



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 17, 2021

NOTE: DUE TO THE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS CAUSED BY COVID-19, THE FEBRUARY 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; Miles Greathouse; Donna Hix; Mamie Pound; and Marianne Richter.

Commissioners Absent: Dan Gilbert

Special Invitees: Timothy Bragg, Cunningham Center; Amy Bryan, Columbus Chamber of Commerce; Cyndy Cerbin, National Infantry Museum, Helena Coates, Uptown Columbus; Norm Easterbrook, RiverCenter for the Performing Arts; Tabetha Getz, Columbus 2025; Merri Sherman, Columbus Sports Council; Hayley Tillery, Columbus Convention & Trade Center; Holly Wait, National Civil War Naval Museum at Port Columbus; Carrie Beth Wallace, The Columbusite; and Ed Wolverton, Uptown Columbus.

Staff Present: Peter Bowden, Carter Flynn, Shelby Guest, Joel Slocumb, Andrea Smith, 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

- Jamie Waters asked the Board members present if there were any questions regarding the minutes from the February meeting. There being none, a motion was made by Lauren Becker to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion was seconded by Marianne Richter. A vote was taken and the minutes were approved.
- Mr. Waters then went over the financials for February 2021, reviewing the hotel/motel tax income, specific line items, and highlighted the net gain for the month, stating there were no real changes to the Balance Sheet. He reported hotel tax received was in the amount of \$114,000, with a net gain for the month of just over \$6,000. There were 11 hotels and 28 short-term rentals delinquent in paying hotel/motel tax. He then asked if there were any specific items needing to be discussed concerning the financials and hearing none, he called for a vote to approve. Miles Greathouse made a motion to accept the financials as presented. Sherricka Day seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the motion passed.

Special Presentation.....Tabetha Getz, Columbus 2025

- Peter Bowden introduced Tabetha Getz, Executive Director of Columbus 2025, for an update on the regional plans for prosperity for Columbus. She went over the timeline and history of the “We Do Amazing” brand project that began in 2017 and discussed analytics for Facebook and other mainstream social media platforms, as well as some of the top posts and recent campaigns. She explained the goal is to tell Columbus’ story to a larger audience and she reviewed some of the agencies who were in the running to lead this initiative. Goals include to elevate the Columbus brand, increase the number of travelers and tourists, attract new residents to the area, grow the number of tradeshow and conferences and lure new businesses. Phase One of this project will consist of conducting research, understanding the audience, conducting a competitive analysis, conducting a communications audit, and developing an integrated marketing & communications strategic plan. She discussed the timeline with plans to begin April/May and the execution phase beginning later in the year along with the partners that will be involved.

Chair’s Report Amish Das

- Chairman Das took this opportunity to thank the VisitColumbusGa staff and team for their work over the past year—from reducing budgets, finding relevant speakers for various meetings, being adaptive and flexible. He stressed the excellent job they’ve done during the pandemic to keep operations running smoothly.

President’s Report..... Peter Bowden

- Mr. Bowden began his report with a presentation on current VisitColumbusGa’s operations and shared a chart to demonstrate revenue vs. expenses over the past year. This included revenue, restricted funds, operating revenue, actual expenses, and average expenses. Because of monthly shortfalls reflected in the hotel/motel tax check, the VisitColumbusGa has been using its reserves, as well as funds from the loan agreement with the Development Authority. Staff continues to work on ways to find cost savings while maintaining its program of work. (See attached for more details)
- The next item dealt with the need to update the 403b retirement plan. In 2009, the way 403bs were structured changed and that has led to the need for VisitColumbus’ current plan materials to be updated. VisitColumbusGa has engaged a consultant to help become compliant and offered options to include Option 1 -- Most Conservative, and Option 2 -- Middle of the Road. The cost to implement either plan is between \$6,000-\$7,000. (See attached for more details) A discussion was held and the Board directed staff to go with Option 2.
- Mr. Bowden gave an update on the Tourism Recovery Plan (TRP) Phase 1. He covered the upcoming virtual writers’ tour, the Leisure market recovery process, focusing on research, awareness, messages focusing on Columbus as a sense of place, rewriting the strategic plan for social media and the latest performance indicators for social media, etc. He stressed that all of the messaging VisitColumbusGa produces includes all of our partners.
 - Some of the national research VisitColumbusGa follows is reporting an uptick in optimism for leisure travel with 2/3 of those surveyed saying they are in a travel-ready state of mind; half of the respondents can be motivated to plan trips with discounts offered; travelers still need to see safety messaging, etc. (See attached for more details)
- For the update on Phase 2 of the TRP, Mr. Bowden called on Ashley Weitena to report. She stated Columbus is seeing recovery a bit faster than anticipated for the Meetings & Conventions market segment with Request for Proposals (RFPs) beginning to come in for review and in-person

