

**Tourism Advisory Committee
Minutes**

December 21, 2022

TAC Attendees: Sue Adler, Melinda Allen, Charlie Brazil, Steve Brenneman, Jason Combs, Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Nancy Maia, Joseph Marinelli, and Michael Owens

TAC Absences: Mitch Linder

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

Guests: Will Reyes

Call to order: 8:36 AM

1. Approval of minutes from November 22, 2022

J. Combs asked if all members were able to review the minutes from the November 22, 2022 meeting and if there were any issues to consider. J. Combs requested to amend the November 2022 minutes concerning a statement he made about the Ghost Tours. He requested the minutes to say that “complaints were made to him from veteran tour guides about tour etiquette when providing narrations in the squares with other tours.”

J. Combs asked for a motion to pass the minutes. The minutes passed unanimously.

2. Director’s Report: Rachel Buck

- Nominations for Vice-Chairman of TAC

J. Combs opened the floor for discussion about 2023 Vice-Chairman nominee Sue Adler.

N. Maia stated that the VNA believed there were potential conflicts with the nomination. Specifically, the selected nominee’s appointment to the Visit Savannah board which further complicated matters.

J. Combs agreed with N. Maia and stated that S. Adler is currently a non-Savannah resident.

V. Goode-Walker added some institutional history to the discussion relative to questions in the past concerning HSF and TAC. V. Goode-Walker stated that HSF represents the preservation of the represented districts which is why the seat was extended to HSF initially.

J. Combs stated that after reading the Tourism Management Plan there is a recommendation made for TAC to include three groups of stakeholders comprising of tourism, residential, and preservationists.

A roll call vote proceeded for the nomination of Sue Adler as 2023 Vice-Chair of TAC.

Roll call vote:

S. Brenneman: Yes

M. Allen: Yes, via text (signal loss)

N. Maia: No.

J. Combs: No

J. Marinelli: Yes

M. Owens: Yes

C. Brazil: Yes

V. Goode-Walker: Yes

The motion to nominate Historic Savannah Foundation representative Sue Adler as the 2023 Vice-Chairmen of TAC passed with six in favor and two dissenting votes.

- 90 Day Bicycle Pilot Program / Bicycle and Segway Ordinance

R. Buck stated that she sent the final version of the Bicycle and Segway ordinance to TAC and the bicycle and Segway companies. R. Buck added that she had not received any direct emails concerning the ordinance but was aware that there had been communication with legal concerning the ordinance. R. Buck requested TAC take a vote on the ordinance as is to be moved to the Mayor and Alderman for consideration.

J. Combs seconded R. Buck's request and recognized staff's time and effort that went into creating the ordinance. J. Combs added that TAC was at an impasse with a few items; however, delaying the vote would not rectify those disagreements. J. Combs opened the floor up for discussion.

N. Maia stated that the VNA was not in favor of tour sizes being 15 patrons and that bicycles should not be allowed on the sidewalks nor perimeter of Forsyth Park.

J. Combs stated that he was fine with tour sizes being 15 patrons per group and did not like the idea of bicycles being in Forsyth Park but due to the design of Drayton and Whitaker, it could be a necessary evil. J. Combs stated that he was in favor of passing the ordinance and moving it forward to City Council.

J. Marinelli stated that he wished to thank J. Combs for the acknowledgment of the hard work staff put into the matter. J. Marinelli added that the committee had a year to discuss the matter and now was the time to move forward.

M. Owens stated his opposition to the ordinance regarding certain parts including needless regulation.

C. Brazil stated he agreed that the ordinance wasn't a perfect resolution which would prove difficult to reach either way and that the ordinance had been thoroughly considered by the committee. His recommendation was to move forward to the Mayor and City Council to iron out the details.

V. Goode-Walker agreed and added the ordinance should be moved forward to City Council.

A roll call vote proceeded to move the ordinance as is forward to the Mayor and Alderman for consideration.

Roll call vote:

S. Brenneman: Yes

M. Allen: Yes, via text (signal loss)

N. Maia: No

J. Combs: Yes

J. Marinelli: Yes

M. Owens: No

C. Brazil: Yes

V. Goode-Walker: Yes

S. Adler: Yes, but desired comments be made to City Council.

N. Maia stated that her casted vote was unanimous with the VNA board.

The motion to forward the ordinance as currently written to the Mayor and Alderman for consideration passed with seven in favor and two dissenting votes.

3. Creeper Van

R. Buck asked if everyone had a chance to read over the revised business plan for Creeper Van Savannah. R. Buck stated that Jennifer Long, the owner of Creeper Van, and her lawyer created a new business plan and removed items from the van that were a concern, including "free candy". R. Buck asked if anyone had any questions or concerns.

J. Combs added his concern regarding the degree of physical interaction of passing out of candy.

R. Buck confirmed Creeper Van's tour route. Stating the starting point would begin at the tour stop located at Reynolds Square and her final stop would be at the tour stop on Montgomery Street at Franklin Square.

