

Rock Hill/York County CVB Board of Commissioners Meeting
Courtyard by Marriott Fort Mill/Kingsley | February 25, 2025 | 11:30 am

MINUTES

ATTENDANCE

- **Board:** David Angel, Elizabeth Bowers, Ben Boyles, Drew Corrigan, Indira Eskieva, Chip Hutchison, Malinda Foster, Shea Maple, Lisa Moseley, Lamar Thompson
- **Guests:** Tommy Henry and Charlie Ruffalo
- **Staff:** Allison Cleveland, Andy Clinton, Logan Elrod, Michelle Manning-Osborn, Jordan McCraw, Cortney Peterson, and Annabel Thomas

CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTIONS

David Angel welcomed everyone at 11:42am and introduced Adam McCloskey, with Concord Hospitality and General Manager of the Courtyard by Marriott in Kingsley. Adam touched on the hotel's performance, noting an average daily rate of over \$200 and a steady 70% to 80% occupancy. He also noted that the hotel was built in 2017, and they have a full renovation planned to begin in January/February that will take between 3 to 4 months to complete. He acknowledged the impact of Visit York County's efforts to drive overnight stays and spoke of the compression they receive from sporting events in Rock Hill, the amount of corporate business they see, as well as social events.

With a few new faces in the room, introductions were made, including Michelle Manning-Osborn, Director of Marketing. Allison Cleveland asked for everyone to review their contact information that was included within their folders to confirm accuracy. Chip Hutchison was recognized for his guidance and direction as the 2024 Board Chair, as well as his continued advocacy and knowledge of the area.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MINUTES

David referenced the minutes that had been sent out previously and asked for a motion to approve. The motion was made by Elizabeth Bowers and seconded by Lisa Moseley. Chip called the question, and all were in favor.

APPROVAL OF TREASURER'S REPORT

Shea Maple provided highlights of the P&L. From the income side, he noted that Andy and Allison are working on municipality reimbursements and are waiting for approximately \$80,000 for the SCPRT Emerging Destinations Grant. He shared that \$71,000 was transferred from the Partners In Tourism Foundation to the Visit York County account, and Cortney would be providing a report on the Destination Marketing Fee. As it related to expenses and unemployment taxes, Shea noted that we went over budget and are adjusting for next year's budget. Conference travel was attributed to being a little higher than budgeted due to airfare. Expenses for Printing & Design were noted as being over budget, primarily due to the "Make It York County" initiative which is where the majority of the revenue from the Foundation is being allocated.

Lisa Moseley made a motion to approve the report and Malinda Foster seconded the motion. David deferred to Andy to elaborate on the money being moved from the Foundation. Andy referenced the December board meeting during which the decision was made to move the money that had been raised by the Foundation in anticipation of the Carolina Panthers playing a large role but not coming to fruition. This happened after the Foundation Board agreed for the money to be transferred for the "Make It York County" campaign and partnership between Visit York County, the Chamber, and York County Economic Development. The funding will be utilized for printing and design projects which will cancel out the overage currently seen on the P&L.

David acknowledged our financial stability and noted that the County only provides around 18% of our funding. Having had the motion to accept the report, Ben Boyles called the question, all were in favor.

HOTEL PERFORMANCE

Cortney Peterson noted the difference between the hotel report and the P&L due to some hotels reporting after things were printed. She shared reaching 75% of the \$1.2 million goal for the year with an invoiced amount of \$916,276, and 67% of our collection goal of \$1.8 million at \$732,800. A little over \$70,000 is 60+ days past due, but there are no concerns since some hotels pay quarterly. Cortney continued in sharing an upward trend, even with one hotel being offline for 3 months due to a renovation. Figures from the 2024 calendar year were shared and included a significant occupancy growth of 5.5%, and 4% increase in Average Daily Rate which resulted in a revenue increase of 10% for the York County market.

Tracking trends and forecasts suggest that we will see another high-growth year. Preliminary reports show an increase of 15% in occupancy and 13% in ADR, compared to a 2% decline nationally. Cortney elaborated on the largest benefit for the hotels to participate in the Preferred Hotel Program being the marketing efforts with recruited events that include referrals and leads. The new hotel in downtown York was referenced, and a question was asked about the partnership with Rock Hill Parks, Recreation & Tourism. Cortney spoke on the recruitment component, and Allison Cleveland touched on the financial component, referencing that 35% of the Destination Marketing Fee collections goes to the City of Rock Hill to support the joint partnership that allows us to work with the event organizers to market the Preferred Hotels and provide additional destination services.

CEO REPORT

Andy provided an operational overview that included our funding models, mission statement, focus areas, and a breakdown of our revenues, of which 82% is generated from the hotels. He highlighted a couple meetings and initiatives over the past couple months that included the Governor's Conference, the state conference for tourism, at which he served on a panel. He also referenced being a part of the Performing Arts Center Board and opportunities it presents for our organization. Our role is yet to be determined but will likely include an awareness component and event recruitment efforts. Andy acknowledged our current lease coming to term in 2028 and the possibility of having visitor center presence that would ultimately come before the board if it receives any traction. The venue will be across from Fountain Park in downtown Rock Hill, and there are plans for a Shepherd Hotel as well.

