

**Tourism Advisory Committee
Minutes**

March 28, 2023

TAC Attendees: Melinda Allen, Charlie Brazil, Steve Brenneman, Jason Combs Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Mitch Linder, Joseph Marinelli, and Michael Owens

TAC Absences: Sue Adler and Ryan Madson

City Staff: Susan Broker, Rachel Buck, Jennifer Herman, and Cynthia Pelote

Guests: Nancy Maia (Representative for Ryan Madson) and Marysue McCarthy

Call to order: 8:33 AM

1. Approval of minutes from February 28, 2023

- J. Marinelli asked for a motion to approve the February 28, 2023, meeting minutes. S. Brenneman made a motion to approve the minutes. M. Owens seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Director's Report

St. Patrick's Day- Susan Broker

- S. Broker stated that it was a great weekend overall for St. Patrick's Day. The city moved the emergency command center to the Floyd Adams complex which worked better than expected. The command center was staffed Thursday evening through Sunday morning.

Arrests were down this year specifically for drunk and disorderly and fighting. As of Saturday night, there was one arrest for fighting and one for drunk and disorderly.

S. Broker stated this year the city had SPD officers and City Marshals in each square that helped monitor activity and clean out the squares. Both SPD and City Marshals worked collaboratively to identify issues as they developed. Incidents were then called into the command center where they were assessed and dispatched the appropriate emergency response.

S. Broker stated with next year being the 200th 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 200th.

J. Marinelli opened the floor for discussion about the 2023 Parade.

M. Owens confirmed there were 48 arrests by Georgia State Patrol and 4 by SPD for DUI.

Overall, the conversation was positive with several suggestions for improvements. TAC members commended the efforts that were made this year to reduce the amount of trash left in the parks, squares, and streets.

M. Linder and M. Allen requested more restrooms be added near the end of the parade with temporary signage directing people to the nearest restroom. M. Linder stated everyone seems to think the restrooms at the Desoto are open to the public, so it becomes a madhouse when the parade disbands.

M. Allen also requested that the regular trash schedule be revised to pick up after the parade in the residential areas because many trashcans in the lanes were overflowing by the end of the day and were not picked up until their regular trash day the following Thursday.

S. Brenneman suggested selling plots for the parade to avoid people camping out and setting out chairs too early.

Critical Mass/Medallion System - Tourism Management Plan

- S. Broker stated that Mobility and Parking received a request for a new Quadricycle Company. 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 requested direction from the TAC as to what data we as a city need to collect to start the conversation.

M.Owens offered a brief history of the trolley system and how trolleys are not just a tour product they are a means of transportation. He continued by stating medallion systems are not for every city and that we must be careful when making decisions that impact equity and not push the small players out. He agreed something needs to be done but we need to approach this in terms of what works for Savannah's tourism industry.

V. Goode-Walker stated as a small company when she hears the word medallion system, she thinks of New York, congestion, and problems down the line. She suggested inviting the companies, neighborhoods, and hotels that will be impacted by the medallion system to the table to be part of the conversation.

R. Buck stated she would like to include walking tours when discussing critical mass. The number of walking tours grows exponentially each year, and it is important we include them in this process. R. Buck continued by

stating the word medallion system is a scary word and that whatever solution we come up with does not have to be called a medallion system, we can say we have x number of tour service decals to distribute in a year.

J. Marinelli suggested taking a step back to determine what the definition of a medallion system is and requested staff create a one-page document that outlines what a medallion system is so we can all start on the same page.

M. Allen stated imposing restrictions of any kind will be impossible to make things fair and profitable across the board, ultimately someone will be upset about it.

N. Maia stated there is a benefit in looking at the various systems already in place and determining why they do and don't work. Doing this would allow us to come up with a plan that has the least negative impact.

C. Brazil stated Old Town Trolley does operate in other cities where there are franchise or medallion systems in place. He continued by stating there are benefits and detriments to the systems. There is rarely a one size fits all solution because each tour product is impacted differently. He stated it is important we remember Savannah is unique and, in this process, we need to be deliberate in identifying our priorities.

3. Other Business

Tourism Fees

- S. Brenneman requested information on how much the city charges tourism companies, films, and events to operate, utilize the right of way, and rent squares. He stated if we charged more maybe there would be less demand for the space.

J. Herman stated the city adopts an annual revenue ordinance every year and all the fees S. Brenneman requested are listed in the ordinance. The only fees that can be charged are regulatory.

R. Buck stated all tour service companies are charged the price of their business tax certificate and those with vehicles are also charged \$160.00 per vehicle. Fees obtained by Mobility and Parking go into the general fund.

C. Brazil stated there was previously a preservation fee, but the city does not charge that fee anymore. V. Goode-Walker continued by stating the fee was \$1.00 per patron on your tour, that fee was supposed to go to maintaining the monuments, parks, and squares. The preservation fee was challenged, and the city lost.

J. Herman confirmed the preservation fee was ultimately a tax that the city could not defend. The preservation fee was repealed, and she does not recommend resurrecting it.

Meeting adjourned at 9:23 AM