



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
WEDNESDAY, October 20, 2021

Commissioners Present: Amish Das, Sherricka Day, Miles Greathouse, Donna Hix; and Jamie Waters

Commissioners Absent: Lauren Becker; Dan Gilbert; Marianne Richter; Mamie Pound; Mayor Skip Henderson

Special Invitees: Norm Easterbrook, RiverCenter for the Performing Arts; Kellan Flis, East Alabama Chamber of Commerce; Merri Sherman, Columbus Sports Council; Hayley Tillery, Columbus GA Convention & Trade Center; Holly Wait, National Civil War Naval Museum; Ed Wolverton, Uptown Columbus

Staff Present: Peter Bowden, Shelby Guest, Ashley Woitena

Special Guest: Carrie Beth Wallace, VisitColumbusGA Social Media Manager

Call to Order..... Amish Das

- The meeting, held at the Columbus Convention & Trade Center, was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by Chair, Amish Das.

Approval of Minutes & Financials Jamie Waters

- Mr. Das reminded the Board that the approval of the minutes & financials is by way of a consent agenda.
- Jamie Waters then reviewed the consent agenda and asked the Board if there were any specific items from either the minutes or the financials needing additional discussion. Hearing none, he asked for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. A motion to approve was made by Miles Greathouse and was seconded Donna Hix. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Chair’s Report..... Amish Das

- For this month’s Stakeholder Spotlight, Mr. Das introduced Holly Wait, Director of the National Civil War Naval Museum for an update on the impact of COVID-19 on the facility, precautions taken during the pandemic, and how the Museum was recovering financially. Ms. Wait noted the Museum ramped up its online presence, applied for and received a Georgia Humanities Grant and PPP funding; because of this funding, the Museum was able to keep all staff positions. After a brief closure, the Museum reopened in May ('20) with safety protocols and procedures in

place. Ms. Wait also noted several conservation projects that took place during the pandemic and the development of micro-tours for families. The Museum is beginning to see military groups return and have seen overall visitation numbers steadily increase. A new component the Museum has added is a Mystery Dinner Theater series, which has sold out.

- Mr. Das reminded the Board about the upcoming election and reviewed information on the proposed SPLOST.
- The final item on the Chair's Report was an update from Mr. Das on the American Rescue Plan Funding. VisitColumbus hopes to receive a portion of this money, however there has been no update from the Columbus Consolidated Government (CCG) as to when/if funds will be available. The CCG is still waiting on distribution directions from the federal government.

Staff Report..... Peter Bowden

- First on the agenda was a presentation from Carrie Beth Wallace who handles social media posts and placements for VisitColumbusGA. Ms. Wallace explained the strategy has ranged from organic posts (no spend), to using grant monies (TRP, Northstar, and Trip Adviser) to schedule paid posts. She also highlighted overall reach resulting from the grant spend for Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; focused on industry shares and mentions, i.e., Explore Georgia, Best of the Southeast, Georgia Mainstreet, Explore the South, Coca-Cola, etc. As part of VisitColumbusGA's social media strategy, Shelby Guest described the two travel media press tours slated for the last part of fiscal 2022; the first to be held in March 2022—focusing on arts & culture, and a second to be held in May, focusing on outdoor adventure. VisitColumbusGA once again be working with Laurie Rowe Communications to invite, vet and qualify writers, as well as working with staff to help craft both itineraries.
- Peter Bowden presented information about the recent 14th Annual Hometown Meeting with city officials and state representatives. Ashely Woitena had the opportunity to address the group and present VisitColumbus' legislative agenda for the upcoming legislative session.
- Mr. Bowden then recapped the recent 8th Annual Collaborate Summit. This year focused on topics ranging from travel research and trends, why it's important to work with a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), how to market with little or no budget, and how to leverage the assets Explore Georgia has to offer partners throughout the state.
- He then gave a brief follow-up to the most recent FilmColumbusGA meeting. Fifty attendees were able to attend virtually to hear the latest industry updates from representatives from Georgia Production Partners and an independent film producer. Mr. Bowden also mentioned the Film Fund Donor meeting that took place that updated donors on the latest events surrounding the film and entertainment industry in Columbus.
- In his report, Mr. Bowden also spoke about the International Kayaking Competitions that will take place in Columbus. There are two events, the first to take place in October 2022 and the second in June 2023. VisitColumbus is working with Uptown Columbus and GA Department of Economic Development on how to market the events.
- His final items included updates:

- The National Defense Industrial Association Conference and the long-term strategy between VisitColumbus – led by Ashley Woitena -- and the meeting planners to make this event a success
 - A recent meeting with representative from Fall Line Entertainment and the potential for establishing an animation studio in Columbus
 - The StoryCorps project and news conference.
- He ended by giving the Board an update on Marianne Richter, who recently underwent surgery and seems to be doing well and recuperating at home.

Other Business..... Group

- Ed Wolverton with Uptown Columbus gave an update on projects and events to include wrapping up a successful Fall Concert Series; the Fall Food Truck Festival; and the cancellation of Spooktacular and the Bi-City Christmas Parade. He said that next year’s event schedule looks to be full of events to include RiverFest and the International Canoe Federation’s competition.

Adjournment.....Amish Das

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.