



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
Wednesday, January 18, 2023

Commissioners Present; Lauren Becker, Chair; Jamie Waters, Vice Chair; Miles Greathouse, Secretary/Treasurer, Amy Bryan, Sherricka Day, Dan Gilbert, Pace Halter, Mayor Skip Henderson

Commissioners Absent: Pete Jones, Mamie Pound

Special Invitees: Norm Easterbrook, RiverCenter for the Performing Arts; Merri Sherman, Columbus Sports Council; Ed Wolverton, Uptown Columbus, Inc.

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

Call to Order Peter Bowden

- The January 2023 meeting was called to order by Peter Bowden at 3:30pm for the annual election of officers. Mr. Bowden presented the slate of officers with Lauren Becker as Chair, Jamie Waters as Vice Chair, and Miles Greathouse as Secretary/Treasurer. He then called for any nominations from the floor and there being none, a motion was made by Pace Halter and seconded by Dan Gilbert to accept the slate of Officers as presented with no opposition. Mr. Bowden then adjourned the meeting and turned it over to Lauren Becker.

Call to Order Lauren Becker

- The meeting was reconvened by Lauren Becker at 3:35pm.

Approval of Minutes & Financials Miles Greathouse

- Miles Greathouse presented the consent agenda -- minutes for the November 2022 meeting, as well as financials for November and December 2022. NOTE: there was no meeting in December due to the Holidays. He asked if there were any questions or discussion. There being none, a motion was made by Jamie Waters to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Pace Halter. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Chair's Report..... Lauren Becker

Ms. Becker recognized former Board Member Donna Hix for her service. Ms. Hix was unable to attend the meeting, so the gift commemorating her time on the Board will be delivered on behalf of the Board and staff. Ms. Becker also recognized new Board Member, Amy Bryan, Executive Director of Direct Services.

- Ms. Becker asked the Board to review and sign the Conflict-of-Interest and the Board Agreement documents before leaving the meeting.
- Ms. Becker then turned the meeting over to Peter Bowden to review and discuss the proposal of a Social Media Policy . He explained that an on-line “news” organization, called the Muscogee Muckraker, has been targeting various companies and organizations social media platforms. In particular to VistColumbusGA, these posts are half-truths, off message, and often times repetitive in nature which in turn interferes with how VisitColumbus’ social media strategy is conducted. It was stated that research confirms that organic posts are important in social media strategy and often times the basis of the paid social media content. Consequently, VisitColumbusGA has stopped posting organic posts, because of this interference. Mr. Bowden went on to explain that various tactics have been deployed to resolve the situation to include invitations to meet without any success. Staff even went as far as to establish a telephone hot line. Staff engaged an attorney to assist with developing a social media policy to help mitigate the problem. Mr. Bowden then presented the policy in full and explained how it would work; saying it would allow social media posting to be conducted as previously done – organic and paid. Mr. Bowden also discussed other legal cases cited by the attorney. It was noted VisitColumbusGA’s social media manager will have to monitor pages closely, but is prepared for this. A motion was made by Amy Bryan to approve the policy and the motion was seconded by Jamie Waters. A vote was taken, and the motion was unanimously approved with no opposition.
- Mr. Bowden then presented a new Funding Request Policy to the Board. He explained it has become evident there is a need for a policy to help govern funding requests as VisitColumbusGA is receiving more of these with the recovery from the pandemic. The policy documents the criteria regarding grants and allows staff to manage those requests. It would be used by staff to determine if qualifications for a grant are met and the grant amount to be awarded. There was some discussion and questions from the Board on some of the wording of the document. Mr. Bowden told the Board that staff would be revisit the wording to make it clearer. The Funding Request Policy was tabled and will be brought back to the Board in a future meeting.
- Mr. Bowden then turned the meeting back over to Ms. Becker. Ms. Becker reminded the Board of the February 15th meeting and that the FY 2024 budget will be presented. She reminded everyone that a quorum would be necessary to approve the budget.
- Ms. Becker then introduced Shannon Gray, with Gray Research Solutions, for a review of the Destination Tourism Research Project that is being implemented. Ms. Gray gave a presentation showing how the project is being carried out and how the information obtained from the project

will be used to attract more visitors to Columbus, GA (see attached). Ms. Becker asked if there were any questions for Ms. Gray and then turned the meeting over to Peter Bowden for the President's Report.

President's Report.....Peter Bowden

- Mr. Bowden introduced Ashley Woitena, who reported FY 2023 Q1 & Q2 and forecast for the remainder of the fiscal year (see attached).

Other Business.....Group

- Ms. Becker asked how the announcement to cancel American Airlines flights to/from Columbus, GA airport has impacted visitors & conventions. Mr. Bowden stated that aspects of VisitColumbusGA's marketing strategy have had to be re-worked as a result of this.
- Dan Gilbert asked about the Columbus Film Fund and how it might be used. Mr. Bowden explained that the Film Fund was not a part of VisitColumbus and that it had its own Board that oversees funding requests. Pace Halter, chair of the Film Fund Board, offered that the Film Board was considering other options, and nothing had been determined.

Adjournment.....Lauren Becker

With no further business, Ms. Becker adjourned the meeting at 4:49 p.m.