

**Tourism Advisory Committee
Minutes**

September 21, 2022

TAC Attendees: Sue Adler, Melinda Allen, Charlie Brazil, Steve Brenneman, Jason Combs, Mitch Linder, and Nancy Maia

TAC Absences: Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Michael Owens, Joe Marinelli

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

Guests: Dee Ann Geeslin (attended on J. Marinelli's behalf), Marysue McCarthy, and Will Reyes

Call to order: 8:33 AM

1. Approval of minutes from August 17, 2022

J. Combs asked if everyone had a chance to review the minutes and if there were any concerns or amendments that needed addressing. Nancy Maia requested that the language be amended to state "TAC members unanimously agreed Creeper Van Savannah's business concept was not in line with the aesthetic or image that the City of Savannah wants to portray" R. Buck confirmed the verbiage would be revised. Charlie Brazil made a motion to approve the minutes. Nancy Maia seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

R. Buck opened the floor up to introductions to new City staff member Tyrell Royal and new TAC member Mitch Linder of the DeSoto Hilton.

2. Director's Report: Rachel Buck

○ **Parklets**

R. Buck asked if anyone had questions or amendments about the Parklet ordinance.

S. Brenneman asked for clarity regarding the penalty provision of the ordinance. This included clarifying whether immediate revoking of a permit would be imposed if such a violation was brought up against a business.

R. Buck added that the business would be served a notice of violation and would be given approximately fourteen (14) days to address and rectify the violation. If the violation(s) is not brought up to code within that period, the permit would be revoked.

S. Broker added that the immediate removal of a parklet is usually due to public safety concerns.

R. Buck asked for a motion to approve the Parklet Ordinance to submit to the Mayor and City Council. M. Allen made a motion to approve the Parklet Ordinance. N. Maia seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

○ **90 Day Bicycle Pilot Program**

R. Buck provided a report of observations made during the 90-Day Bicycle Pilot Program.

- The first concern involved bicycles utilizing parking spaces. The concern is that guests dismount their bicycles and leave them unattended as guides give narrations on the sidewalks or at the corner of squares. It is preferred that guides stay on their bikes and give narrations from the parking space. R. Buck spoke with Sean Brandon with Parking and Mobility Services, who reported that he had no issue with the bicycles utilizing the parking spaces since they would not be there longer than 5 minutes.

- Bike tours were observed parking in designated tour bus spaces, preventing larger vehicles such as trolleys from accessing their designated spaces.

- Bikes were also observed being left unattended in Ellis Square for ten minutes or more. Guides are dismounting, encouraging their guests to do the same, and giving narrations elsewhere in the square. R. Buck added that bikes should be attended to at all times and/or secured in bike racks when not being utilized.

- Bike tour patrons were observed standing/walking in and on the flowerbeds in the squares.

- Bicycle tours were observed blocking and riding on the sidewalks.

- Patrons of large tours are being separated due to stop lights and other traffic control devices. R. Buck stated tours should come to a complete stop together to allow patrons to catch up so that the entire tour can cross safely together all at once.

- A bike tour was observed running a stop light and leaving a patron behind because she was caught in front of a car. The tour then stopped in the street for her to catch up impeding the flow of traffic.

- Narrations conducted outside of the squares have presented a safety concern. Tours are obstructing traffic on roadways.

- Research suggests that there is less traffic on the roads of Savannah between 7:00 AM – 9:00 AM than between 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM.

- R. Buck then provided an example to demonstrate how large the tours actually are when operating on the street.

- 6.3 bicycles measure to one city bus.

- 3 City Buses (18 people per tour) | 4 City Buses (25 people per tour)

S. Adler asked if the bicycles are being ridden single file. R. Buck added there is lagging between guests that stretches the length of the tours. Bike tour hours of operation are recommended to be 8:00 AM – 10:00 PM. Narrations to be given in the squares away from the sidewalks.

