



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
WEDNESDAY, May 19, 2021

NOTE: DUE TO THE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS CAUSED BY COVID-19, THE MAY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING WAS CONDUCTED AS A VIRTUAL MEETING

Commissioners Present; Amish Das, Chair; Lauren Becker, Vice Chair; Jamie Waters, Secretary/Treasurer; Sherricka Day; Dan Gilbert; Miles Greathouse; Donna Hix; and Marianne Richter.

Commissioners Absent: Mamie Pound

Special Invitees: Tim Bragg, Cunningham Center; Helena Coates, Uptown Columbus; Norm Easterbrook, RiverCenter for the Performing Arts; Robert Landers, Columbus Civic Center; Gerald Mitchell, Columbus Chamber of Commerce; Merri Sherman, Columbus Sports Council; Hayley Tillery, Columbus Convention & Trade Center; and Carrie Beth Wallace, The Columbusite.

Staff Present: Peter Bowden, Shelby Guest, Carter Flynn, Andrea Smith, and Ashley Woitena

Call to Order **Amish Das**

- The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by Chair, Amish Das.

Approval of Minutes & Financials **Jamie Waters**

- Mr. Das reminded the Board, approval of the Minutes & Financials is by consent agenda.
- Mr. Das asked Jamie Waters to review the consent agenda. Mr. Waters asked the Board if there were any particular items from either the Minutes or the Financials that needed further discussion before a vote to approve was taken. Hearing none, he then asked for a motion to approve the agenda. A motion to approve was made by Lauren Becker and was seconded by Dan Gilbert. A vote was taken and the motion was approved.

Chair’s Report..... **Amish Das**

- Mr. Das introduced Merri Sherman, Executive Director of the Columbus Sports Council. Ms. Sherman gave an update on the latest events and post-pandemic plans for the Sports Council.
 - Ms. Sherman began her presentation with a bit of history and background of the Columbus Sports Council, explaining it is a 501c3 organization, originating from Columbus '96. The organization is partially funded by hotel/motel tax and sponsors. She explained that like many organizations, 2020 has been a difficult year. Ms. Sherman went on to report the Sports Council

- has received accolades such as Sports Commission of the Year, Complex of the Year, received awards from the National Federation of High Schools and recognition in other publications.
- Ms. Sherman reported the estimated economic impact for 2020 was just over \$11.2 million, with more than 179,000 attendees and over 31,000 participants. These figures do indicate losses of \$6 million due to cancellations stemming from the pandemic.
 - Spotlighting the South Commons Softball Complex renovations and improvements effort, Ms. Sherman reported the original goal was to raise \$5.6 million and through PPP that figure actually reached more than \$5.7 million raised to date. Some of the updates at the South Commons Complex include audio and video streaming capabilities on all eight softball fields, structural issues corrected, restroom and dugout improvements, upgraded lighting on three fields, new concession equipment, new stadium seating, and more. (See attached report to for a complete list of improvements, as well as a list of events that have booked as a result of the renovations.)
 - For the next item in the Chair’s Report, Mr. Das asked Jamie Waters to give an update from the VisitColumbusGA Building Lease Task Force.
 - In the April CVB Board meeting, volunteers were requested to form a task force specifically to analyze the building lease with CSU Foundation Properties and the rental agreement. Volunteers, included Sherricka Day, Amish Das, and Jamie Waters who met to review the financial position of VisitColumbusGA and the request made to CSU Foundation Properties (CSU FP) concerning a reduction in the monthly rental fee, as well as CSU FP response to this request. Upon the review, the task force brought a recommendation to the Board to accept CSU FP’s revised lease agreement until the end of the calendar year (’21). The task force also recommends the Board review VisitColumbusGA’s cash position and the rental/lease agreement in October 2021 to the organization’s financials position based on hotel/motel tax revenue along with the terms of the amended lease agreement.
 - Mr. Das asked for any questions from the Board and there being none, he called for a vote to accept the recommendation of the task force to accept the rental agreement from CSU FP. A motion to accept was made by Marianne Richter and seconded by Donna Hix. A vote was taken and the motion was approved.
 - Mr. Das then entered into a discussion on future Board meeting -- in-person vs. virtual. Because of new, more flexible guidelines from the CDC, it was suggested to go back to an in-person format. The option to offer a hybrid format was also discussed. The decision was to resume meeting in-person in June but offer the virtual component if someone wasn’t able to attend.

