



VisitColumbusGA

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Commissioners Present: Lauren Becker, Chair; Miles Greathouse, Secretary/Treasurer; Amy Bryan, Sherricka Day (virtual), Pace Halter, Peter Jones, Michelle Spivey

Commissioners Absent: Jamie Waters; Dan Gilbert; Mayor Skip Henderson

Special Invitees Present: Norm Easterbrook, RiverCenter for the Performing Arts; Haley Tillery, Columbus GA Convention & Trade Center; Merri Sherman, Columbus Sports Council; Ed Wolverton, Uptown Columbus, Inc.

Staff Present: Peter Bowden, Shelby Guest, Kim Gonzalez, and Ashley Woitena

Call to Order Lauren Becker

- The February 2024 meeting was called to order by Lauren Becker at 4:00pm.

Secretary Treasurer Report Miles Greathouse

- Miles Greathouse presented the consent agenda -- minutes for the January 2024 meeting, as well as financials for January 2024. He asked if there were any questions or discussion. There being none, a motion was made by Michelle Spivey to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Pace Halter. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.
- Mr. Greathouse turned the meeting over to Peter Bowden to discuss the FY 2025 budget. Mr. Bowden began by saying staff was projecting a 10% increase in hotel/motel tax. The budget includes \$350,000 miscellaneous income to offset the absence of American Rescue Funds. He pointed out there were several line items that reflected a reduction and that his report to the board would focus on those expenses that increased; this was based on year-to-date expenses; in essence an adjustment using the current budget comparison. There were general questions about vehicle maintenance, building lease, copier charges, etc. A motion was made by Pace Halter to approve the FY 2025 budget, seconded by Miles Greathouse. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Chair Report Lauren Becker

- Ms. Becker introduced Norm Easterbrook, Executive Director of the RiverCenter for the Performing Arts. Mr. Easterbrook gave a recap on Arts Day at the Capital. Mr. Easterbrook shared that the day long event included a keynote Speaker, Randy Cohen from Americans for the Arts, who spoke about his national research on the social impact arts and culture benefits communities, such as neighborhood pride and cultural identity, as well as how arts and culture contribute to strengthening communities socially, educationally, and economically providing long-lasting benefits year-after-year. Mr. Easterbrook concluded his remarks by saying Georgia Arts Day ended with leaders in Georgia arts engaging in dialogue about how relationship-building with public policymakers to help create long-term partnerships leads to

greater prosperity and success of arts impact throughout the State. He participated in a panel moderated by Mala Sharma of Georgia Music Partners along with others from Greater Augusta Arts Council, Georgia Association of Museums, the Fox Theatre, and Georgia Senator Sonya Halpern.

President's Report Peter Bowden

- Next, Ms. Becker turned the meeting over to Peter Bowden. He began by giving an update on the State of the City meeting. Mr. Bowden discussed several of the mayor's points which included the importance of kindness to one another, emphasizing how this would make Columbus a better place. The mayor also spoke about economic development and the success of tourism.
- Mr. Bowden advised the Board the return of the Tuskegee Morehouse Football Classic and VisitColumbus' participation the news conference that took place earlier in the month. He said he felt that the Football Classic had returned to Columbus because of the partnerships that most communities do not share and that it was those relationships -- such as with VisitColumbus, the Columbus Sports Council and the Consolidated Government -- that made it possible to lure the Classic out of Birmingham and return to Columbus.
- There was discussion about the AAA Black History Trail news conference which staff participated in as part of Black History Month. Columbus is part of a bi-state trail connecting significant African American points of interest, of which Columbus boasts over 32 historic sites.
- Travel Writer Tour – working with the Columbus Museum and Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB), Mr. Bowden explained that this collaboration was developed to publicize the Museum's re-opening and that three journalists are scheduled to take part of a two-and-a-half day visit late April leading up to the Museum's opening. Included in this publicity is a radio, television, and social media campaign with GPB. The writer tour will focus on other museums throughout Columbus.
- There was a brief discussion about House Bill 1180 which provides additional support for rural destinations outside the Atlanta metro area to boost film production. Mr. Bowden pointed out that Joel Slocumb, VisitColumbus' Film Commissioner, has worked on this effort along with thirteen other Georgia film destinations. Staff will continue to watch this piece of legislation.
- Mr. Bowden briefed the Board on the \$5 Hotel Transportation fee slated to sunset in 2025. He said that discussions are taking place on next steps; whether it will go away, be repurposed, etc. He also explained this is a part of the discussion centered around the Tourism Investment District program of work.
- Digital Edge Campaign update. Ashley Woitena reviewed the latest report from Digital Edge, an agency consultant specializing in meeting and convention marketing. She went through a series data points from digital media retargeting to social distribution, from email campaigns to website traffic and how this works together to help staff identify prospects and position Columbus as a meeting and convention destination. (see attached presentation).
- The president's report concluded with an overview of social media analytics and how the data reflects performance above national standards in the hospitality category.

Adjournment Lauren Becker

With no further business, Ms. Becker adjourned the meeting at 5:01pm.