

**Tourism Advisory Committee  
Minutes**

February 28, 2023

**TAC Attendees:** Sue Adler, Melinda Allen, Charlie Brazil, Steve Brenneman, Ryan Madson, Joseph Marinelli, and Michael Owens

**TAC Absences:** Jason Combs, Vaughnette Goode-Walker and Mitch Linder

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

**Call to order: 8:32 AM**

**1. Approval of minutes from January 24, 2023**

- J. Marinelli asked for a motion to approve the January 24, 2023, meeting minutes. M. Owens made a motion to approve the minutes. M. Allen seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**2. Director's Report  
Bicycle Ordinance**

- R. Buck stated she has everything prepped and ready to submit to Mayor and Council for review. The ordinance package she will be submitting includes letters, TAC recommendation, staff recommendation, history of the bicycle ordinance, and the tourism industry. R. Buck stated it was requested that we hold off submitting until after Saint Patrick's Day due to so many things going on at this time.

R. Madson asked under what ordinance the Bicycle tours are currently operating. R. Buck stated they were not operating under any ordinance.

**St. Augustine Visit**

- R. Buck stated City staff, members of TAC, and other partners visited and met with the City of St. Augustine to include their City Manager, CVB, chamber, and local businesses to gain a better understanding on how they operate the Nights of Lights attraction. Ultimately the City decided adding a lights attraction was not a project it wants to take on but encouraged the private sector to explore it if it was something they wanted to attempt. The City would like to focus more on expanding holiday decorations.

J. Marinelli agreed it was a great experience and that it works really well for St. Augustine but he didn't think that it was something that needs to be put on

by the City of Savannah, that it wasn't the time to take on something else when we're just getting the momentum to move forward with expanding our holiday decorations. J. Marinelli added that the City of Savannah has an opportunity to do more and to add to their holiday decorations. J. Marinelli suggested creating a 3-year plan to upgrade the overall holiday presentation.

S. Adler suggested creating a holiday committee to host several think tank meetings to determine what is right for the City of Savannah. M. Owens commented that the city is not short on ideas but short on funding on what we want to create.

- **St. Patrick's Day- Susan Broker**

S. Broker stated that St. Patrick's Day falls on a Friday this year. The City is in full operation mode to make the event a success. Though the parade is one day the City is preparing for a two day event. City Command Center operations will begin Thursday evening and run through Sunday morning.

S. Broker stated this year not only will each square have SPD officers they will also have City Marshals that will help monitor activity and help clean out the squares. She continued by stating food trucks will be allowed on private property only. None will be permitted on the public right of way.

M. Owens stated he recently pulled occupancy stats for hotels in the area and is confident occupancy will be between 90-95% occupancy rates.

S. Broker stated with next year being the 200<sup>th</sup> St. Patrick's Day Parade she would like to pull the Mayor's committee back together after this year's parade to start preparing for the 200<sup>th</sup>.

- **New Tour Request- Susan Broker and Rachel Buck**

S. Broker stated that Mobility and Parking received a request for a new Quadricycle Company which will begin with two bikes and expand to four within the year. Upon receipt of the request, SEFT and Mobility and Parking met to discuss critical mass and how much more our infrastructure could handle. She explained the medallion system was suggested in the Tourism Management Plan and that it is time we start discussing our options. S. Broker stated that she and Sean Brandon decided we need to start gathering data on the growth of Tour Service Vehicles. S. Broker requested feedback from TAC on the creation of the Tourism Management Plan (TMP).

J. Marinelli requested staff send the committee a copy of the TMP so they could refresh themselves on the plan.

S. Broker sent an email with the Tourism Management Plan to the committee while the meeting was still in progress.

R. Buck stated there were 178 registered tour service vehicles on the streets last year. She continued by stating the issue is the congestion at the tour stands that is creating both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. There are currently 39 tour stands available for tour service vehicles and the City cannot take more parking to add more tour stands. R. Buck also stated the queuing is taking longer at each stand due to the number of visitors in the city.

R. Buck stated the Tour Services for Hire Ordinance needs a complete overhaul because as written, the ordinance does not help City staff regulate the industry properly. She plans to start editing the ordinance upon her return from maternity leave.

J. Marinelli asked if editing the ordinance was something staff did or is it something that the TAC would be involved in?

S. Broker stated the current TSFH ordinance is a great blueprint, but it doesn't have a lot of teeth. S. Broker stated that when changes are recommended to sections of the ordinance, it is critical for TAC members to be part of the conversation. S. Broker stated that, while the TSFH ordinance is an issue, the more pressing issue is the addition of more tour service vehicles being added to an existing tour company fleet and on the street. S. Broker would like to revisit the medallion system and critical mass topic in the next six months to develop a plan to control the number of vehicles on the street.

J. Marinelli asked staff to highlight some areas in the TMP for the committee to look at this summer to come up some ideas while R. Buck is on leave so when she returns we can discuss and get to work.

Discussion continued about the potential pros and cons of a medallion system.

### 3. Other business

- **Sustainable Tourism- Ryan Madson**

R. Madson stated sustainable tourism could be an introduction to the review of the TMP. R. Madson stated he is skeptical about the term sustainable because it's often used for greenwashing. Big corporations and marketing firms use it frequently. The term can also be confusing because it is used to describe eco-tourism. His understanding of sustainable tourism is understanding that there are limits to growth, there's limits to economic growth, just like there are limits to global economic growth. R. Madson continued by saying Savannah has finite resources and he would like to recognize the limits to growth locally before we get there, though there are already members of the VNA that believe the city has crossed that threshold, and that we are at capacity.

R. Madson further explained it is time we recognize both positive and negative impacts of tourism so we can minimize the negative and maximize the positive while addressing the needs of the city and the community.

**Meeting adjourned at 9:23 AM**