

**ST. TAMMANY PARISH TOURIST & CONVENTION COMMISSION
REGULAR BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING MINUTES
JUNE 25, 2024**

The **Regular Board Meeting** was held on Tuesday, June 25, 2024, at the Courtyard by Marriott, 101 Northpark Blvd., Covington, Louisiana.

Chair Marlaine Peachey called the Regular meeting to order at 2:00 PM. She gave the **Invocation** and led the **Pledge of Allegiance**.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Barry Bagert
Katherine Dominique
Patti Elish
Marlaine Peachey
Melissa Ruddick

COMMISSIONERS

EXCUSED
Mark Myers

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT

Alex Carollo

A quorum was present.

OTHERS PRESENT

Donna O'Daniels, President/CEO
Devan Richoux, Chief Financial Officer
Katie Guasco, Chief Marketing Officer
Rae Shipley, Executive Assistant
Tanya Leader, VP of Sales & Services

Lacey Osborne, Commissioner Alternate
Jim Tonglet, Ericksen Krentel
Thomas Huval, Commission Counsel
Maddie Scott, St. Tammany Farmer

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Marlaine Peachey asked if anyone had anything to change or add to the agenda.

Barry Bagert made **a motion** to approve the agenda as is and Patti Elish seconded. ***The motion carried.***



OLD BUSINESS

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A **motion** to approve the April 30, 2024, Regular Board Meeting minutes was made by Barry Bagert. Melissa Ruddick seconded, and ***the motion carried.***

FINANCIAL REPORT

Devan Richoux presented the Financial Report for April & May 2024. Patti Elish had questions on what is included in the total capital outlay budget. Devan Richoux elaborated that it currently includes the sign and will also include all the building renovation pay applications – none have been submitted yet. Marlaine Peachey asked for clarification on why administration costs are currently \$30,000 over budget. Devan Richoux explained that because the expenses are not perfectly linear, it sometimes makes them over budget in the beginning of the year. She told Marlaine that this would even out as the year continued. Patti Elish made a **motion** to approve the Financial Report. Barry Bagert seconded, and ***the motion carried.***

STAFF REPORT

Donna O’Daniels gave a few highlights:

Since the last meeting, the legislative session wrapped up. No big tourism things to report, although she was in Baton Rouge quite a bit regarding the Chamber, St. Tammany Corp., and other St. Tammany groups as well as the Louisiana Travel Association. This session went very smoothly and there was great face time with both local legislators as well as some of the other legislators around the state.

Donna gave kudos to Devan for an outstanding job managing the project for the building reconstruction. The project has been ongoing for 6-8 weeks. The exterior is mostly painted, and interior framing is completed. Donna feels confident that the project will meet its current October deadline. She also thanked the entire staff for rallying together the last couple of months while they’ve all been displaced.

Donna informed the board that the yearly numbers for 2023 from the state are here. Visitor spending is up, and St. Tammany Parish is at nearly \$1.3 billion in visitors spending, which is a 1% increase over 2022. St. Tammany Parish now ranks third out of 64 parishes, passing up Baton Rouge. This means 13,907 jobs and \$426,000,000 in employment earnings were generated by visitor spending. Visitors contributed \$127 million in state and local tax revenues for St. Tammany Parish. If it were not for the state and local taxes paid by tourists visiting St. Tammany Parish, each household would pay \$1,345 more in taxes each year. Last year that number was \$1,128.

Katie Guasco presented the Marketing and Communications department report:

She played a new marketing video for the commissioners. The new website and blog are ahead of schedule and should be launched in August. The podcast is doing very well and episode five just launched last month. It is on spring festivals and music. Episode 6 also just launched and it’s all about history in the parish. Social media is doing well despite changing all the social handles with the rebranding.

STAFF REPORT (CONTINUED)

Visit The Northshore won a new award this year – the Communicator Award for the redesigned visitor guide.

Earned media has less articles than last time, but higher unique visits per month. Press releases and some specialized pitches were pushed out regarding National Travel and Tourism Week. Erica Glory, Communications Manager, attended the Travel South USA global media marketplace. Visit Baton Rouge partnered with Visit The Northshore to split the costs. Erica had 24 appointments with journalists from six countries.

Samantha Brown's TV show Places to Love will feature The Northshore in an upcoming episode. Samantha Brown got to see many great places, including Southern Hotel, Brooks Bike Shop, Marianne Rodriguez's Art Gallery, Abita Brewery, and the Tammany Trace. That episode should be on TV in the first quarter of 2025.

Katie's team hosted Jay Ducote, a culinary food traveler and John Sizemore, a freelancer on assignment on music. Erica is hosting an influencer FAM this week. She's invited five people from in and around the area to start posting about The North Shore. They'll have a name and be an official club.

Blogs are doing good. E-newsletters continue to have very high open rates. E-newsletters are now being sent for the Sales Team as well.

Continuing education this period included: Erica attended a class with the Louisiana Tourism Leadership Academy in Baton Rouge. Sarah attended Simple View Summit and Zardicon. Katie attended the LTA Leadership Forum.