R. Buck provided the following recommendations and additions to the bicycle ordinance as an outcome of the 90-day observation phase.

- Allow bike tours to offer tours before 9 a.m. (Commercial operations may occur between the hours of 8 a.m. and 10 p.m.) Bicycle tours may operate Monday-Friday between 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM and can resume operations at 6:00 PM. Traffic Engineering does not want any bicycle tours operating between the hours of 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM.

- Allow bike tours to narrate in the square. All narrations should be off the streets and not blocking the sidewalks.

- Do not leave bikes unattended at any time.

- The maximum tour size recommended is to be no more than eighteen after speaking with Traffic Engineering and other City departments. J. Herman added that after speaking with Chief Gunther, the recommended maximum number of eighteen patrons was relatively high. Chief Gunther stated that he would prefer fewer than fifteen (15) guests per tour.

Max tour size recommendation is 18 patrons.

- All tours must stop at a stop sign or stop light to allow all patrons to catch up so the tour is able to cross the street at the same time to avoid gaps or trailing.

- When tour guides stop in a parking space to provide narration, all patrons should remain on their bicycles, and not dismount.

S. Adler asked if walking tour companies were included in conversations and recommendations. R. Buck stated that they had not been as of yet. S. Adler further added that the walking tours should be included as they could provide greater insight into their business models which could create a collaborative effort with bicycle tours.

S. Adler asked for the next steps in the process. R. Buck added that she would be working on a recommendation and editing the proposed Bicycle Ordinance. The committee was not prepared to take a vote on the matter at the present time. S. Broker suggested the committee review the recommendations between this meeting and the next. The ordinance would then be crafted based on those recommendations and the final product will be sent to J. Herman for review. Additionally, by the first of the year, the committee would hopefully have had enough time to formally vet this process thoroughly so that the ordinance may be presented to the Mayor and City Council.

S. Adler suggested the discussion be tabled until the next meeting due to timing constraints. J. Combs added that there should be some further discussion on the matter at the present time, but no action or vote would be taken.

N. Maia raised a concern regarding the maximum number of eighteen patrons allowed in a tour with the belief that this number is too high. The volume of bikes and the potential for there to be increased volume due to patrons who cannot navigate a two-wheel bicycle should be considered.

M. Allen raised a concern with the sizes of the tours and how some tours are being conducted in the streets which is creating safety concerns. Bicycles should not be ridden on sidewalks. It is the hope that the City will create bike lanes in the areas.

S. Broker asked R. Buck if she recalled the numbers for the largest bike tour she had observed during the 90-day review period. R. Buck stated that she had not seen a tour of more than seventeen (17).

C. Brazil added that restrictions should be placed on larger tours that become problematic. There may also be a scenario that presents itself where tour guides must leave their bicycles unattended for a period of time, so a mandate that prevents bicycles being left unattended would be deemed

an unrealistic expectation. R. Buck added that leaving bikes in bike rack is perfectly acceptable but leaving multiple bicycles in squares unattended and not in a rack was not acceptable.

S. Adler asked if research could be done to find other cities that have implemented a designated area outside of squares for bikes to be dismounted and if the City could explore options of doing such with the squares in Savannah. R. Buck has identified Charleston, SC as a comparable city to Savannah with a bicycle tour ordinance. There has not been any luck finding other cities with specific bicycle tour ordinances. Charleston does not allow bicycle tours in their historic district.

M. Allen raised a concern regarding going against Traffic Engineering and Safety's recommendations on the size limit of 15 patrons and the time restrictions of 4:00-6:00 p.m. S. Broker stated that it was a compromise as the city wanted to be the least invasive and provide the tours a little additional time to wrap up. S. Broker also added that it was not the goal of the department to constantly regulate but to allow the tours the space and environments to operate.