Andy touched on the Chamber Awards where we have been able to implement an award for the hospitality community. Debbie Whitsett, founder of Olive's Mud Puddle and a respected artist in the Fort Mill community, was presented with the award. A video highlighting "Make it York County" was shown at the event, as well as during the meeting, to provide a glimpse into the types of marketing that are planned through the partnership between Visit York County, the Chamber, and York County Economic Development. Andy reiterated that the organizations are not coming together as one organization but rather working together from a marketing standpoint to show what the community has to offer.

Andy noted a couple of upcoming events including the May 19th Taste of Tourism event that serves as our annual meeting and allows us to get in front of County Council and other stakeholders. In addition to the Annual Report, the new Destination Guide will be coming out within the next month. The front cover was shown, which featured a local artist's take on tourism in York County, which encompasses the entire county. He also shared his upcoming attendance at Destinations International's CEO Summit, as well as plans to work with the CEO of Visit Greenville, Heath Dillard, on our strategic plan. Everyone was invited to attend the planning session the morning of March 18th to provide input relating to the board's engagement and the organization's direction over the next three years.

EVENTS UPDATE

Jordan McCraw reviewed the last two quarters from July to January. This included some events that were relocated to York County during the fall months due to Hurricane Helene. Specific events that performed well included the ACL World Championships and Adidas 3SSB Palmetto Road Championship, both in partnership with Rock Hill PRT. Adidas brought in around \$18 million and will be returning in 2025. He also highlighted the US Disc Golf Championships, NCAA Division 1 Southeastern Regional Cross Country Championships and USA Track and Field Junior Olympic Championships for the region.

In total, there were 145 events and direct economic impact of \$67 million, which is an increase of 14.4%. An estimation on the number of room nights sold was around 150,000, with around 275,000 event attendees. Events such as BMX, cornhole, disc golf, and cross-country help supplement the timeframes when travel basketball, volleyball, and softball aren't happening due to school schedules. Jordan touched on January's event reporting as well, and noted volleyball events and Futsal, an indoor soccer event, that was recruited out of North Carolina.

As it related to event recruitment, he noted several event bid submissions: 2025 Endzone 7on7 Football Tournament, 2026 USATF Cross Country National Championships, 2026 USA SUP (Stand Up Paddleboarding) National Championships, and 2026 Oldsmobile National Car Show. Confirmed upcoming events included the College National Disc Golf Championships and AAU Karate Super Regional.

Annabel Thomas distributed a sign-up sheet for the distribution of Destination Guides. While staff handles the distribution of the majority of the 30,000 guides, board members are asked to take a box to various locations. Annabel continued by sharing that our organization is the pilot study for Playeasy to guide other Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and shared the corresponding video that highlights how the sports event portal is used to prepare for promotions and drive event traffic to businesses. The group is coming in March to add the facilities to the video and

show the exact process for how the site works. Annabel noted several recent events and website activations that ultimately link to our page where they see local promotions for businesses and attractions. She also touched on the Placer software that provides mobile location data for foot traffic and demographics.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Michelle Manning-Osborn noted recent paid advertising initiatives, some of which were in place prior to her hire in February. These were either paid social ads or paid Google searches that focused on weddings, museums, arts, and Black History Month before shifting to outdoor content. As it related to public relations, she touched on a recent travel writer from Detour Magazine and featured in publications throughout the country. Michelle also noted Andy's recent podcast and an upcoming hospitality crawl with multiple writers and content creators. She continued by sharing the headway made on our website redesign, specifically relating to a sample map, as well as focusing on making Lake Wylie and weddings more prominent due to various analytics.

Logan Elrod elaborated on how he and Michelle have been looking at our strategy and some possible shifts to boost the algorithms. He highlighted a recent social media strategy to get people to our website which showcased future partners in "What's News in 2025 – Restaurants, Parks, Breweries, and More in York County, SC" and how it helps garner website page views through search engine optimization, a key performance indicator. He shared multiple performance numbers and touched on the significance of short-form video for Instagram and high-quality photos for Facebook.

Logan also highlighted a new content series called "Bite Into York County" that showcases new or iconic places to eat in York County through the utilization of different strategies that adds a more personal touch to our social media. He shared that we enable closed captions due to 65-89% of people using social media without sound and noted that people are using social media as a search engine rather than Google, because they want to travel and experience things as a local. We are also monitoring how many followers compared to non-followers are viewing the content. Michelle and Logan are working to determine what resonates so that we produce content that is highly shareable and reaches more people.

ADJOURNMENT

Prior to adjournment, Allison referenced the appreciation bags that included an "Explore" shirt and encouraged everyone to serve as an ambassador for York County. Andy mentioned evaluating how we conduct board meetings and continuing to make sure everyone is engaged and providing input. Chip made the motion to adjourn at 1:04pm.