



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
WEDNESDAY, November 18, 2020

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

Commissioners Present: Cameron Bean, Chair; Amish Das, Vice Chair; Lauren Becker, Secretary/Treasurer; Miles Greathouse; Donna Hix; Marianne Richter; and Jamie Waters

Commissioners Absent: Mamie Pound

Special Invitees: Tim Bragg, Cunningham Center; Amy Bryan, Columbus Chamber of Commerce; Cyndy Cerbin, National Infantry Museum; Helena Coates, Uptown Columbus; Carrie Corbett, RiverCenter for the Performing Arts; Norm Easterbrook, RiverCenter for the Performing Arts; Pace Halter, W.C. Bradley Real Estate/Power House; Robert Landers, Columbus Civic Center; Merri Sherman, Columbus Sports Council; Hayley Tillery, Columbus Convention & Trade Center; and Holly Wait, National Civil War Naval Museum at Port Columbus; Ed Wolverton, Uptown Columbus

Special Guest Presenter: Jerald Mitchell, Greater Columbus Chamber of Commerce

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

Call to Order **Cameron Bean**

- The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m.
 - Mr. Bean began the meeting offering the Board’s congratulations to Merri Sherman and the staff at the Columbus Sports Council for being selected Sports ETA’s 2019 “Sports Commission of the Year, Population under 500,000” Award.

- Mr. Bean then welcomed Jerald Mitchell, the new president of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce and asked him to give the Board an update of the Chamber. Mr. Mitchell began with a review of the Chamber’s concentration of work in the areas of Member Engagement, Community Engagement, Public Partnership in Economic Development, Leadership & Staff Support for a Community Initiative, Regional Responsibility, and Innovation & Entrepreneurism. Being new to this area, Mr. Mitchell stated he already sees Columbus as a giving community, a culture of innovation, with assets to include infrastructure, property and quality of life. He also sees the need for Columbus to stop exporting talent, further addressing livability, the need to leverage the entire region, and emphasized the need to support local businesses—especially during the holiday season.

Approval of Minutes & Financials Lauren Becker

- Lauren Becker asked the Board members present if there were any questions regarding the minutes from the October meeting. There being none, a motion was made by Donna Hix to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Amish Das. A vote was taken, and the minutes were approved.
- Ms. Becker then went over the financials and discussed changes reflected in the Balance Sheet that included the hotel/motel tax income, the net loss for the month, and noted there are 2 hotels and 26 short term rentals that are delinquent in remitting collected hotel/motel tax to the City. She described the operational income compared to expenses along with the staff’s goal of managing expenses. She then asked if there were any specific items needed to be discussed concerning the financials and hearing none, she called for a vote to approve. Donna Hix made a motion to accept the financials as presented. Marianne Richter seconded the motion, a vote was taken, and the motion passed.

- **Chair’s Report Cameron Bean**

- **Tourism Investment District**

- Mr. Bean informed the Board that the Uptown Hotel Coalition met in October and participated in a presentation from Civitas, the company who helps destinations establish Tourism Investment Districts (TID). He also stated CVB staff had been asked to research and create scenarios for revenue projections, which is complete. The next step is to bring the Coalition back together to review the data collected. There are two options to review:
 - 1. A Feasibility Study
 - 2. Contracting to establish the TID.
- The review of these two options will be brought to the Board when appropriate.

- **Nominating Committee Report -- 2021 Officers**

- The next item on the Chair’s Report included an update from the nominating committee for the slate of officers for the 2021 calendar year. The nomination committee, consisting of Marianne Richter, Hayley Tillery, and Cameron Bean, offered up the following for officers:
 - Amish Das—Chair
 - Lauren Becker—Vice Chair
 - Jamie Waters—Secretary/Treasurer

At this time, the floor was opened for any other nominations. There being none, the nominations stand and will be voted on in the January 2021 meeting.

- **Banking/Credit Card Adjustments**

- Mr. Bean presented to the Board the need for VisitColumbusGA to acquire an additional credit card—to be used for online purchases like software licensing and ordering office/building supplies. The request is for a \$10,000 limit. Mr. Bean noted there are about \$7000 in renewals. The financial institution is asking that this request and approval be reflected in the minutes, should the Board decide to approve. There being no further discussion, a motion was made by Donna Hix to approve this new card and limit and the motion was seconded by Amish Das. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

- **December Board Meeting**

- Mr. Bean asked the Board if they would like to meet in December. Normally there is no meeting held due to the holidays, but with the ongoing pandemic and the financial effect on VisitColumbus, he felt the Board needed to consider this option. With the Board stating their confidence in the leadership and staff, a motion was made by Lauren Becker to forgo the December meeting and reconvene in January 2021. The motion was seconded by Donna Hix. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

- **Legislative Resolution Update**

- As the final item in the Chair’s Report, Chairman Bean gave an update on the VisitColumbus’ priorities for the upcoming legislative session. There are three top priorities:
 1. Protect Georgia’s Lodging Taxes from Redirection
 2. Increase Georgia’s Investment in Tourism Marketing
 3. Oppose Legislation that Allows Discrimination
- A motion to approve these legislative agenda items was made by Marianne Richter and was seconded by Jamie Waters. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

President’s Report.....Peter Bowden

- **Contract Renewal**

- Mr. Bowden began his report by informing the Board that in October, the VisitColumbus and the Columbus Consolidated Government had renewed its contract. This is 5-year agreement allowing the organization to represent Columbus as the official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO).
- Mr. Bowden then recapped the annual Collaborate Summit, held virtually this year on October 8. Featured speaker included Carrie Beth Wallace with The Columbusite. The event was well attended. Two mini-workshops are being planned for January and February 2021 as a follow up from the attendee survey.
- Mr. Bowden’s report concluded with highlights from his recent Quarterly Columbus City Council Briefing that included mitigation of the impact to the hospitality industry created by COVID-19, research and updates on the Tourism Recovery Program (TRP).

- **Sales**

- Ashley Waitena presented the Year End Report to the Board. She discussed meetings held/number of attendees and the economic impact, goals for leads sent, turned definite business, and turned tentative business. She also went into activities to include tasks, sales missions, site visits, and servicing. There was also a review of market segments and breakdown of attendance, room nights, and meeting origins. Ms. Waitena spoke about the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, sharing for total groups impacted this figure is \$14.1million, postponed business is \$8.6million; however, VisitColumbus has been able to recover 39% of group business, noting this percentage is in line with the national average.

Other Business..... Group

- Peter Bowden thanked Cameron Bean for his 6+ years of serving on the Board, as well as serving in officer roles. Mr. Bean added he was honored to serve and will always be an advocate for VisitColumbus and its mission.

- **Adjournment.....Cameron Bean**

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.