



Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 03, 2025 at 6:30 PM

Columbus City Hall – 105 N. Dickason Boulevard

Call to Order

Walcott called the meeting to order at 6:34pm.

Roll Call

A quorum of the Tourism Commission present included Belschner, Hammer, Walcott, and Walker. Staff liaison Bennett was also present.

Notice of Open Meeting

Bennett confirmed the meeting was properly noticed.

Approval of Agenda

Hammer motions to approve the agenda for the Tourism Commission meeting of Monday, February 3, 2025. Belschner seconds. Motion carries by unanimous vote.

Approval of Minutes

1. Review and Approve Minutes from January 6, 2025

Walker motions to approve the minutes from the Tourism Commission meeting of Monday, January 6, 2025. Belschner seconds. Motion carries by unanimous vote.

Public Comment

There was no one from the public in attendance for public comment. There was no correspondence.

Unfinished Business

2. Approved Columbus Chamber of Commerce 2024 Wine Walk Room Tax Funding Final Report

Bennett presented the materials from the approved 2024 Wine Walk final report. At the previous meeting, Bennett was authorized to review the final report from the Chamber of Commerce if it arrived by January 27, 2025. Bennett confirmed it arrived by the deadline and after reviewing the final report, concluded it met the guidelines and was in line with previously approved reports. Bennett has received the expense line-item approval from the City Administrator and has submitted the Chamber's invoice to Finance in order to keep the reimbursement on the 2024 budget.

The Tourism Commission expressed satisfaction with Bennett's review and the submitted materials.

3. New Room Tax Funding Guidelines Implementation

Bennett informed the Tourism Commission that the new guidelines have been implemented. An online form has been created and is live, while both the form and guidelines have been promoted on Facebook. Bennett said the Facebook post has generated over 13,000 views and had 11 shares. Belschner shared a concern about a potential lack of verification thinking that an individual

could apply on behalf of an organization, without that organization's approval. Bennett thinks that any verification could be handled during the application meeting with any potential applicant. Walcott would like to see some form of verification on the initial application.

Roelke motioned to continue implementation of the new guidelines with added verification for individuals and organizations. Hammer seconds. During discussion, Hammer asked about the logistics of a group like the 4th of July Organization keeping track of analytics. Everyone knows the festival is a draw, but dedicating volunteers to counting them would be very hard. Bennett suggested they could talk to local lodging, restaurant, and shop owners to gauge impact as that would be more efficient. Walker added that there could be a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce to reach out to its members. Motion carries by unanimous vote. Bennett will add an organization verification part to the application.

New Business

4. Discuss and Take Possible Action on Setting 2025 Priorities

Bennett introduced an outline for potential 2025 Tourism priorities which highlighted the new guidelines, digital signage, increased digital marketing, and prioritizing "heads in beds".

When going over the digital signage topic, Belschner asked about billboards and digital welcome signs coming into town. The welcome signs would have a host of issues to work through, such as DOT. Bennett stated the Commission worked with Lamar on holiday train billboards on the 151 corridor and could be an option again. Hammer will be meeting with Amtrak and will bring up the possibility of tourism's digital signage on or in the train station. Hammer noted that Amtrak normally does not allow for non-Amtrak signage. Walcott would like to see a QR code to the Tourism website and community calendar in conjunction with the digital signage.

No additional comments or suggestions were made to the staff list of priorities. Bennett also highlighted some possible secondary priorities as discussed in previous meetings. These include an event centered around the movie, Public Enemies, historic walking tours, print marketing distributed at events, itinerary marketing, and a marketing study and survey. The Tourism Commission would like to add these to the overall priority list and agree to keep them secondary. The consensus is that these could be worked on incrementally when time allows to build up towards implementation or increased priority. Belschner asked about itinerary marketing and Walcott explained it as list of things to do for a weekend and gave an example. The study and survey may require cost, but staff is confident that there's possibility of working on parts in-house. Belschner would like to see flyers for distributing during the 4th of July parade on the next agenda.

5. Discuss and Take Possible Action on Purchasing 2025 County Guide Ads

Bennett presented the 2025 Columbia and Dodge County guide ads from Madison Media Partners (MMP). The Tourism Commission had purchase quarter page ads in 2024. The new highlights include added value of email marketing in the Columbia guide. The Dodge County guide, however, will be transitioning toward promoting for the 65+ age demographic in the coming years. The combined total for a quarter-page ad in both publications would be \$1,300.

Belschner asked about analytics. Bennett said they have never really had any, but the added email marketing should provide some. Hammer would like physical copies to distribute at events and around local attractions and businesses.

Hammer motions to approve \$1,300 for the quarter-page ads in both Columbia and Dodge County guides. Roelke seconds. Roll call vote: Belschner - abstain, Hammer - aye, Roelke - aye, Walcott - aye, and Walker - aye. Motion carries with 4 ayes, 0 nays, and 1 abstention.

Staff Reports

6. Tourism Budget Update

Bennett provided a brief recap of Tourism finances from January. No new revenues have been reported. The new kayak rental has been implemented as a new revenue line item. The notable expenditure was for \$372.44 from the web/media line item for Tourism's contribution to the City's website by CivicPlus.

Bennett gave an update that both Columbus Historic Landmarks Preservation Commission (CHLPC) and the Chamber of Commerce invoices from approved final reports for room tax funding reimbursements will be part of the 2024 budget. Bennett noted having to contact CHLPC multiple times to receive an invoice.

No additional discussion or actions were taken.

Future Agenda Items

The next meeting will take place on Monday, March 3, 2025.

Bennett will be using the discussed priorities to set future agendas - noting that flyers for the 4th of July parade will be on the next one.

No additional items were given for future agendas.

Adjourn

Roelke motions to adjourn the meeting. Walker seconds. Motion carries by unanimous vote. Walcott adjourns the meeting at 7:36pm.

These minutes will be approved at a future meeting and may be amended. These minutes are respectfully submitted by David Bennett, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator.

*A quorum of city committees and/or commissions may be present at this meeting. No action will be taken or considered by those committees and/or commissions.