President’s Report Peter Bowden

- Mr. Das then asked Peter Bowden to present the President’s Report.
 - First on the agenda was the topic of the Black History Trail. Prior to this meeting, Mr. Bowden sent information to the Board about the Black History Trail, showcasing some of the materials VisitColumbusGA has produced. He spoke of recent postings on Facebook and a story published in The Courier in regards to both the Trail and the History Guide. Regrettably, some of the information posted and published was not entirely accurate, but Mr. Bowden stated he did not want to dismiss the importance of promoting and telling the story of the Black History Trail. Since 1996, VisitColumbusGA has provided the information of the legacy and major contributions and heritage of African Americans in Columbus. The on-screen examples of materials produced by VisitColumbusGA included the earliest pieces and then more recent ones with modifications

and additional information. Mr. Bowden explained that even with the updated information from a variety of resources, there still seemed to be a lack of consensus on the content.

- VisitColumbusGA hosted the Georgia Department of Economic Development's (GDEcD) its Product Development Team to conduct a deep dive on how to best interpret this aspect of the community. Mr. Bowden then displayed the 100+ page research-based guideline master plan developed by Product Development Team, which was delivered in April 2019. One of the major suggestions of this plan was the development of a "Friends Of" group that would implement the plan according to the recommendations.
- With the recent conversations about the Trail, he said it has become apparent of the need for clarification of ownership of the Trail, funding, etc. Mr. Bowden said he contacted City Manager, Isaiah Hugley, for his assistance to determine the best course of action. Mr. Hugley has asked Wane Hailes Publisher of The Courier and curator of the Black History Museum to develop a brochure. The action plan includes the Columbus Consolidated Government providing printing assistance, as well as a review of the current signage along the Trail to see if any revisions are needed. Mr. Bowden offered that staff was exploring ways to provide digital representation, putting the brochure on its website, with a downloadable version. This brochure will be distributed in the Visitors Center as well as the 11 Welcome Centers in the state. Appreciation was given to Johnnie Warner, Mr. Hailes, and Mr. Hugley for their assistance.
- The next item was an update on the quarterly presentation given to Columbus City Council, showcasing the Tourism Recovery Program (TRP) and the current progress of recovery for leisure and meetings and convention business. In essence the presentation provided a snapshot of how VisitColumbusGA has worked to support the hospitality industry by working with hotels and other partners on a strategic and focuses awareness campaign. The Council presentation also underscored the importance the hospitality industry is to the city.
- Mr. Bowden then gave an update on the status of the 403-B retirement plan and the work being done with consultants. He said that a draft of the Plan Document had been completed for review and the next step was the completion and compiling of the 5500 forms. He said he hope the work would be completed by the end of June. Mr. Bowden also stated there has been internal talks about looking into the Georgia Chamber of Commerce's new 401-K benefit plan and researching it to see if this plan would be a better option for staff.
- Next was an update on the Tourism Recovery Plan (TRP)—Recovery Phase for both the Leisure and Meetings/Convention markets.
 - Mr. Bowden focused first on the Leisure market, stating 75% of those surveyed perceive it being safe to travel, leading to the belief that this summer will be a strong travel season, with it peaking in early autumn. Seventy percent of those surveyed are now open to travel inspirations as they look for new places to travel and 90% are actively traveling now.
 - Ashley Waitena and Carter Flynn then gave an update for the Sales Department pertaining to the TRP, to include a look at some of the latest trends and research, forecast and outlook for this market, the progress of the COVID Recovery Plan, analysis of the Smith Travel Research report, a review of the awareness campaign with Digital Edge, and wrapped up with a look at the plans for the Sales Department going forward in a post-COVID world. (See attached report for complete details.)

