



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING  
Wednesday, February 16, 2022

**Commissioners Present;** Lauren Becker, Vice Chair; Jamie Waters, Secretary/Treasurer; Sherricka Day; Dan Gilbert; Miles Greathouse; Donna Hix;

**Commissioners Absent:** Mamie Pound, Mayor Skip Henderson

**Special Invitees:** Michael Denehy, National Infantry Museum; Merri Sherman, Columbus Sports Council; Ed Wolverton, Uptown Columbus

**Special Guest:** Shalise DeMott, Northstar Travel Group

**Staff Present:** Peter Bowden, Shelby Guest, Ashley Woitena

**Call to Order .....Lauren Becker**

- In the absence of Board Chair, Amish Das, Vice Chair Lauren Becker called the meeting to order at 3:30pm. The meeting was held at the VisitColumbusGA office.

**Approval of Minutes & Financials .....Jamie Waters**

- Mr. Waters reminded the Board approval of Minutes & Financials is by way of a consent agenda and asked if there were any questions or discussions on the minutes and financials and there being none, a motion was made by Miles Greathouse to approve the January Minutes & Financials and the motion was seconded by Donna Hix. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.
- As part of the Secretary/Treasurer Report, Peter Bowden was asked to present details of the FY 2023 budget. Mr. Bowden explained that staff used the FY 2019 budget as a framework, or as a benchmark, in planning for FY 2023. He said that the pandemic had created a major disruption in revenue against expenses, making for a reduced operating budget for the past two years. He discussed specific line items to include Traditional Marketing; Digital Marketing-encompassing meetings & convention markets, mobile devices, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, marketing the International Canoe Federation tournaments, refreshing the VisitColumbusGA website, etc; Mr. Bowden also reviewed the importance of travel writer tours (reminding the Board of the success VisitColumbus has had with this type of marketing with 141 published results, resulting in 11 million total impressions and more than \$101 billion total estimated value so far in FY '22), etc.

He also made note of a portion of the American Rescue Funds (ARF) being applied to the proposed budget, which would be used for social media manager fee; employee salaries; promotion and advertising; continuing the meetings and conventions campaign with Digital Edge; refreshing or rebuilding the VisitColumbusGA website; travel schools and conferences; visitors services (PopUp Visitors Center); and special & ongoing projects.

- Ms. Becker asked for questions concerning the budget and there being none, a vote was called to approve. A motion was made by Miles Greathouse to approve the budget as submitted and the motion was seconded by Jamie Waters. A vote was taken, and the budget was approved. The budget will be forwarded to the City Manager for inclusion in the City’s budget.

**Chair’s Report.....Lauren Becker**

- Ms. Becker gave a recap of the American Rescue Funds (ARF) received by VisitColumbusGA. A total of \$1.143 million was received from ARF through the Columbus Consolidated Government. Staff allocated restricted funds, in accordance with its contract with the City, to the Columbus Sports Council and the Columbus Cultural Arts Alliance, leaving a balance of \$749,140.56. As well as the money received from the Economic Development Fund (in FY ’21 to support VisitColumbus during the pandemic) in the amount of \$95,282.21. On behalf of the Board, Ms. Becker thanked the Consolidated Government for its support through this program.

**President’s Report.....Peter Bowden**

- This month’s report featured a presentation (via Zoom) with Shalise DeMott with NorthStar Meeting Group, who discussed the co-op grant awarded through ExploreGeorgia . The campaign’s success was measured with meeting planner engagement, increased search analytics, and Columbus hotels’ occupancy up 20% from 2020 to 2021. She also did an overview and discussed success metrics for the Vision Video, Supplied Targeted Emails, and Partner Spotlight.

**Other Business..... Group**

- Ashely Woitena and Shelby Guest gave a recap of the recent GACVB Annual Meeting, sharing survey results of the event, and the unique twist on participant welcome gifts—VisitColumbus worked with local partners to purchase and plant 150 trees (Trees Columbus), plant 150 Spider Lilies (Chattahoochee Riverkeeper), and adding a bee hive to Columbus Botanical Garden; the intention to reduce the carbon footprint of the conference and “pay forward” on behalf of the conference attendees.

**Adjournment.....Lauren Becker**

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:20 p.m.