

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes  
March 13, 2014

The following individuals were in attendance:

Commission Members – Tourism Commission Chair and Council Secretary Mary Knight, Councilmember Dennis Dare; Chris Trimper, HMRA; and Buck Mann, Chamber of Commerce. Staff members present were City Manager David Recor, Donna Abbott, Tourism Director; Larry Noccolino, Convention Center Director; Susan Petito, Recreation and Parks. Also present were Melanie Pursel, Chamber; and Susan Jones, HMRA. 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 February 10 meeting, seconded by Chris Trimper. The vote was unanimous.

Report on the Washington Travel & Adventure Show

Donna presented a report on the Tourism Department's recent participation in the Washington DC Travel & Adventure Show. Out of the four shows attended last year, it was determined the most attended and successful was the DC travel show. Ocean City again contracted with Spark Productions to help set up and man the booth at the two-day show. To reduce costs, the booth was reconfigured to a 10 by 10 size verses last year's 10 by 20. This year's show was once again extremely well attended. We distributed hundreds of visitor guides, event sheets and goody bags filled with coupons and rack cards supplied by CVB members. We collected 500 leads through our IPAD data collection and email addresses have been added to our Tourism database to receive our regularly deployed Boardtalk e-blasts.

Tourism Strategic Plan update

Donna presented an update of the tourism strategic plan process. Eight proposals were submitted. After a thorough review of all proposals, which offered a wide range of prices and approaches, it was decided to request a proposal from the town's consultant, Lyle Sumek, who facilitated the townwide strategic plan that was initiated last year. Mr. Sumek has submitted a proposal that will be less than half the cost of the lowest bidder in the RFP process. Mr. Sumek is very knowledgeable about Ocean City and has done work with other destinations. Donna said the HMRA and Chamber along with other business representatives will be tasked with collecting and providing information to develop a tourism profile to determine who our tourists are and where they come from along with other important information. This information is needed to assist us in making decisions on our marketing. Council Secretary Knight said Mr. Sumek's proposal will follow a

similar process as the townwide strategic plan and will involve all members of the Tourism Commission representing the various business organizations as well as key stakeholders in the development of a five-year strategic plan for tourism and one-year action agenda/work program. The plan will also define outcome based tourism goals with performance standards and metrics; establish a tourism framework and decision tool to assist in making decisions and investments including targeting markets and guests; develop a tourism work plan for one year with specific activities and milestones as well as defined responsibilities and timeframes; and institutionalize a tourism strategic planning process with a monitoring and reporting mechanism.

A schedule of meetings and interviews will be put together based upon Mr. Sumek's calendar with a final plan presented in October. There were no objections to this process.

#### Updates from other Departments & Organizations:

##### Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber had a booth at the Harrisburg show in February. The Chamber also conducted a powerpoint presentation with AAA New Jersey reps. Melanie has been very busy during the legislative session monitoring matters such as the state's proposed tourism budget and the minimum wage bills. The Chamber sent a letter to the Worcester County Commissioners in support of the expansion of the Showell Park for more athletic fields. Three meetings have been held regarding the EARN grant for employee training and she is working with the county to set up an economic summit in the fall. A seasonal workforce meeting will be held in April. She and Donna participated in a post Labor Day school calendar work group conference call earlier in the afternoon. The group is discussing having an opinion poll conducted to gauge public support for the school calendar changing statewide. The task force will be issuing a final report in June and the poll could help. There is a cost to have Opinion Works conduct the poll and various trade groups and municipalities will be asked if they can contribute to fund the poll.

##### HMRA

Susan Jones reported her trade show went very well and the convention center staff did an excellent job. This was the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the show and there were 5,500 attendees. Exhibitors were pleased with the results. HMRA will be partnering with Habitat for Humanity to support construction of a house for a hospitality worker. The Maryland Restaurant Association will hold its annual awards gala April 6 at the Hyatt. Maddie and Billy Carder are being inducted into the hall of fame. Susan is also working on midweek summer splash deals and will give to the Tourism Dept. to promote on the ococean website.

##### Convention Center

Larry reported a national dance competition was in the facility this coming weekend presented by Epic Brands. This is a relatively small group compared to the company's cheerleader competition, but still expects between 2,500 and 3,000 participants. The Handbell Ringers will also be in the building. Phase 2 construction is proceeding along on schedule. He is in talks with producers at the Kennedy Center to possibly bring five or

six shows to the performing arts facility when it is completed, including opera, ballet and musicals. The Mid-Atlantic Symphony is also discussing five or six dates of performances.

#### Tourism

Donna reported she was in Baltimore last week for the new television ad shoot. The new spots are now in the editing phase and should be completed next week. The redesign of the website and development of the mobile site are coming along nicely as is the development of our 2014 press kit. She distributed the 2014 event sheet, which is updated periodically throughout the year and distributed to local businesses.

#### Recreation and Parks

Susan Petito representing Tom Shuster and Frank Miller, reported Springfest plans are moving along. Headline entertainment for Sunfest will be announced April 1 and a big country act will be one of the performers. Staff is working on a rebranding of Art's Alive. This year's awards ceremony for the artists will be held at the Center for the Arts for the first time. An August visit by two tall ships is a possibility, and the coming weekend will have another St. Patrick's Day Soccer Tournament. Golf bookings at Eagle's Landing look good for spring. The department's new Splash publication is now out.

Buck Mann reported the coming weekend's St. Patrick's Day Parade will be bigger than ever with 136 units participating. All agreed the event has grown into a signature spring kick off with hotels and bars experiencing strong sales.

Mary announced that the next meeting will be held on Monday, April 14 at 3 p.m.

Council Member Dare made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Buck Mann. The meeting adjourned at 4:20 p.m.