- Shelby Guest reported on the upcoming virtual press tour planned with the assistance of Laurie Rowe Communications (LRC), on May 26 via Zoom. LRC has vetted and qualified 15 writers to attend the virtual tour. Ms. Guest and Andrea Smith have filmed over local attractions to produce a compilation video of the Columbus experience. Ms. Guest also highlighted other aspects of working with LRC and how they have helped increase the exposure about Columbus as a desirable travel destination. The year-to-date 2021 showed LRC has, by working with staff, helped place 111 published results focusing on Columbus, for a total of 1.5 billion impressions, and an earned media value of \$13.6 million. The goal of the virtual tour is to introduce this new collection of travel writers to Columbus to build on the successes and momentum currently underway.

Other Business Group

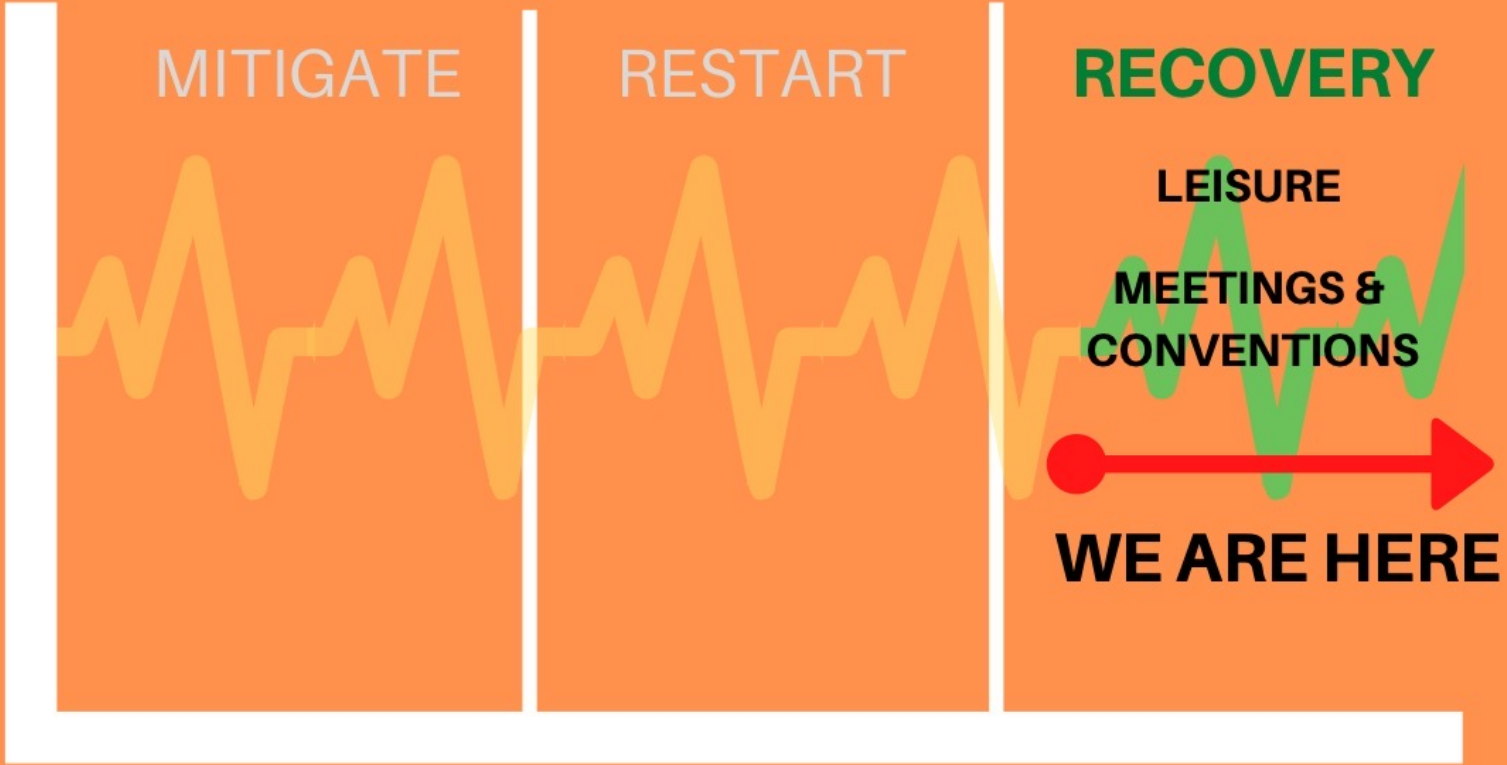
- Dan Gilbert and other Board members complimented the staff on their reports, hard work, and enthusiasm.
- Sherricka Day suggested the Board research ways to help with ideas on the revitalization of the Liberty District. She said the hope is to make the District a success like the Midtown and Uptown areas. She also suggested additions to the VisitColumbusGA website, in particular, adding vegan and vegetarian, as well as international restaurant options to the Dine page.
- Helena Coates reminded the Board the Splash Pad (Bay Ave) is open and mentioned the upcoming Beer & Wine Festival at Golden Park on June 12.

