

**Tourism Advisory Committee  
Minutes**

October 18, 2022

**TAC Attendees:** Sue Adler, Melinda Allen, Charlie Brazil, Jason Combs, and Michael Owens

**TAC Absences:** Steve Brenneman, Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Nancy Maia, and Joe Marinelli

**City Staff:** Susan Broker, Rachel Buck, Jennifer Herman, and Tyrell Royal

**Guests:** Dee Ann Geeslin (attended on J. Marinelli's behalf), Ryan Madson (attended on Nancy Maia's behalf), Marysue McCarthy (attended on Steve Brenneman's behalf), and Will Reyes

**Call to order: 9:04 AM**

**1. Approval of minutes from September 21, 2022**

J. Combs asked if all members were able to review the minutes from the September 21, 2022 meeting and if there were any issues to consider. M. Allen made a motion to approve the minutes. M. McCarthy seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

J. Combs notified the committee that no votes would be taken during the October meeting and that the bicycle ordinance matter would be taken up for a vote at next month's meeting. Additionally, committee's input would be sought regarding final edits to the bicycle ordinance.

**2. Director's Report: Rachel Buck**

○ **90 Day Bicycle Pilot Program / Bicycle Ordinance**

R. Buck opened the floor for discussion regarding the proposed bicycle ordinance recommendations, including any desired or proposed changes from TAC.

R. Madson opened the discussion stating that Segways are currently only limited to eight (8) patrons and that the eight (8) patron limit is by design to keep the patrons of tour groups together as one. Bicycle tour operators should be subjected to the same standards and expectations as Segway tour operators. The Victorian Neighborhood Association (VNA) recommends changing the ordinance to reflect eight (8) maximum bicycles and one (1) guide which is comparable to the Segway ordinance.

J. Combs asked if the matter had been discussed prior with the VNA board.

R. Madson stated that the board deferred to Nancy regarding the matter, and if TAC wanted the matter put to a vote that the board would be willing to do so. R. Madson recommended the ordinance include language that bicycle tours should be prohibited on the pedestrian right-of-way. There are concerns of bicycles parking inside of squares where there is only pedestrian rights-of-way access. The concern then becomes where exactly do bicycles park.

R. Buck stated that the proposal allows guests to bring bicycles in the squares so as to ensure that narration does not take place in the street. Bikes should not be left unattended. If a tour group is separated, it is the responsibility of the tour guide to use stop signs and other traffic control devices to bring the group back together.

R. Madson stated that operating hours for Segways are until 4:00 PM. R. Matson recommended that the bicycle tours operate consistent with the Segways and cease operations at 4PM. R. Matson again brought up the number of patrons in a bicycle tour. He stated that a tour group of twenty-five (25), eighteen (18), and fifteen (15) guests is too large. A group size of twelve (12) is a compromise, but VNA's preferred recommended size is eight (8), consistent with the Segway ordinance.

R. Buck stated that a Segway policy was put in place through a collaborative effort by Bridget Lidy, the Tourism Management Coordinator, and the tour operators. The number was an agreed number between all parties. Additionally, any tours over ten (10) patrons and two (2) guides were split due to safety issues and comfort levels.

R. Madson added that these tours have been operating for at least ten (10) years or more with financial success which demonstrates that the current Segway ordinance is not onerous, and both supports and manages the industry. R. Madson also brought up a concern regarding Forsyth Park and bicycles. Bicycles by state law are treated as vehicles and must adhere to the same traffic regulations. The state law furthermore suggests that bicycles should not be on the sidewalks, but an exception is made in Forsyth Park. The VNA believes this is adding to the congestion in the park. A question regarding the legality of allowing bicycles on the perimeter of Forsyth Park was raised.

J. Herman stated that further research would be conducted, and an answer would be provided at a later time.

M. McCarthy stated that the Downtown Neighborhood Association (DNA) recommended fifteen (15) as the maximum number of patrons allowed in a tour. Eighteen (18) to twenty-five (25) would be excessive. The cutoff time of operation should be from 4:00 PM-6:00 PM instead of 4:30 PM-6:00PM. DNA believes that too many concessions are being made for the bicycle tours. Additionally, bicycle tours should not be allowed in or around Forsyth Park.