M. Owens recommended a vote on approving the business plan.

S. Brenneman stated that what struck him about the business plan was the live streaming component.

J. Combs stated he believed there would be a live stream into the van that would that could be viewed online.

S. Brenneman added that at this time the business plan appeared too vague regarding operations.

N. Maia stated that she believed Ms. Long had addressed the biggest concerns and that she had no problem with it.

J. Combs agreed that the biggest concerns had been addressed, and as a new tour operator, she should be afforded the chance to go forth in the process.

C. Brazil stated that he wondered about the content but was cognizant of limitations as to what could be done regarding that. Additionally, he stated that he had not had sufficient time to read through the plan and recommended that if there was not a pressing need to move forward immediately suggested the matter be tabled for a vote at the next meeting to give the committee more time to consider everything.

J. Combs stated that he disagreed and added that the information had been provided to the committee before the meeting and recommended a vote be taken.

V. Goode-Walker asked about the name selection and whether it was ever a topic of discussion.

M. Owens added that Creeper Van is a direct acknowledgment of child molestation and child murder.

V. Goode-Walker agreed with M. Owens.

M. Owens added that the name was the biggest issue and remains as such.

J. Combs stated that the biggest issue was that the van displayed signage saying free candy in lettering made of duct tape.

M. Owens disagreed and a consensus was confirmed that the duct tape was not the issue.

M. Owens stated the issue is Creeper Van is making light of a serious matter. Furthermore, M. Owens doubted if the name issue could be regulated. M. Owens added that the name was not aligned with the aesthetics of the city of Savannah nor

aligned with what residents expect. It also does not add to the guest experience nor mutual goals.

V. Goode-Walker stated that the addition of the livestream was questionable as it could be viewed as an invasion of privacy.

M. Owens stated that he did not believe the livestreaming was in the committee's purview.

R. Buck asked if the name Creeper Van was still a concern to the committee.

M. Owens added that it did not fit within the aesthetics.

R. Buck stated the purpose of the discussion was to measure the thoughts of the committee regarding the business plan and the name as there wasn't a lot of information presented regarding operations previously. The main concerns were addressed but regulating the name posed a legal question in which the operating name could not be regulated. Furthermore, Ms. Long had met the criteria for registration purposes.

J. Marinelli stated that the city is moving toward an overall destination and a product branded experience to which this type of tour is not complimentary. Additionally, visitors and residents would find the name distasteful and would not find humor in it. J. Marinelli added that while he was not a fan of the name, he did appreciate the work that has been placed into the business model.

J. Herman stated the City is unable to regulate the content of speech which would extend to the name of the company. There was room, however, to convey to the applicant how uncomfortable the committee was regarding the name, specifically as it relates to the overall aesthetic of the community.

J. Combs asked for clarification regarding what impacts would this have on Ms. Long.

R. Buck stated that Ms. Long would still have the opportunity to move forward after the concerns had been addressed. A lot of time and effort had been made resolving concerns shared by the committee. Ms. Long would still move forward in the application process but would not be granted registration until all concerns had been addressed.

J. Combs asked R. Buck now that concerns had been made regarding the Creeper Van, what was the advice on how to move forward in the process.

S. Adler stated that it is important for TAC to have a voice in setting the stage of what Savannah should look like. It is important that when new businesses speak with TAC, they understand that the committee weighs their proposals seriously as the committee

is comprised of leaders that are invested in how the city looks. The problem is the image and perception of how this business looks in the city. The committee has to make the best decision for residents and businesses on how the city looks to the rest of the world. S. Adler further added that she was very uncomfortable with the business model and the name.

Several members stated they would like to invite Ms. Long to a meeting, outside of TAC, to hear more about her business plan.

R. Buck stated she would meet with Legal to identify the correct strategy on how to move forward. R. Buck further stated that she would prefer meeting with Ms. Long, Legal, and Cynthia Pelote prior to TAC members doing so.

4. Other Business

- **Email Blast**

J. Combs stated that there was an email blast regarding a crime spree involving short term rentals. There may have possibly been collusion between cleaning crews that were leaving doors and windows open in the downtown area. This has resulted in the possible skewing of crime numbers for the Savannah Police Department. A meeting has been planned, but not yet finalized, to discuss the matter with SPD. Any additional information will be shared when available.

- **Nancy Maia**

R. Buck congratulated N. Maia for her nomination and election as President of VNA for 2023 and that R. Madson would be taking over her seat on TAC.

N. Maia thanked everyone and stated she would miss being a part of the group. Furthermore, she would be implementing a tourism committee with VNA Victorian Neighborhood Association and R. Madson would serve as Chair of said committee.

R. Buck again thanked N. Maia for her time, energy, and words of wisdom.

Meeting adjourned at 9:26 AM