

**Tourism Advisory Committee
Minutes**

November 22, 2022

TAC Attendees: Melinda Allen, Charlie Brazil, Steve Brenneman, Jason Combs, Nancy Maia, Mitch Linder, Joseph Marinelli, Michael Owens

TAC Absences: Sue Adler and Vaughnette Goode-Walker

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

Guests: Will Reyes

Call to order: 8:31 AM

1. Approval of minutes from October 18, 2022

J. Combs asked if all members were able to review the minutes from the October 18, 2022 meeting and if there were any issues to consider. J. Marinelli made a motion to approve the minutes. M. Linder seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Director's Report: Rachel Buck

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

J. Combs notified the committee that no vote would be taken during November 22nd meeting regarding the bicycle ordinance.

R. Buck stated that edits have been made to the bicycle ordinance to reflect what was discussed during the October 18th meeting. The edits were sent to J. Herman who asked that the matter be tabled until the December TAC meeting. Everyone will be notified of any further updates.

○ **RHI update**

S. Broker informed the committee that the RHI consultants recently visited the City. The consultants facilitated multiple meetings and listening sessions with stakeholders to develop action steps for the final assessment. The primary areas of study are venue safety, public safety, public space, quality of life, and mobility.

There were three additional meetings conducted with neighborhood leaders. The most recent meeting took place on November 21st where 14 Neighborhood Association Leaders received updates on the assessment and provided feedback on their priorities and concerns about the potential impacts that new nightlife development could bring

to their respective communities. The first draft of the assessment is expected January 2023. Once reviewed and approved by City staff, the assessment will be presented during a Nightlife Summit.

J. Combs asked which communities believed they were the right fit for nightlife development.

S. Broker stated that the arena/canal district, Carver Village, West Savannah, Cloverdale, Feiler Park, Tatemville, and Poplar Place all expressed interest in how nightlife could be developed, and the potential impacts (positive and negative) could be in their respective areas.

J. Marinelli asked if the RHI team is on track with the plan and timeline that was set and if the project is on or behind schedule? J. Marinelli also asked that if the City was ahead of the game in terms of the plans the City Manager set forth, how did this attribute to a setback in the timeline of events?

S. Broker stated that the project is a little behind schedule. The RHI team is accustomed to visiting areas where they spend a great deal of time attempting to convince the community that an Office of Nightlife is needed. In Savannah, however, the need was already identified. This required RHI to shift gears and work on more of a blueprint for the office that included goals, strategies, timelines, and budget needs. This pivot in direction put us slightly behind schedule.

- **Nominations for Vice Chair**

R. Buck opened the floor for nominations for Vice Chairmen.

M. Owens made a motion to nominate Sue Adler (S. Adler) for Vice Chair. He added that Sue has been on the committee for a few years and understands the dynamics.

J. Marinelli seconded the motion.

J. Combs opened the discussion by stating that he disagreed with the nomination. J. Combs further stated that S. Adler would do a great job but there is concern over whether the Historic Savannah Foundation (HSF) should represent residents on TAC. The individual serving as Vice Chair-elect should be a resident representative and have a relationship with the neighborhood groups. J. Combs requested that this nomination be voted down and another selection be made.

M. Owens added that he was unaware of any stipulations requiring the Vice Chair to be a representative of a resident/neighborhood group.

J. Marinelli added that he supported the nomination of S. Adler as Vice Chair. S. Adler joined the Visit Savannah board roughly four or five months ago. Prior to her joining the board, the relationship between Visit Savannah and HSF had been

strained. Since S. Adler has taken over, she has developed a keen insight into the work Visit Savannah does. She has also shown this interest and commitment as a representative on TAC.

J. Combs asked if S. Adler was the selected nominee due to her participation with the Visit Savannah board?

J. Marinelli added that he supports S. Adler because now that she sits on the Visit Savannah board, she has a broader perspective on the work of both HSF and TAC.

S. Brenneman expressed similar thoughts to J. Combs regarding the nomination. S. Brenneman asked if anyone had reached out to S. Adler to see if she is interested in the position?

M. Owens stated that she could decline the nomination at a later time if she chose to do so.

S. Brenneman asked if this matter should be tabled?

M. Owens confirmed with a yes.

N. Maia stated that she too agreed with J. Combs and S. Brenneman and stated that she was unaware that S. Adler sat on the board of Visit Savannah and that it raised concern.

N. Maia stated there have been concerns raised about S. Adler's representation of the residential neighborhood members and is unclear of how her position is representative of neighborhood and community interests. Furthermore, N. Maia desired to nominate an individual who has residential/neighborhood connections. N. Maia remains unclear as to how HSF fits into the TAC mission.

J. Marinelli asked for clarification on N. Maia's position and asked if her position was taken due to S. Adler's non-involvement with representing a neighborhood?

N. Maia stated that S. Adler does not represent a neighborhood and specific interests of the residential community members. She further questioned HSF's commitment to representing neighborhoods.

J. Marinelli asked if this was not the purpose of HSF?

R. Buck added that if there was another individual that the committee wished to nominate for Vice Chair who would that person be?