M. Allen stated that DNA supports the Police Chief's recommendation of fifteen (15) guests per bicycle tour.

M. Owens stated that the Tourism Leadership Council does not agree with a cap on the number of bicycles in a tour. M. Owens stated that bicycle tours have been operating for years without accident. Also, M. Owens stated that an entity cannot control the population of Forsyth Park through legislation as it is public space for all. Bicycle tours should be required to walk through the squares as opposed to riding. There are differences between bicycles and Segways and according to O.C.G.A., bicycles share the same rights and privileges as any other vehicle. The City is allowed to regulate this but only up to a certain extent. Bicycle tours have the right to engage in business in the public rights-of-way.

C. Brazil suggested there be regulation of bicycles but within reason. Bicycles are becoming a popular mode of transportation, and it is imperative that boundaries are put in place that do not restrict tour business. Limiting the number of bicycle tour patrons to eight (8) is not recommended; however, fifteen (15), not to include the tour guides, was reasonable. Bicycles

should not be ridden through squares, but they should be allowed to stage in them rather than in the streets.

R. Buck asked for clarity regarding the term staging and whether this meant providing narration in squares.

C. Brazil stated yes.

R. Buck added that bicycles should not be ridden in the squares but should be allowed to give narrations in the squares so that the groups are out of the roadways.

S. Adler stated that the City of Savannah currently has an opportunity to set an example and precedence by supporting bicycling and healthy living, as other parts of the world are doing. Additionally, many areas outside of the U.S. have adopted bicycling as a primary mode of transportation, including much of Europe. Shutting down tours and placing too many restrictions and conditions will be a business deterrent. S. Adler suggested that the City place bike racks in the squares so that the tours are aware of where they are allowed to park and provide their narrations. This will provide greater clarity for bicycle operators and their guests, rather than creating confusion about operations.

S. Broker agreed that TAC and the City currently have a great opportunity to set a precedent that show that the community is bike friendly. Seizing this opportunity would show the Mayor and City Council the long-term vision TAC has regarding bicycles and how bicycles contribute to mobility and the fabric of the community.

C. Brazil added that it is TAC's duty to advise and inform the Mayor and City Council about trends within the industry, and in this instance, develop an ordinance that supports and manages the industry.

R. Buck asked for S. Adler's thoughts regarding the number of guests on a tour because in previous meetings she had mentioned her concerns about limiting the number.

S. Adler stated her position that eighteen (18) was a reasonable number and that the ordinance should reflect that. S. Adler confirmed that she had not discussed the matter with her board of directors but this was her personal viewpoint.

R. Madson asked about the quality of life for residents that live downtown who are impacted by the tour size of eighteen (18), particularly in light of the fact that 18 bicycles is the equivalent length of two (2) city buses.

S. Adler confirmed she feels the size of eighteen (18) was doable.

D. Geeslin stated that Mr. Marinelli supports bike tours. These tours are quiet, family friendly, and have no carbon footprint. Mr. Marinelli believes that no other added restrictions should be added to bicycle tours while operating in a square as long as landscaping is not disturbed. He added that, if you were following trolley and Segway tours, as has been done with the bicycle tours, violations would also be observed; however, the pictures from the 90-day observation phase reveal too many violations occurring from bicycle tours. Therefore, tours must comply with established guidelines. D. Geeslin asked for clarification regarding the hours of operations and whether the 4:00 PM-6:00 PM timeframe included weekdays. D. Geeslin and Mr. Marinelli both agree to the 4:00 PM-6:00 PM timeframe. From personal

experience, D. Geeslin stated she has never been caught behind a bicycle tour. The tours she has observed ride in single file and have not posed a serious issue regarding road and pedestrian safety. D. Geeslin asked in what scenario would bicycles be left unattended in the squares.

