

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes
April 14, 2014

The following individuals were in attendance:

Commission Members – Tourism Commission Chair and Council Secretary Mary Knight, Council Member Dennis Dare, Council Member Joe Mitrecic and Todd Ferrante, OCDC. Staff members present were City Manager David Recor, Donna Abbott, Tourism Director; Larry Noccolino, Convention Center Director; Frank Miller, Special Events; Lisa Osman, Tourism. Also present were Melanie Pursel, Chamber; and Susan Jones, HMRA; Andy Malis and Alison Fiorelli, MGH. 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 1 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Todd Ferrante made a motion to approve the minutes from the March 13 meeting, seconded by Councilmember Dennis Dare. The vote was unanimous.

Rocket Launch Viewing Area at Inlet

Rebecca Hudson from NASA's Wallops Island Flight Facility spoke about designating a specific area on the boardwalk to view rocket launches from Wallops Island. The Wallops facility has limited public viewing area space during launches and Ocean City's Inlet area could be promoted as a viewing area. The area on the boardwalk would be near the Life-Saving Station Museum. NASA can provide a speaker system, possibly an inflatable screen, and a trained docent who can provide information when a launch is scheduled. Rebecca can also provide a mission information fact sheet about the launch for visitors. The next launch is tentatively scheduled for May, although it may be rescheduled for June. She will know for sure later this week and provide updated information to the Tourism Director.

New Website & Outdoor Creative

Alison Fiorelli presented the newly updated www.ococean.com website now under construction. The updated website will allow businesses to add more photos and videos to showcase their properties. The new website will be launched the week of May 19 along with the new mobile site. Alison also presented the new Vacation Days commercials and the new outdoor advertising boards proposed. MGH has also updated the Boardtalk e-newsletter template to make it brighter and easier to read.

Tourism Strategic Plan Update

Council Secretary Mary Knight announced that she, City Manager David Recor and Tourism Director Donna Abbott had a conference call last week with Lyle Sumek to discuss the upcoming tourism strategic plan process. Mary explained that it was decided to have a tourist survey to compile data throughout the summer. An iPad will be located in the Visitor Center in the Convention Center, at the Chamber of Commerce Visitor

Center, and at the Boardwalk Cottage among other locations for people to take the survey. Mary distributed a copy of a draft survey and received feedback from the attendees. The proposed survey seeks zip code information, length of stay, reason for visiting Ocean City, and lodging choice among other items. A survey at Springfest will be completed to test the process. Also hotels will be asked for occupancy numbers on select dates throughout the season along with room rate ranges. Interviews with members of the Tourism Commission and other key industry stakeholders will be conducted by phone with Mr. Sumek in May and June as part of the process.

Updates from other Departments & Organizations:

Tourism

Donna Abbott reported that the Ocean City Insiders group was in town this past weekend for their annual visit. Donna and MGH reps met with them on Saturday to review the new campaign.

Chamber of Commerce

Melanie Pursel distributed The Source, a local publication that the Chamber does. They will be inserted into local papers that are distributed in the area. Melanie attended the Seasonal Workforce Employer Conference with Susan Jones at the Carousel last week. It was very well attended. The OC Job Fair will be held this weekend, April 19, at the Convention Center. The Legislative EDC meeting will be held on May 2 at the Carousel. The Chamber is almost finished selling advertisements on their OC map, which will be ready by Memorial Day weekend. Melanie said the Chamber has many ribbon-cutting ceremonies coming up for new businesses.

HMRA

Susan Jones shared a copy of the 3rd edition of Inside Ocean City, which is HMRA's in-room hotel book. The book will be located in 8,800 rooms throughout Ocean City, and the book will be exclusive in approximately 4,400 rooms. It is a fundraiser for the HMRA. Sandy Phillips is the local sales representative and she donates a portion of the advertising back to the HMRA. HMRA's installation of officers will be held on April 24 at the Harborwatch and G. Hale Harrison will be the incoming president. A seminar will be held about online travel agencies. The goal is to teach the hotels how to increase their direct bookings. Donna Abbott will also show a presentation on the new advertising campaign for those hotels/motels that did not attend the season kick-off meeting. Restaurant Week is May 4-18; there are currently 15 restaurants participating.

OCDC

Todd Ferrante reported that the OCDC has completed 148 façade projects. The OCDC has finalized the special events for Sunset Park. There will be a kick-off concert on June 26 and 98.1 radio station will be the sponsor. OCDC just got approval from the town on a dolphin sculpture on 60th street. Their annual meeting will be held on April 30 at Shenanigan's and is always well attended.

Special Events

Frank Miller reported that the Komen Race went very smoothly this weekend. They start setting up for Springfest next Monday. Merle Haggard is sold out. Loverboy is about 60 percent sold out. They are finalizing their schedules for Sundaes in the Park and Concerts on the Beach and should have those out soon. Frank announced that there will be two vessels coming this year for the Tall Ship Event from August 1 to September 1. They are looking into a possible Pirate's Festival to be held during that timeframe. There will be vendors dockside the entire time that the vessels are docked. This year's event will be more organized than last year's pilot effort.

Convention Center

Larry reported that the Convention Center floor removal is 25 percent complete and will be removed 100 percent by April 28. Larry is presently working on bringing three new shows to the Convention Center, one in 2014, one in 2015, and one in 2016. The 2016 show is a ping pong tournament. Larry also reported that they had record-breaking numbers at the Convention Center last weekend with the Reach the Beach Cheerleaders.

Council Member Dennis Dare announced that the St. Patrick's Day parade went very well with over 130 floats.

Mary announced that the next meeting will be held on Monday, May 12, at 3 p.m.

Council Member Dare made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Council Member Joe Mitrecic. The meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.