J. Combs stated that he would like to nominate the VNA representative whether it be N. Maia or Ryan Madson.

R. Buck further added that since S. Adler was currently out of the country, it would be beneficial to take nominations and speak with S. Adler to gauge her interest before taking a vote, which would be held at December's meeting. R. Buck stated she would reach out to S. Adler regarding the nomination.

J. Combs asked for a motion to table the matter with a vote to come on December 27th.

M. Owens stated that he sent a text to S. Adler and that she was okay with the nomination.

S. Broker added that HSF was appointed to TAC to represent the interests of the preservation movement as well as to ensure that tourism was a part of that movement.

C. Brazil added his support to nominate S. Adler and stated that HSF and S. Adler represent the best of both worlds as they operate a historic home and are firmly rooted in the preservation movement. Furthermore, S. Adler is the type of individual who can advocate for both sides and bring balance to the position.

M. Owens stated that possibly some neighborhoods are at a disagreement with actions taken by HSF. HSF is not a neighborhood representative, but it is a preservation representative. Preservation is at the core of the city. These disagreements have no bearing on the topic at hand.

R. Buck confirmed that nominations were made for S. Adler and the VNA TAC representative whether it be N. Maia or Ryan Madson to serve a Vice Chair. R. Buck stated there would be a vote at the December meeting.

3. Other Business

○ Ghost Tours

S. Brenneman stated that he wished to open a dialogue on what is happening with Ghost Tours. A concern has been raised regarding the information tour guides are providing to patrons regarding squares, specifically, stemming from Calhoun (Unnamed) Square. There is concern regarding the limits of what information is given on the tours. Additionally, noise levels and sidewalk blockage are growing concerns. S. Brenneman asked if there are any regulations in place for regulating these matters?

J. Herman stated that years ago the City had a Tour Guide policy in place that required testing of tour guides where all guides were required to pass the exam with a score of 80%. An organization in Washington D.C. filed a claim against the City which resulted in the repealing of the policy because it was found to be an infringement on first amendment speech. The City cannot regulate the speech of the tour guides.

R. Buck expanded on the process for submitting tour guide complaints. R. Buck added that complaints regarding tour companies are sent in to the appropriate City departments by emailing tourism@savanahga.gov. R. Buck reaches out to companies involved in complaints to make them aware of violations. If there are any complaints regarding tour companies, R. Buck has requested that this information be sent to her.

S. Brenneman asked if the timing of the tours is regulated as some are operating at night beyond 11:00 PM? Also, is there regulation regarding the sidewalks and public rights-of-way as the tours, at times, block sidewalks?

R. Buck asked if this was regarding the walking tours or the ghost tours?

S. Brenneman confirmed yes, this was regarding the walking tours.

R. Buck stated that walking tours are regulated by the Tour Service for Hire Ordinance. They should not be taking over the sidewalks. They are limited to thirty (30) people per tour. Tourism Compliance Officers are in the field keeping track of infractions.

S. Brenneman asked for a citation to the ordinance?

J. Herman added it is City Code - Division 2 Part 6 under Chapter 1.

J. Combs added that complaints have been made from veteran tour guides concerning tour etiquette of other tour companies when providing narrations in the squares.

R. Buck added that tour companies, when tour guides make application, they must submit a route. City Staff work diligently with companies to identify alternative areas to conduct tours if the desired area has already reached a certain number of tours. Once tour company owners are notified of complaints, they work with the guides to address issues. There are walking tours that are operating illegally. Tour guides must also have a tour guide badge issued by the City for identification purposes.

M. Owens asked how are these guides cited?

R. Buck stated that there have been instances where illegal tours have been tracked. This eventually leads to a name. Many illegal guides are guides who started with a company and separated from that company to give tours on their own. When doing so, they keep their old tour guide identification badge.

J. Marinelli asked S. Brenneman if he had spoken to any of the tour guides that he has encountered so that there is follow-up to any observed infractions or concerns?

S. Brenneman stated no and that he simply wanted to keep the tour experience enjoyable for the tourists and had no desire for an approach to become confrontational in front of the tourists.

M. Owens asked if it were possible to do a nighttime blitz of enforcements concerning tours. Essentially, we have good ordinances codified but not enforced. Additionally, the question was raised why have an ordinance if it is not enforced?

S. Broker added that in January of 2022 the Office of Special Events, Film & Tourism was given four Tourism Compliance Officers. Two of the four are no longer with the Department. Two officers will be hired soon. There is hope for two additional staff members to be added to assist with enforcement in 2023. Also, it would be beneficial for the officers to take part in the TAC meetings to hear concerns. Officers are placed in situations that can be extremely confrontational and combative. Having officers involved with TAC meetings can empower them.

- **Other**

J. Combs asked for an update to the St. Augustine, FL trip.

R. Buck stated that she would be sending an email.

C. Brazil stated that everything is in place and asked that R. Buck get in touch with him before sending the email to the committee.

M. Owens applauded the efforts of the holiday decorations and the mulch provided to the landscaping on Broughton Street. Additionally, M. Owens added that the decorations and mulch have added to the vitality of Broughton Street helping to restore it back to its original state.

Meeting adjourned at 9:21 AM