group business making a slight comeback. This market segment is critical to the VisitColumbusGa's program of work as these attendees stay longer and spend more money. Using research supplied by Northstar, Ms. Woitena gave an update of sentiments of meeting planners. She highlighted four groups holding events here in March, showing attendance, room nights, and economic impact; reviewed the outlook for the remainder of FY '21, and discussed the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the meetings & conventions market—stating 155 groups have postponed/cancelled, with an economic loss of \$22.2 million to the city.

- Ms. Woitena finished her report with an update on the partnership with Digital Edge and the campaign designed specifically to target the meetings and conventions market for the Uptown Meeting Campus.

Adjournment.....Lauren Becker

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:38 p.m.

A nighttime photograph of a city waterfront. In the foreground, a wide river flows from left to right. The right bank features a park with trees, a brick walkway, and several streetlights. In the background, a cluster of industrial-style buildings is lit up, including a prominent water tower and two tall chimneys. The sky is a deep, dark blue.

TOURISM RECOVERY PLAN

MITIGATE

RESTART

RECOVERY

LEISURE

WE ARE HERE





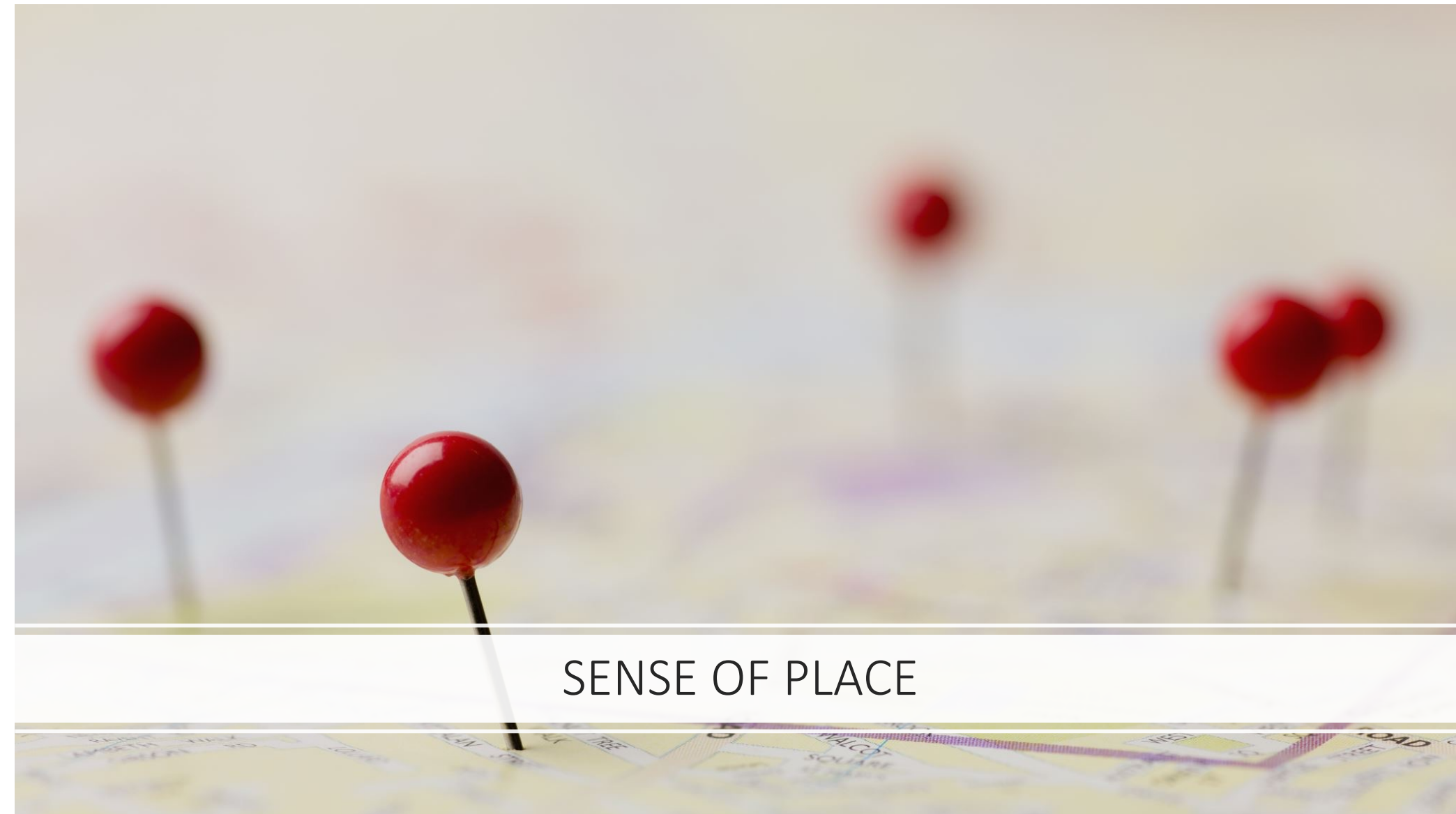
EVERYTHING CHANGED



RESEARCH



AWARENESS



SENSE OF PLACE



PERSONAS



STRATEGIC PLAN





FY 21 Travel Writer Results

86 Published Results
1.4 Billion Impressions
\$13 Million Earned Media





Atlanta Journal- Constitution

“Gotta Get Away 21
Things to See in Georgia
in 2021”

11.53 Million Impressions
\$105,321 Earned Media



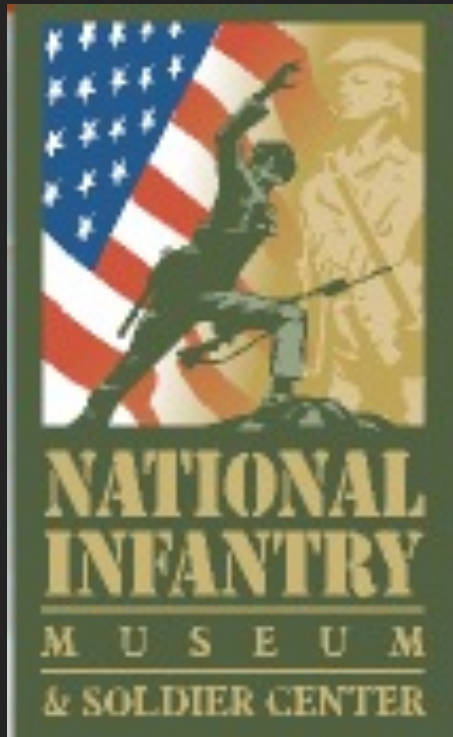


Explore Georgia

“10 Best Things to Do This Spring in Georgia”

647,000 Impressions

\$5,985 Earned Media



U.S. News & World Report

“Museums Form World War II Heritage Trail”

167 Million Impressions
\$1.55 Million Earned Media



The Best Things to Do in
Columbus, Ga
(including lots of freebies!)

