will be held on Thursday, March 13, at 3:00 p.m. in Room 214 at the Convention Center as the HMRA trade show will be in the convention center on March 10.

The Mayor reminded everyone that the upcoming St. Patrick's Day Parade is put on entirely by a volunteer organization and has become one of the biggest weekends in town between New Year's and Memorial Day. It is a fund-raising event. Last year, they gave \$22,000 toward high school scholarships at Stephen Decatur High School and also donated \$10,000 to Coastal Hospice. They would appreciate any support that you may be able to give.

The Mayor made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Councilman Dare. The meeting adjourned at 4 p.m.