Adjournment Amish Das

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:55 p.m.



TOURISM RECOVERY PLAN



A pair of brown-rimmed glasses is resting on an open book. The book is open to a page with some text, though it is out of focus. The entire scene is set against a dark, textured background, possibly a blue fabric. The word "LEISURE" is written in a large, white, serif font across the center of the image, partially overlapping the glasses and the book. The text is enclosed within a thin white rectangular border.

LEISURE



PERCEIVED SAFE TO TRAVEL

75%

A stack of three vintage suitcases. The top suitcase is brown leather with "A.H.B." stamped on it. The middle suitcase is tan canvas with a dark brown leather handle. The bottom suitcase is dark brown with a striped pattern. A large white percentage "70%" is overlaid on the middle suitcase. The text "EXCITEMENT TO TRAVEL" and "PERCEIVED SAFETY OF TRAVEL ACTIVITIES" is overlaid on the top suitcase.

EXCITEMENT TO TRAVEL
PERCEIVED SAFETY OF TRAVEL ACTIVITIES

70%

OPENESS TO TRAVEL INSPIRATION



70%

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a bright yellow raincoat, is smiling and looking upwards. She is standing in the rain, with her right hand held out, catching some of the falling water. The background is a soft-focus green, suggesting trees or foliage. The overall mood is joyful and carefree.

ACTIVELY TRAVELING NOW

90%



MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS

BOOKING ACTIVITY

50%





IN-PERSON MEETINGS 3RD & 4TH QTR 2021

60%

A person with dark hair, seen from the back, is sitting in a living room. They are watching a large television that displays a video conference with several participants. The room has a bookshelf filled with books in the background. The text "SAFETY MESSAGING IMPORTANT" is overlaid in white, uppercase letters across the top of the TV screen. The percentage "54%" is overlaid in large white font across the person's back and the TV screen.

SAFETY MESSAGING IMPORTANT

54%



BUDGET CONCERNS

OUTLOOK

3-YEAR UPCOMING/POTENTIAL BUSINESS	FY '21	FY '22	FY '23	FY '24
Total Business - May 2021	100	81	29	11
Total Economic Impact - May '21	\$12,226,705	\$17,408,837	\$10,366,719	\$3,772,636
Definite Business	100	58	12	2
Definite Economic Impact	\$12,226,705	\$11,098,435	\$1,986,590	\$982,584
Tentative Business	0	23	17	9
Tentative Economic Impact	\$0	\$6,310,402	\$8,380,129	\$2,790,052