Community Relations Committee Update: Murals are moving along. Four murals are currently being worked – sites include The Art House in Covington, the Abita Full Serve Garage in Abita Springs, and The Ugly Dog Coastal Kitchen in Madisonville. Mandeville has yet to choose their site. Patti Elish asked Katie who is paying for the murals and who is choosing the sites/artists. Katie said Visit The Northshore is paying \$7,500 for each mural directly to the artist. CEAs are being written to make sure the art is kept up in perpetuity. Melissa Ruddick asked if the artworks would include a QR code, and Katie assured her that they would. Marlaine asked how long the murals take to complete and Katie responded that it's a tricky answer, but the Slidell mural took six months. Patti asked if the committee is doing RFPs for the artists. Katie responded that each municipality is choosing the site and artist themselves unless they ask for assistance. Madisonville is the first needing assistance and a Call For Artists is being sent out.

Cobranded retail items: Abita Coffee is out there. Up next is ornaments which will be done by Swamp Girl Glass. These should be out in early Fall. Abita Beer is having to wait because they just launched their own new website and a few new beers.

STAFF REPORT (CONTINUED)

St. Tammany Taste of Summer is coming up. It will include prix fix menus again as it went very well last year.

Tanya Leader presented the Sales & Services department report:

Leads included: In April and May, SMURF market had five leads, corporate and associations had two leads. These are all estimates because this is foreshadowing.

Meetings and conferences included: SGP National Conference and Sports ETA Conference. Co-hosted a dinner with team Louisiana. Also attended a bridal expo.

Groups included: Hosted the Elite Redfish Tournament in Slidell, a three-day tournament turned into a two-day tournament because of water/weather conditions. This also included a kayak tournament and this year a youth tournament was added. The Discovery Channel filmed it to be shown last quarter of this year.

Confirmed UK FAM through Louisiana Office of Tourism. This was originally scheduled for summer but now is happening this fall with eight delegates. They will be on The Northshore a full day and one night.

Last fall a Holiday FAM was held with five different parishes. One of the companies involved published that FAM in their August catalog.

North Shore Half Marathon is happening this October. Visit The Northshore will be sponsoring a relaxation station again. It was very successful last year.

Other groups booked include Leadership Terrebonne, Southwestern Cheer Association, and Fire Chiefs Association.

IPW was at the beginning of May. This is an international show that Visit The Northshore participates in and mostly partners with Visit Baton Rouge on hosting the reception party Louisiana Office of Tourism, the UK Office. It has grown each year – this year there were 80 plus different delegates. This is only for UK delegates. Visit The Northshore is gaining traction in the international market. Numerous companies have added VTN to their itineraries this year.

A mystery tour recently happened on The Northshore as well. Two motor coaches came from Abilene, TX and spent three days here.

May included National Tourism and Travel Week.

DEI Committee Update: working with boombox on some blogs and content for LGBTQ+.

STAFF REPORT (CONTINUED)

Industry Relations Committee Update: worked on National Tourism and Travel Week. Also working on an ambassador curriculum, to be hopefully launched in January. The committee hosted the annual hospitality FAM.

Marlaine asked Tanya if we could do something special with the Super Bowl coming up this year. Tanya & Katie both spoke of the mini marketing campaign we are doing for both the Super Bowl and the Taylor Swift concerts.

BUILDING UPDATE

Devan Richoux discussed updates happening with the current building renovations: The exterior has been painted except for the front where they're doing the bathroom renovation. The new restrooms have been framed. Kiosk has been taken down which will be replaced by a lighthouse eventually. Plumbing and electrical work has also started.

NEW BUSINESS

PRESENTATION OF AUDIT REPORT & AGREED UPON PROCEDURES REPORT

Jim Tonglet, CPA with Ericksen Krentel presented the audit report and agreed upon procedures report for the year ended december 31, 2023. The audit report had a clean unmodified opinion, and the agreed upon procedures report included zero exceptions.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Melissa noted that she's been enjoying the recent Visit The Northshore Instagram posts. Patti congratulated Devan for another year with a clean audit. She also enjoyed Katie & Tanya's reports and the information they presented. She commended the staff for their performance while being displaced during construction.

Barry asked if the Parish Counsel was aware of the numbers presented today by Donna. Donna said yes and she'd be meeting with them later this year. Patti and Marlaine both said that they'd support her at that meeting.

Lacey Osborne spoke on how much she's learned about tourism in the parish from attending the board meetings this last year.

Marlaine mentioned Light up the Lake is coming up next week in Mandeville.

GUEST COMMENTS

Devan reminded everyone about doing their sexual harassment and ethics training.

Lacey mentioned the Chamber's events coming up: Southern Nights Soiree & Fan-Up Pep Rally.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting is scheduled to be held on Tuesday, August 20, 2024, at the Harbor Center in Slidell, LA.

ADJOURN

Barry Bagert made a **motion** to adjourn, and Patti Elish seconded. ***The motion carried*** and the meeting adjourned.

Minutes Respectfully Submitted,

DEVAN RICHOUX, CFO

MARLAINE PEACHEY, CHAIRMAN