R. Buck stated that bicycles have been left unattended several times. Bicycles have been left in Ellis Square where tours have left bicycles behind to walk over to statues or to take restroom breaks. These bikes have been observed being left for longer than ten (10) minutes at a time. Bicycles have also been left unattended as groups are on sidewalks giving narrations, which is presenting safety concerns. The preferred space to give narrations is in the square or parking space.

D. Geeslin stated that the liability of bicycles being left unattended should be given to the tour owners. If bicycles are prevented from parking on the streets or sidewalk to give narrations, then they should be provided a designated area.

J. Combs stated that bicycle tours are not given in Thomas Square but that could change. J. Combs has spoken to individuals that have participated in bicycle tours who have enjoyed them. There have been issues raised regarding the size of tours and how the size potentially impacts pedestrians. Bicycle regulations will help bicycle usage rather than hinder it. The goal is not to punish bicycle usage but to regulate within reason. It is desired that friction be lessened between bicycle tours and pedestrians. The recommended size of the tours should be fifteen (15).

R. Madson suggested a compromise of a tour group size of twelve (12) after tour companies requested twenty-five (25).

R. Buck added that a compromise of eighteen (18) was reached in the past between TAC and the tour companies. One tour company is only allotted for a tour size of twelve (12) because that is the maximum number allowed by their insurance provider. A second company has a maximum number of fifteen (15) and they have a second tour guide to accompany the tour when they have that many guests.

J. Combs stated that TAC should prepare for a vote on the matter at next month's meeting.

R. Buck added that she would send the ordinance edits to J. Herman for review and would send to TAC as soon as possible for a vote at next month's meeting.

S. Broker added that she could draft a letter that would accompany the ordinance to the Mayor and City Council laying a foundation that TAC supports the bicycling industry and desires that the City place further infrastructure in support of the bicycling industry.

R. Madson proposed an agenda item regarding the TAC composition and who represents which communities. J. Combs stated that TAC would need to forward a recommendation to City Council regarding seats.

- **Holiday Decorations**

R. Buck stated that poster finalizations are being made. Another Broughton Street visit will be planned for businesses that have not yet signed the list for holiday light placement. The lighting of the Christmas Tree has been set for the day after Thanksgiving from 5:30-7:00

PM. Funding is being sought for a snow machine. A quote has been received, but the budget has been exhausted. The City Manager is envisioning a Winter Wonderland experience for the holiday season.

S. Broker added that the City Manager has added a \$100,000 toward holiday decorations. This amount must be spread throughout the aldermanic districts. There are plans to light the Factors Walk Bridges.

R. Buck added the snow will be real with no remnants, and if funds could not be obtained it could be added to next year's budget request. The cost of renting a snow machine would be \$5,000 per day.

M. McCarthy commented on the aesthetics of the barricades used around the Christmas Tree and recommended further research on possible alternatives.

J. Combs added that the barricades were likely due to a Department of Transportation requirement. S. Broker confirmed that GDOT does require the barricades.

M. Allen suggested the usage of laser lights as opposed to a snow machine.

M. Owens stated that financial participation in holiday decorations comes from local hotels. Restaurants, retail establishments, and other organizations should also contribute to holiday decorations instead of sole participation only stemming from hotels. In lieu of purchasing a snow machine, M. Owens suggested a soap snow machine. A snow machine will produce a heavy film which may cause a safety issue. The soap snow machine would accomplish the same goal as a snow machine.

D. Geeslin added that she was willing to reach out to contacts in Macon, GA regarding the brand of machine used to produce snow flurries with no accumulation used in their holiday décor/displays.

C. Brazil stated that community expectations of holiday decorations have transitioned from decorative bows to lighting displays that can be seen at night. He suggested that more research is needed to find communities that successfully utilize lights in their holiday décor.

S. Broker added that she submitted a \$500,000 Service Enhancement Request in the 2023 budget for holiday decorating. Now that the City is putting greater emphasis on decorating, she would like to identify community partners who could offset some of the costs by sponsoring parts of the holiday decorations and programming.