365 Atlanta Traveler

“27+ Awesome Drivable Weekend Getaways”

435,400 Impression

\$4,027 Earned Media

Virtual Travel Media Tour



TRP - SOCIAL MEDIA

Combined Performance Overview ⓘ



41 New Posts ⓘ

↑ 64% from last week

Facebook Page (14) +1

Twitter (14) +8

Instagram (13) +7

57 New Followers ⓘ

↑ 0% from last week

Facebook Page (27.7K) +10

Twitter (5.95K) -1

Instagram (9.21K) +48

2.29K New Engagements ⓘ

↑ 233% from last week

Facebook Page (604) +394


Twitter (29) +21

Instagram (1.65K) +1.18K

TRP - SOCIAL MEDIA

Top Liked Posts



 [columbusgeorgia](#)

Sending you a little zen moment from...

 **347** Likes

Mar 9, 2021




 [columbusgeorgia](#)

The @mccullerscenter podcast is BACK!...

 **339** Likes

Mar 7, 2021



 [columbusgeorgia](#)

Good morning from @columbusgeorgia!...

 **313** Likes

Mar 10, 2021



RESEARCH

LEISURE



MITIGATE

RESTART

RECOVERY

MEETINGS CONVENTIONS

WE ARE HERE





RESEARCH

MEETINGS | CONVENTIONS



The background of the slide features a close-up, shallow depth-of-field photograph of a stethoscope resting on a document. The document has horizontal lines and some faint, illegible text. A silver pen is positioned on the right side of the document, pointing towards the center. The overall lighting is soft and focused on the central elements.

81% = in-person meeting THIS YEAR

RESEARCH - PLANNERS

The background of the slide is a photograph of a notebook. A silver pen is lying on the right side of the page. A black stethoscope is draped across the left side of the page. The notebook pages are lined and have some faint numbers and text visible. In the top left corner, there is a small orange rectangular bar.

76% = rescheduling/rebooking

RESEARCH - PLANNERS

The background of the slide is a photograph of a stethoscope resting on a lined notebook. A silver pen is positioned on the right side of the notebook. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

65% = booking NEW events

RESEARCH - PLANNERS

A stethoscope and a pen are resting on a document with a grid. The stethoscope is on the left, and the pen is on the right. The document has a grid with numbers 17, 18, 19 and 30. An orange bar is in the top left corner.

76% = encouraged by the vaccine rollout

RESEARCH - PLANNERS



SALES FUNNEL

FOUR GROUPS

- ATTENDANCE = 590
- ROOM NIGHTS = 665
- ECONOMIC IMPACT = \$200,930

OUTLOOK FY 2021

3-YEAR UPCOMING/POTENTIAL BUSINESS	FY '21	FY '22	FY '23	FY '24
Total Business as of Mar 2021	88	59	20	8
Total Economic Impact as of Mar '21	\$12,871,707	\$13,461,260	\$6,141,177	\$3,423,606
Definite Business	86	42	8	2
Definite Economic Impact	\$12,649,597	\$8,872,983	\$1,526,190	\$982,584
Tentative Business	2	17	12	6
Tentative Economic Impact	\$222,110	\$4,588,277	\$4,614,987	\$2,441,022

COVID-19 IMPACT

GROUP BUSINESS

- 155 Groups - POSTPONED/CANCELED/LOST
- 126,811 Attendees
- 61,381 Room Nights

\$22.2 MILLION IMPACT



MEETINGS &
CONVENTIONS

DIGITAL EDGE



A nighttime photograph of a city waterfront. In the foreground, a wide river flows from left to right. The middle ground features a curved promenade with a brick wall, trees, and streetlights. In the background, several buildings are visible, including a prominent one with a water tower and two tall chimneys. The sky is a deep blue with some light clouds. The text "TOURISM RECOVERY PLAN QUESTIONS" is overlaid in the center in white, sans-serif font.

TOURISM RECOVERY PLAN QUESTIONS