

HAMILTON COUNTY TOURISM, INC. BOARD OF DIRECTORS
37 E. Main Street, Carmel, Indiana
March 4, 2022
Minutes of the Regular Meeting
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Attending the meeting:

Bob DuBois, Andrew Newport, Jimia Smith, Jeffrey Brown, Norman Burns, Kelly Sujka, Mark Truett.

Also attending:

Brenda Myers, President/CEO; Karen Radcliff, Vice President/CSO; Betsy Ekelof, Director of Operations; Sarah Billman, Visitor Experience Director; Ashley Ledford, Director of Marketing and Promotions; Mike Thibieau, Vice President, Workforce Strategy; Sarah Buckner, Assistant Director Community Engagement; and, Christine Altman, legal counsel. Also joining was Ken Alexander, Hamilton County Council representative.

Not attending:

Chris Stice, Kayla Arnold, Charles Trice, Karen Radcliff.

I. Welcome

B. DuBois welcomed everyone to the regular Board meeting at 8:35 a.m.

II. Minutes of the February Annual & Regular Meetings

B. DuBois asked if there were any changes to the February 2022 Annual Meeting minutes. There being no changes, A. Newport moved that the Annual Meeting minutes be approved as presented. N. Burns seconded. Motion passed. He then asked if there were any changes to the February 2022 Regular Meeting minutes. No changes were proposed. K. Sujka moved that the minutes be approved as presented. J. Brown seconded. Motion passed.

III. Financials & Metrics

- A. 2022 Occupancy Report -- Preliminary hotel occupancy for February 2022 is 48.5% (through February 26). This is significantly higher than the 2021 occupancy rate of 36.3% but still low, even by winter standards. January's hotel occupancy was 46.2%, driven in part by compression from the College Football Championships mid-month.
- B. 2022 Tax Remittance Report -- Through the March deposit for taxes remitted January-March (November-January activity), taxes total \$1,258,496.44, or 48% higher than budget. The March deposit got a boost from the College Football Championships mid-month, but November and December also showed stronger hotel demand than had been anticipated.
- C. 2021 HCT Budget Report -- The 2022 budget is not yet loaded into the system and spending is low, so there is no 2022 report. However, year-end balance sheet for 2021 indicated a strong cash position with \$1,959,175 in the bank. While not completely closed out, it looks like expenses in 2021 were under budget and have contributed to that favorable balance.
- D. Bond Payoff Updates -- B. Myers noted that final details on the pay-off of the 2011 Tourism Bond have been set. K. Alexander mentioned that at the March Hamilton County Council meeting, the fiscal body authorized an additional \$1 million in appropriations to come from 2021 and 2022 lodging tax remittances, which will allow the payoff of the approximately \$1.9 million bond. An additional appropriations request may be required to meet this goal, but positive tax remittances for the first quarter give confidence this can happen. B. Myers mentioned that the staff would return in May with an amended budget to account for the bond pay-off.

IV. Old Business

- A. 2022 Funding Agreement -- At the February meeting, the Board asked the officers to work with legal counsel to complete a revised funding agreement to accommodate the pay-off of the 2011 Tourism Bond at the Tourism Commission level. This would mean not drawing down funds for January-February-March and amending the funding agreement to accommodate for that. The funding agreement was re-written, and C. Altman noted the proposed changes -- primarily allowing the Tourism Commission to withhold funds for the bond retirement purpose. She recommended that the board codify the agreement. N. Burns moved that the amended funding agreement be approved as presented. N. Burns seconded. Motion passed.

- B. BEST Study Updates -- K. Radcliff is on vacation, so B. Myers presented an update from her on the proposed study and EDA grant application. She noted that HCT is still awaiting notification from the EDA about the grant award. J. Brown noted that he still has concerns about the size and scope of the study and funds required to conduct the study and would like to consider postponement of the program until things are more stable. The Board indicated it wanted to wait and see if the EDA grant would come through before making any such decision.
- C. Legislative Updates -- B. Myers noted the only surviving piece of legislation of interest to HCT is Senate Bill 245 which would establish a sports and events incentive pool at the state level, with a percent allocated outside Marion County. While no funding is tied to this legislation, there is hope that it will pass and in 2023 some funds can be allocated to support this pool.
- D. Hospitality Workforce Updates -- B. Myers noted that HCT is still seeking more hoteliers to support this initiative with two hotel owners confirmed, one representing multiple properties. HCEDC is working with the Hamilton County Jail's TOWER program on final details and talking with a curriculum development expert on content. Janus also is sending HCEDC a proposal on a housekeeping training program.

V. New Business

- A. Retirement Plan Trust Resolution -- T. Rodgers presented a retirement plan trust resolution that is needed to be adopted by the Board per requirements. K. Sujka moved that the resolution be adopted as presented. M. Truett seconded. Motion passed.
- B. Staff Updates - T. Rodgers introduced Eric Powell, HCT's new Senior Communications Manager. Eric comes to HCT with experience at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and Indiana Railroad. She also noted that finalists are being interviewed for the Vice President Finance position that was added to the budget in 2022.
- C. Sales & Sports Updates -- L. Kelner provided a look at the numerous meetings and sports events booked so far in 2022 -- with the pace of bookings up significantly. She noted there is a lot of interest in the suburban hotel properties and that the sales team did not reduce its face-to-face selling and direct mail promotions and it has paid off.
- D. 2022 Leisure Campaign Sneak Preview -- A. Ledford provided a look at the spring/summer leisure print ad campaign which focuses on "Why Wait," as in why wait for the weekend, why wait for travel. She also showed the television spot that will air. Much effort went into diversifying imagery for 2022 and thought has gone into driving a new "tone" for this post-pandemic year of travel. With ARPA funds, HCT will be back into the Chicago market in a big way. A. Newport noted that if his sales are any indication, 2022 might exceed 2019's sales significantly.

- VI. Adjournment -- There being no further business, J. Brown moved that the meeting be adjourned at 10 a.m. and I. Sujka seconded. Motion passed.