M. McCarthy suggested music to be a part of the planning as the holidays generally correlate with music.

R. Buck will be sending out invites for the St. Augustine, FL visit in early December.

C. Brazil added that the Festival of Lights starts in November and runs through January.

- **Homelessness**

S. Broker brought up the recent removal of the homeless camp under the Truman Parkway Overpass. She wanted to mention to TAC that they may see an increase in homeless

individuals downtown. SPD is working with Chatham Savannah Authority for the Homeless to provide services to those individuals willing to participate.

J. Herman added the City provided fifty (50) storage totes and that forty (40) to fifty (50) individuals refused to vacate, which included many veterans. There were some veterans who were offered tiny homes but refused. There was a total of five (5) arrests made during the demolition process. Only one (1) individual took advantage of the bus tickets that were offered.

M. Allen added that the camp was unsafe as far as its proximity to fast-moving traffic.

J. Herman stated that many of the tenants that occupied the camp moved southeast to a location within Chatham County near the canals on President Street.

M. Owens confirmed that providers and services were staged at the camp for at least ten (10) days to provide resources. Additionally, there is a segment of the homeless population that do not want housing but suggested that a plan should be put in place due to the increasing numbers of individuals engaging in illicit activities, specifically in the downtown area. This is having an adverse impact on residents and visitors.

J. Herman stated that homelessness cannot be policed. J. Herman also praised the Savannah Police Department for their actions and the dignity displayed during the eviction process. Ms. Herman further stated that it is not the position of the City to adopt procedures and policies from other communities such as Los Angeles, CA.

M. Owens added that hotels are seeing an increase of homeless individuals loitering in hotels but to no avail do they receive assistance from authorities. There is growing sentiment in the community that nothing that can be done to manage homelessness. There are other concerns such as the bussing of outside community homeless populations into the Savannah area.

M. Owens added that there is a great fear that putting off this issue will lead to a far greater and serious situation, so this matter must be considered a priority.

R. Buck stated that there should be a statement from TAC concerning this issue that could be included in the annual report distributed to the Mayor and City Council.

M. McCarthy asked if the City Manager planned on streamlining agency services regarding homelessness.

J. Herman stated the City Manager is addressing the issue and is conducting bi-weekly meetings with organizations but to her knowledge has not appointed anyone to serve in a leadership capacity.

○ **Future Meeting Days/Time**

R. Buck suggested that the new proposed meeting time of the third Tuesday of each month be moved to the fourth Tuesday of each month after reviewing surveys submitted by TAC members. The meeting time will be set for a starting time of 8:30 AM.

○ **RHI update**

RHI will be in town the week of October 24<sup>th</sup>. S. Broker added that RHI will be in town Wednesday through Friday and will be staying for the Pride Festival that weekend. There will be two (2) meetings per day with RHI, during which the participants will be asked to develop action plans to address the concerns identified in previous meetings. Individuals who have received invites for these meetings are encouraged to attend. A meeting will be held Tuesday night with alcohol licensed businesses in the downtown area. Additionally, a meeting will be held on Thursday night with all City Neighborhood Leaders. This will be the introduction of the Office of Nightlife to the community.

**3. Other Business – Ghost Tours, Vote, and San Fransicko**

Ghost Tours was tabled for discussion until next month's meeting.

J. Combs suggested *San Fransicko: Why Progressives Ruin Cities* written by Michael Shellenberger to be an interesting read.

M. Owens proposed a vote on the proposed change in TAC's composition and suggested that no change be made. J. Combs stated that the vote to recommend new seats was rescinded but no vote had been taken for a new recommendation. M. Owens made a motion to keep the composition of TAC unchanged with continuous evaluation to be made regarding the matter in the future. M. Allen seconded the motion.

Roll call vote:

M. McCarthy- Aye

M. Owens- Aye

C. Brazil- Aye

D. Geeslin (on behalf of Mr. Marinelli)- Aye

M. Allen- Aye

J. Combs- No

The motion passed.

**Meeting adjourned** at 10:21 AM