



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
Wednesday, April 20 , 2022

Commissioners Present; Lauren Becker, Chair; Jamie Waters, Vice Chair; Sherricka Day, Mayor Skip Henderson

Commissioners Absent: Donna Hix, Dan Gilbert, Miles Greathouse, Pete Jones, Mamie Pound

Special Invitees: Norm Easterbrook, RiverCenter; Pace Halter, WC Bradley Real Estate; Merri Sherman, Columbus Sports Council

Special Guest: Cedricia Thomas, Cunningham Center

Staff Present: Peter Bowden, Shelby Guest

Call to Order **Lauren Becker**

- The April meeting was called to order by Lauren Becker at 3:30pm.

Special Presentation.....**Lauren Becker**

- Ms. Becker introduced Cedricia Thomas, Assistant Director of the Cunningham Center, who made a special presentation to the staff of VisitColumbusGA on their recent Benchmark of Excellence Gold ranking reaccreditation; the highest level achievable within the Georgia Association of Conventions & Visitors Bureaus accreditation program. Mr. Bowden accepted the certificate and thanked the staff for their continued hard work and maintaining a standard of excellence within the travel and tourism industry.

Approval of Minutes & Financials **Lauren Becker**

- In the absence of Miles Greathouse, Ms. Becker 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. There being none, a motion was made by Jamie Waters to approve the March Minutes & Financials and the motion was seconded by Sherricka Day. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Chair's Report..... **Lauren Becker**

- The first item presented by Ms. Becker included a discussion of the request from Columbus Consolidated Government (CCG) to VisitColumbusGA to provide \$75,000 to the upcoming International Canoe Federation (ICF) events that will take place in Columbus (October '22 & July '23). City staff suggested using the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Funds. Ms. Becker asked Peter Bowden to lead the discussion and explain the current use of the ARP funds. Mr. Bowden shared VisitColumbus received \$1,143,139.74 and after distributing \$398,139.74 of these funds to the Columbus Sports Council and Columbus Cultural Arts,

this left a balance of \$745,000. He then displayed a chart showing how these funds have been allocated – advertising, travel writer tour, website development, meetings and conventions programming, etc. – totaling over \$1 million. Mr. Bowden also stated VisitColumbus had included \$100,000 to market the ICF. He also offered that he had spoken with leadership at Uptown Columbus and ICF and all felt marketing was critical to the success of ICF; that redirecting those funds would be a net loss for ICF's success. Mr. Bowden recommended to the Board to maintain its commitment for marketing and decline the request from the CCG. Mayor Henderson stated he was unaware of this request and told the Board he would talk to city staff to explore other ways for the CCG to support the event.

- Ms. Becker then asked Mr. Bowden to present findings on options for the relocation of the administrative office. He began by reminding the Board of the initial discussion on this topic at a previous meeting, the included permanently closing the Visitors Center, establishing a PopUp Visitors Center in its place, and downsizing and moving the administrative office to a location that provided more efficiencies. Mr. Bowden reviewed several charts and scenarios that included nine potential properties for comparison. Five of the nine properties were eliminated citing reasons including on-going construction, size, availability, etc. The remaining locations for consideration included the YMCA Building, Dillingham Place (current office location), Carmike, and the former SaltLife location. After more research, meetings with owners/property managers, the field was narrowed to two, the YMCA and Dillingham Place. The same criteria was used throughout the evaluation process, to include how each would best meet the needs of the staff and impact on the operational budget. Staff recommended relocating to the YMCA Building, with a timeline to be established upon final approval. With the absence of a quorum, Mayor Henderson suggested that the members present provide its consent in order to allow staff to move forward with a final ratification at its next meeting.

President's Report.....Peter Bowden

- Mr. Bowden asked Carrie Beth Wallace, VisitColumbusGA's social media manager, to present a year-to-date summary for social media. She highlighted Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, specifically looking at performance of the each platform (see attached report).

Adjournment.....Lauren Becker

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:35 p.m.