

HAMILTON COUNTY VISITOR AND CONVENTION COMMISSION
37 E. Main Street, Carmel, Indiana
Minutes of the Meeting
November 1, 2018

Attending:

Robyn Pauker, Casey Wilson, Bill Smythe, Chris Renner, Perry Williams, Andrea Huisden, Brenda Tolson, Howard Stevenson and Lisa Hanni. Not attending: Paul O'Connor, Donna Prather.

Also Attending:

Brenda Myers, President/CEO; Karen Radcliff, Vice President/CSO; Christine Altman, Legal Counsel; Rick McKinney, Hamilton County Council.

I. Welcome

Perry Williams called the meeting to order at 5:47 p.m.

He introduced Carol Sergi, Director of Marketing, Economic Development, recently hired as part of a renewed partnership Hamilton County Tourism has entered into with Hamilton County Economic Development Corporation. Sergi will work with HCT's Marketing Manager Jordan Musall to understand workforce attraction and how it meshes with the same targets and metrics as visitor attraction. She most recently served as Director of Marketing for the Indiana Office of Tourism Development.

II. Review of the Minutes of the August 2018 Meeting

Williams asked for a review of the August 2018 minutes. Howard Stevenson moved that the minutes be approved as presented. Andrea Huisden seconded. Motion passed.

III. New Business

A. 2019 Budget & 2019 Funding Agreement

Brenda Myers opened discussion of the 2019 budget by reminding Tourism Commissioners that in September, the Hamilton County Council reduced the total amount of 2019 appropriations requested by the Hamilton County Visitors and Convention Commission from \$5.6 million (gross before debt service) to \$4 million (gross before debt service). This amounts to \$3,738,592 net for operating, or a revenue reduction of \$1,125,661.

This would reduce significantly the 2019 contract with Hamilton County Tourism, Inc. and its ability to plan for the coming year. She provided a revised, reduced budget based on direction provided by Hamilton County Tourism, Inc. at its October meeting. The HCT Board did not think it prudent to pass a budget unless appropriations were secure and asked that the staff outline how it would manage with the reduced appropriations.

Hamilton County Council member Rick McKinney then addressed the appropriations reduction and subsequent concerns of HCT and the Commission and offered the following thoughts regarding the appropriations reduction:

- The HC Council overall supports tourism's efforts;
- But, the HC Council thinks HCT is focusing on too many activities, some of which are seen as outside the organization's mission.
- The HC Council would like to see more communications from HCT and the Tourism Commission moving forward.
- The HC Council would like more involvement in destination development grants made by HCT and the Tourism Commission.

R. McKinney invited the Tourism Commission and HCT to the December Hamilton County Council meeting to begin dialog on restoration of appropriations and improving communications moving forward. This would include allowing two HC Council members to serve on a destination investment review committee. B. Myers noted that HCT would review its procedures for funding destination development and suggest ways to engage the HC Council members.

The Tourism Commissioners suggested after this conversation that the HCT Board could feel confident moving forward with 2019 restored appropriations, along with a concerted effort to restore confidence by the HC Council.

Attorney Christine Altman noted that the contract allows for an automatic renewal of its 2018 funding level plus 10%, providing funds are available. Discussion took place as to what that total would be. The "plus 10% total" is slightly higher than the actual request to County Council (\$5,350,754 net vs. \$5,300,000 net), and it was suggested that HCT proceed with that budget in mind but be cautious about spending pending restoration of appropriations by the HC Council in 2019. A revised fully funded \$5.3 million budget will be brought back in February for review.

Perry Williams said he would accompany B. Myers to the December meeting.

B. Myers said she would report to the HCT Board leadership team the results of the meeting and proceed with a revised budget. At this time, the auto renewal of the contract still stands and can be amended at the February meeting.

B. 2019 Meetings Schedule – B. Myers passed out the meetings schedule for 2019 for review.

IV. Old Business

A. Tourism Ordinance Review

B. Myers provided an edited and updated version of the Hamilton County ordinance that enables establishment of the Tourism Commission. This draft needs to be sent to the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners for review at its November 27 meeting. At the previous meeting, it was decided to move the Commission to 15 individuals, allowing for 5 appointments by the Board of Commissioners and 2 by the Hamilton County Council and 4 by the mayor of the largest city (Carmel as of now). All of these requirements (percentages) are established by the Indiana Uniform Innkeepers Tax, under which the Hamilton County Visitors and Convention Commission is established. In addition to these 11 appointments, it is recommended another 4 appointments be made: 2 by the second largest city's mayor, and 1 each by the third and fourth largest cities' mayors. The revised ordinance also meets state statute changes that remove any political or residency affiliations, and more closely align with the state's statute defining tourism industry and lodging industry representatives. After some discussion, it was determined the request was ready, with minor edits, to be sent to the county commissioners for review.

B. New Office Space

Karen Radcliff updated everyone on the current status of the letter of intent (LOI) with the developer of the proposed new office space articulated in August. The HCT Board may decide, given the current conversations with the county, that this project should be put on hold. The LOI can remain in place but the developer should be notified that HCT understands if it needs to move on. Howard Stevenson asked if the LOI was binding, and K. Radcliff said no. Councilman Rick McKinney noted this is an additional area of concern by the Hamilton County Council, in that the office location is in a high-valued area of town. Although B. Myers did point out that the price offered was fair and competitive, and K. Radcliff noted that in a study of downtown districts and office parks, the space was also comparable. McKinney asked that a Hamilton County Council member be allowed to serve on the review team for input, and the HCT and Tourism Commission said that would be welcomed.

C. Nickel Plate Express Grant Discussion

As the 2018 and 2019 grants to Nickel Plate Heritage Railroad for two-year start-up support for the operations of the Nickel Plate Express are at the HCT, Inc. level, B. Myers noted she did want to update the Tourism Commission on that grant. HCT had provided start-up financial support for the railroad restoration loan as well as operating and marketing support. In addition, HCT was to provide interest support on the equipment loan from Atlanta Pacific Railroad. However, it looks as though APR is going to extend that note to year-end 2019 in a revision, and allow interest to accrue allowing cash to be invested into expanding the equipment's capacity for dining cars. A fourth car would be converted into a dining car, which would double capacity for these high-value experiences. B. Myers said the HCT board had approved this change in direction, and she wanted to notify the Tourism Commission of this change.

D. Q1-Q3 Dashboard Reports

B. Myers reminded the Tourism Commission that it provides reports to the HCT Board that indicate progress toward marketing and sales goals for the year. She provided an updated version of that report through September 2018.

V. Consent Agenda Financial Reports

B. Myers provided a packet to the Tourism Commission outlining year-to-date spending, a balance sheet and profit/loss statement for the Tourism Commission and the HCT budget report through October along with lodging/occupancy and tax collection reports. There being no questions, Brenda Tolson moved that the financial reports be accepted as presented. Chris Renner seconded. Motion passed.

VI. There being no further business, Andrea Huisden moved that the meeting be adjourned at 7:40 p.m. Chris Renner seconded. Motion passed.