- **Will Reyes, Owner of Savannah Bike Tours presentation/overview**

The tours that the company provides are conducted are clean, safe, sober, and healthy. The tours have minimum to no adverse impacts on the city. The State of Georgia currently regulates sidewalks. W. Reyes spoke with Atlanta Bike tours and they relayed that the City of Atlanta does not regulate bike tours due to the State of Georgia already having such robust regulations already in place. The company has no issue with the 8:00 AM – 10:00 PM hours of operation. Square narrations are not the same as walking tour guides as bicycle tour can cover a larger geographical area. Guides adhere to all traffic control devices by stopping at stop signs, etc. Guides are properly dismounting in parking spaces. Tours are not given on arterial roads. Tours may at times cross busy intersections but are not riding down those streets. Some issues of concern include the 4:30 PM – 6:00 PM ban due to the fact that seventy-five percent of the company's income in the winter is during this ban period. Over the decade there have been no issues to report. The tours are not blocking traffic as they are not on arterial roads. The last trolley pickup is at 5:00 PM, so bicycle tours also desire an end time of 5:00 PM. The second issue is the maximum group size of 18 patrons. There are prescribed rights exclusive to bicycles where they too can be operated in the same fashion as motor vehicles. Larger groups are deemed safer as vehicles have been determined to be much more aggressive to smaller groups as opposed to larger ones. There is a higher chance of a traffic accident to occur with two tours on the road at the same time versus one larger tour on the road. There will be a need to pay two guides as opposed to one to conduct two tours which would mean less pay for guides and less quality of the guides who may not be familiar with the proposed ordinance. Larger tours are less disruptive to traffic. The suggested recommendation is to have a bicycle ordinance for the entire city as opposed to a bicycle tour ordinance.

C. Brazil asked W. Reyes what his average group size is. W. Reyes said his average group size was 12-15 patrons and that that average group size would vary based on the season.

- **Creper Van**

R. Buck stated that Jennifer Long will be withdrawing her appeal and will restart the application process with the submission of a new business plan.

- **Savannah Cruzers**

R. Buck stated from this point forward Savannah Cruzers will operate as a tour service vehicle and abide by the regulations in the Tour Service for Hire Ordinance.

3. Westside Seat

S. Broker suggested that the committee consider finding someone to represent the westside/canal district as it is experiencing growth due to the Enmarket arena. Tourism will be a major component of that area so a representative on the committee to address the concerns of the community would be vital.

4. Holiday Decorations

R. Buck stated there will be a restoration of the current Christmas Tree in lieu of purchasing a new one. Next year's budget includes a request that funding is allocated to purchase a new faux Christmas Tree or a real one. Six hundred (600) red bows have been purchased and will be distributed by the City to each aldermanic district (100 each). R. Buck stated she hopes to purchase more holiday decorations next year such as wreaths for the districts outside of downtown. There will be a restoration of the lights on Broughton Street. Five (5) bridges will be decorated for the holidays. S. Broker added that she has requested a holiday program for decorating in the 2023 budget. The City is looking for corporate sponsors to assist with decorations. The City Manager is viewing holiday decorating around the city as a priority.

C. Brazil suggested arranging a visit to St. Augustine, FL to see their holiday decorating process.

R. Buck added that every square will be decorated.

M. Allen raised a concern regarding funneling resources to decorate in areas with the most attraction due to businesses and restaurants e.g., Thomas Square. The most vital takeaway is to market the areas towards residents and the community as a whole and not just tourists.

5. Future Meeting Days/Time

S. Broker informed the committee that there are key members that are now unavailable to meet on the third Wednesday of the month, so R. Buck will be checking-in with members to coordinate the newly proposed day and time for future meetings. R. Buck also added that members should expect meetings to last up to ninety minutes going forward.

6. Other Business – The Kingdoms of Savannah

J. Combs suggested *The Kingdoms of Savannah* a mystery novel written by George Dawes Green to be an interesting read.

Meeting adjourned at 9:46 AM

Next meeting: October 19, 2022– City Hall Media Room – 2nd Floor