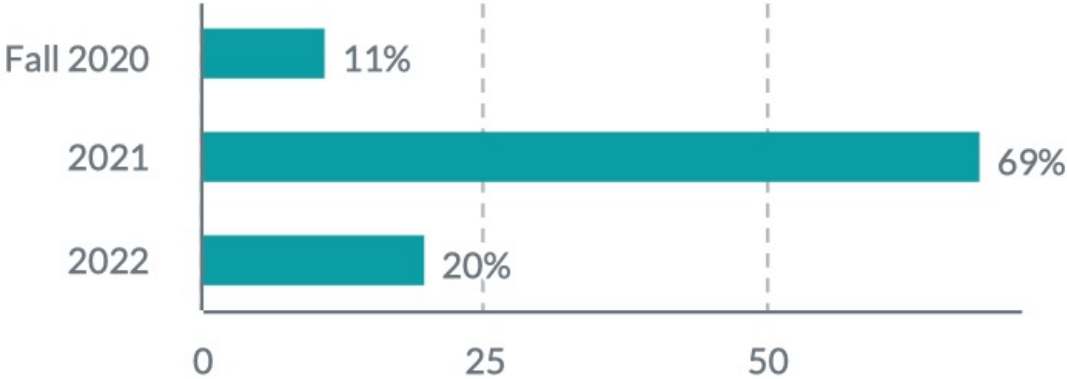
COVID-19 IMPACT

GROUP BUSINESS

- 159 Groups - POSTPONED/CANCELED/LOST
- 127,446 Attendees
- 62,041 Room Nights

\$22.4 MILLION IMPACT

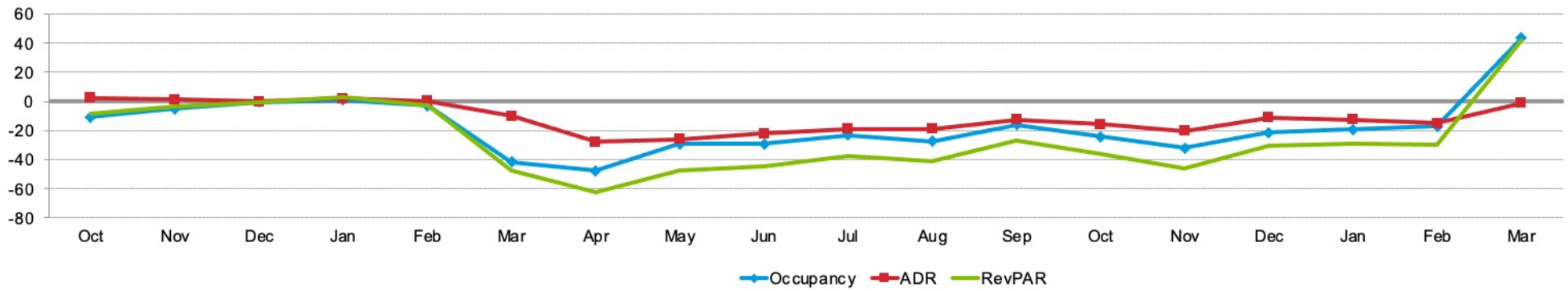
**36%
RECOVERED**
10% VIRTUAL



MEETING SLIPPAGE

March 2021

Monthly Percent Change



HOTEL PERFORMANCE CITYWIDE

SOURCE: STR

Meetings Website Traffic Overview

- Traffic to Meetings Website 2021 vs 2020 - Up **84.92%** in Users and **92.15%** in New Users when comparing YoY
 - Seeing a larger spread across the Meetings Section due to Content Marketing and Social Distribution. Prior the Meetings Homepage accounted for the majority of traffic without users going into deeper pages.
- Sept 2019 - Present vs. Previous Year (Sept 2018 - Apr 2020) traffic was up **14.33%** in Users and **16.90%** in New Users



Awareness Campaign Overview

Awareness Campaign 2021

- Overall Impressions
 - Feb '21-Mar '21
 - **2M+ Impressions**
- Audience Reach
 - **140k+ planners** across Facebook
- Media CTR (Click-Thru Rates)
 - Currently **2%** on Facebook
 - Average is 0.89%
- Email Open Rates
 - **19.3%**
 - Average is between 10-15%



Lead Generation Campaign Overview

Lead Generation Campaign 2019–2020

- Launched Feb 2020 – Paused in March 2020
 - **463K Impressions**
- Audience Reach
 - **60k+** planners across Facebook
- Media CTR (Click-Thru Rates)
 - **1.26%** on Facebook
 - Average is 0.89%
- Email Open Rates
 - **24.95%**
 - Average is between 10-15%



An abstract background featuring vibrant, swirling liquid splashes in shades of blue, yellow, orange, and red against a white gradient. The splashes are dynamic and fluid, creating a sense of movement and energy.

PLANNING FORWARD POST COVID-19

A blurred background image showing a person's hands typing on a laptop keyboard. The person is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt. The scene is set in an office environment with a desk and other office equipment visible in the background.

FY 21 Touchpoints

35,189

Site Visits/Client Meetings

23 Events

18 Definite

5 Tentative

0 Lost

9,810
Attendees

10,230
Room Nights

\$4.2
Million E.I.

