

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes
August 11, 2014

The following individuals were in attendance:

Commission Members –, Tourism Commission Chair and Council Secretary Mary Knight, Mayor Rick Meehan, Council Member Dennis Dare, Buck Mann, Chamber of Commerce; Todd Ferrante, OCDC; G. Hale Harrison, HMRA; Greg Shockley, MTDB; and Michael James, EDC. 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. Media representatives present were Clara Vaughn, 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

Council Member Dare made a motion to approve the minutes from the June 12 meeting, seconded by Buck Mann. The vote was unanimous.

2014 Summer Season Metrics to date

Donna Abbott distributed a copy of the May and June metrics reports. Per OC Budget Manager, the room tax collection in May was the best May ever. June Smith Travel hotel occupancy was up 5.6%, the largest increase in our comp set, while room tax for June was down slightly. Susan Jones stated that she believes the June room tax was down due to rate wars between the hotels. June reflects a slight decline in web visits to our new website, but that may be tied to a change in Google Analytics classification of web traffic. Events section visits have gone way up. The new mobile website may be a factor. Social media continues to climb. We have over 700,000 Facebook fans. Dennis Dare mentioned how nice it is to have the metrics report to look back on.

Tourism Strategic Plan Update

Donna stated that all Tourism Commission members should have already been interviewed by the consultant, Lyle Sumek. The next stage is for Donna, Frank, Larry, David, and Andy Malis, MGH, to meet with the consultant by Skype to keep expenses down. Lyle will be coming to Ocean City in October to meet with the Tourism Commission for a full day session. Donna reported that the visitor profile surveys continue to be collected. Mary Knight stated that visitors don't seem to mind taking the survey when they visit the Boardwalk Cottage. Melanie offered to have one of the iPads at the Chamber for visitors there. Donna stated that we've had visitors take surveys at the White Marlin Open and at Sundaes in the Park at Northside Park, along with the firemen's convention and MML.

Sports Marketing Update

The TAB allocation was approved by the Mayor and Council to fund Ocean City's share of the bid fee for the USSSA Girls Softball World Series. \$34,650 came out of TAB allocation. Wicomico County received a state grant for last year's USSSA event and since TAB also supported that, Wicomico County will be reimbursing Ocean City \$16,280, which Council approved to go back into the TAB allocation. Donna will be meeting with Wicomico and Worcester Counties about Worcester County entering this agreement. We have been working per the MOU to pursue other amateur sporting events. Donna and Gary Mackes from Wicomico County met in June with Terry Hasseltine from the state sports marketing office. Terry has a lot of contacts and will be assisting with some of these efforts. Terry will assist us with submitting proposals for a few events. We will try to get events when the community needs them, weekdays and shoulder season. The USSSA has a conference every fall in Orlando, where they are based. It was recommended that the Town and Wicomico fund a sponsorship of the conference. Ocean City's share would be \$3,500 and funds are available in Ocean City's sports marketing budget. A motion to support the sponsorship was made by Buck Mann and second by Todd Ferrante; vote was unanimous and will be forwarded to the Mayor and Council for review.

Updates from other Departments & Organizations:

Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber is working on the 2015 Vacation Guide. The Annual Gala will be held on September 5. They will be honoring their incoming board and a number of award winners. Crab feast will be held on October 9 at BLU. The annual general membership meeting at the Dunes Manor is on September 24. Their networking luncheon will be held next Tuesday. They have been working on the J-1 cultural activities, which have been going well.

HMRA

Susan Jones reported that Surfer's Healing, an event where pro surfers come and surf with children with autism, will be held on Wednesday. Melanie and Susan will be serving lunch to the children and their families. There was tremendous support from the business community during their search for lunches. HMRA will also be sponsoring Sandfest. Hotel Week will be held August 17-28 with 39 hotels participating.

EDC

Michael James reported the next meeting will be after the summer season.

MTDB

Greg Shockley – The state's TV ads for Star-Spangled Celebration have begun and are running late summer and fall.

OCDC

Todd Ferrante reported that the OCDC has a golf tournament coming up on October 8. OCDC also installed 10 bike racks and some business directory signs on the Boardwalk. Sunset Park concerts continue.

Tourism

Donna reported that she and the Mayor were on a media tour in Baltimore on June 18. They made stops at five media outlets, which netted an ad equivalency value of \$15,000. The Mayor and a team of helpers will be in Silver Spring on Thursday, August 21, doing yard work, etc. for the grand prize winner of Ocean City's Facebook Sweepstakes. Our TV ads are still running. We extended our buy with the MASN Network due to the fact that the Baltimore Orioles and the Washington Nationals are both in first place in the respective divisions and the TV ratings are extremely high.

Convention Center

Larry Noccolino reported that we have four months to go with construction on the Performing Arts Center. Larry is meeting with two producers from the Kennedy Center on September 2. Larry and Ruth Waters met with tour group operators to try and bring Branson to Ocean City. He has four hard dates in March 2016 that will bring 150-175 buses to Ocean City. Larry and Frank are still working to see if they can bring a group or two to the Performing Arts Center.

Special Events

Frank Miller reported that Movies on the Beach at 27th Street and Family Beach Olympics have ended for the season. Both were very successful. This is the last week of the camps programs. The dinosaur T-Rex beach play structure was installed on August 1 on 3rd Street. Sundaes in the Park with fireworks have been very successful this year. The Spanish Galeon ship is also doing very well and is averaging approximately 500 people per day. Sunfest tents will go up in a little over three weeks. Starting to execute Winterfest of Lights.

The meeting was adjourned at 4 p.m. The next meeting will be held on Monday, September 8, at 3 p.m.