Upcoming Pipeline

7 events

3 Definite

4
Tentative

0 Lost

760
Attendees

1,320
Rooms

\$389,085
E.I.



Columbus Sports Council Update





2020

A YEAR OF RECOGNITION



October 2020

Sports Events and
Tourism Association
**SPORTS
COMMISSION
OF THE YEAR**



November 2019

USA Softball
**COMPLEX OF
THE YEAR**



May 2020

National Federation
of State High School
Associations
**2020 AWARD OF
EXCELLENCE**



January 2020

David Boyd
**SPORTSEVENTS
MAGAZINE PLANNER
AND INDUSTRY
PROFESSIONAL TO
WATCH IN 2020**



January 2020

USA Softball
International Cup
**SPORTSEVENTS
MAGAZINE EVENT
TO WATCH IN 2020**

February 2020

Merri Sherman
feature
**CSU'S TURNER
BUSINESS &
TECHNOLOGY
REVIEW**



May 2020

Christina Stansbury
awarded
**FORT BENNING
FAMILY OF
THE YEAR**



October 2020

Merri Sherman
recognized
**GEORGIA TREND
40 UNDER 40**



ESTIMATED
ECONOMIC
IMPACT

\$11,260,112

179,328
Attendees in FY2020

31,318
Participants in FY2020

In FY2020, we experienced a reduction of \$6,288,105 in estimated economic impact due to participant reductions, canceled events/ weather as well as events being canceled or rescheduled due to COVID-19.



South Commons Streaming

71,776 Game Views
263,666 Ad Views
270 Ad Clicks



Homeplate

Our Video Sponsors



We do amazing.



VisitColumbusGA





South Commons Softball Complex Renovations and Improvement Effort

- Original Goal \$5.6 million
- Through PPP \$5,781,403.58 raised to date



South Commons



Presentation to Council December 12, 2017

South Commons



Presentation to Council December 12, 2017



South Commons



Presentation to Council December 12, 2017



South Commons



Presentation to Council December 12, 2017



South Commons



Presentation to Council December 12, 2017



South Commons



Presentation to Council December 12, 2017





Before Renovations





Softball Tournament

April 29 - May 1, 2010

Commons Complex
Columbus, Georgia



Before Renovations

South Commons Improvements Phase 1

- LED Field Lights on Fields 6, Stadium, and 8
- Double Bullpens on both Sides of Stadium
- Refillable water stations
- New Bathrooms
- New Concession Equipment
- Fiber Installed for WIFI Access
- Sidewalks repaired
- PAINT
- Traffic Coating
- New Stadium Seating
- Fencing
- New LED Scoreboards on all 8 fields
- Brand new Stadium Field
- Structural issues resolved
- And More...







“Cathedral for Softball”, Team
USA Coach Ken Eriksen





South Commons Continued Improvements

- Installed Cameras & Streaming for all 8 Fields
- Enclosed Batting Cage Facility
- Bullpens added to 5 Fields
- Sidewalk Extensions
- Traffic Coating applied in Stadium Dugouts
- Regrading work in areas needed
- Bollards at gates added
- Roundhouse Improvements:
 - Paint Second Floor
 - New Ceiling Tiles
 - New Bathroom Partitions
 - New Bathroom Fixtures
 - Traffic Coating applied to Bathroom Floors







Renovation Results

Some of the events booked as a result of the renovations:

- NCSA 3 Year Extension \$993,900
- NAIA 3 Year Agreement \$1,047,585
- USA Softball Jr Olympic Cup \$1,179,750
- DCB Showcase \$715,000

TOTAL \$3,936,235

2020 South Commons Impact \$4,443,440
(Reduced due to COVID 19)

2021 South Commons Estimated Impact \$8,201,556



Connecting the dots!



Merri Sherman
Columbus Sports Council

Merri Sherman is the Executive Director of the Columbus Sports Council, a 501 (c) (3) organization that fosters economic development through the recruitment and facilitation of sporting events. Merri has worked for the nonprofit organization for 14 years and has a passion for her work. Merri along with the dedication of the staff and

loyal volunteers of the Columbus Sports Council bring over \$17 million in estimated impact to the community through the many events hosted throughout the year. Merri has received the Carlton Corky Kell Award in recognition of service and dedication to high school athletes and coaches in the State of Georgia as well as the Beverly Sanders Raines Award for her contribution for the betterment of athletics in the State of Georgia by the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association. Merri was named a "Rising Star" by the Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce and has earned the distinction of Certified Sports Event Executive by the National Association of Sports Commissions. Merri is thrilled to attend the ICCLC for the fourth time to support the efforts of the City and discover ways to align City initiatives with the mission of the Columbus Sports Council.

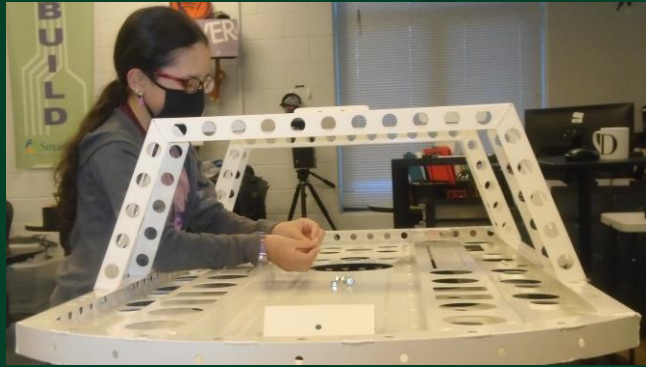
25TH ANNUAL INTER-CITY LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

- Market the city through event organizers- every event flyer, social media post is putting Columbus on the map!
- Athletes and families experience Columbus
- Recruiting tool for CSU, Columbus Tech, Workforce



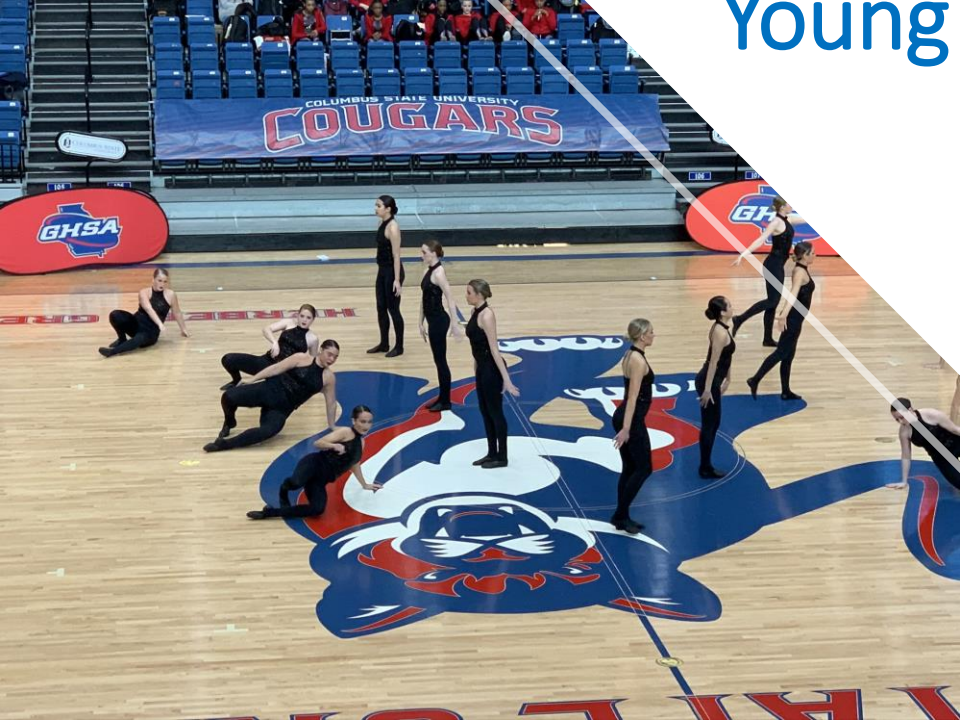
Non-Traditional Sports

- Exploring new market segments related to STEAM.
- Greenpower Columbus Initiative - 12 cars in our community
- Economic Development + Workforce Development = Intentional Win









Recruiting Young Talent