

**Tourism Advisory Committee  
Minutes**

June 27, 2023

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

**TAC Absences:** Rachel Buck, Mitch Linder, Vaughnette Goode-Walker

**City Staff:** Susan Broker, Davita Grier, Jennifer Herman, and Joseph Shearouse Jr.

**Director's Report –**

**Susan Broker** introduced Joseph Shearhouse Jr. and explained his role in the rebuild of River Street and the River Street Streetscape Plan. She expressed her involvement in the project, from the Public Participation Piece standpoint. S. Broker explained that she and J. Shearhouse discussed hiring a staff member to assist because of the amount of engagement necessary to get the job done.

**River Street Streetscape Plan Update**

J. Shearhouse shared an overview of the progress of the River Street rebuild. J. Shearhouse started by reviewing some of the work that has already been done and how he plans to use it as a baseline for the River Street Rebuild Project. He emphasized the issue of parking and transportation amongst visitors throughout the downtown area leading to River Street. He also reviewed a few recommendations from the 'Visioning and Gateway Plan' of 2010.

J. Shearhouse referred to the Downtown Master Plan in 2011, stating that although it was broadly focused on the entire downtown, it also primarily highlighted the focus of transportation and mobility movement, as well as emphasized the sectioned neighborhoods and the Oglethorpe Plan summarizing how the development protected the elements of Savannah, etc.

Shearhouse spoke about trying to finalize and produce the Public Engagement Plan within the next few months. Intending to work with an extensive internal team to finalize and launch the Public Engagement Plan within the next month or so to start that engagement and then work on getting an RFP out and released by Fall or late 2023.

M. Owens asked if the RFP was for a conceptual design?

J. Shearhouse stated they are leaning towards a Design/Bid Build which means 1 RFP would provide a final construction design, provide a guaranteed price, and then would build out the design. City staff is looking to address all challenges that may arise as they did in the past with Broughton Street.

S. Broker expressed the potential issue of the gap in time between the processes to involve the public engagement and the start of construction.

M. Owens addressed a few of the practical issues that need to be considered such as trees blocking viewsheds, creating value, and how putting a stage on the other side may interfere with those having lunch who may not want to be a part of the acoustics, etc.; ultimately, stating that

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it's great to involve the public's input but also putting more focus more towards those who are qualified to discuss the functionality of the design rather than those who are not.

J. Marinelli asked what role if any, does TAC have in this process?

S. Broker stated the TAC serves as a sounding board for the community and is a critical part of the Public Participation Plan.

J. Marinelli acknowledged when the public becomes knowledgeable of this project, many will have tons of recommendations and complaints but ultimately, he is grateful that TAC will be consulted throughout the process and will have the opportunity to contribute.

R. Madson urges that the RFP be worded in such a way as to avoid the dazzle and wow expectation? but also write the procurement so we are getting firms who are in-depth and familiar with major capital improvement, infrastructure projects, and landscape architects rather than a local firm who is not as experienced. He continued by stating, whatever way the procurement is agreed upon, the RFP should be set up to attract and capture the depth and importance of capital improvement, infrastructure projects, and landscape architects directly, so that it helps eliminate those firms who have little to no experience in dealing with a project like this.

J. Combs, asked J. Shearhouse "What are you going to do about the incredible blowback you are going to get from eliminating all of the parking except for ADA spaces; are you committed to sticking with it or are you thinking of removing that part of the plan and keep the parking?"

J. Shearhouse stated that removing the parking was still undecided and more research will be done before making a final decision.

Discussion about convenience and inconvenience of parking downtown continued. J. Marinelli explained that all concerns and feedback will be addressed accordingly as the project begins to unfold.

### **Holiday Programming Plan**

S. Broker started by acknowledging her request for an increase in budget. She spoke on the directive from the City Manager for a holiday Winter Wonderland and to take care of the neighborhoods. The requested budget to do so was \$433,000 but was only approved for \$50,000 which may not be enough to cover all costs of the holiday suggestions. She's been considering working with a few outside organizations to help support and offset the cost that was going to be spent downtown; she requested to put the money awarded from that toward the neighborhoods' decorating.

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S. Broker revealed there is a new decoration for downtown that will be unveiled at the next TAC meeting in August. She spoke on how getting bids for bows and wreaths are expensive and she is looking to move money from other portions of the budget to put toward the holiday decorating.

S. Broker discussed the outage of the Broughton Street string lights stating the electrical load is too much for the traffic poles which is why sections are out. She is working with the city's electrical contractor Aiken Harper to improve the functionality of the Broughton lights with new electrical boxes. \*Looking to have that done within the next 6 weeks or so.

S. Broker continued by stating she has been meeting with Visit Savannah, to discuss SAMMI contributions which is a committee that brings money to the table to assist with holiday decorating. She will also be meeting with J. Marinelli soon to discuss how much money will be needed this year, estimating anywhere between about \$8-100,000 to be primarily funded to the downtown area. Last year, there were lighting improvements. Some of the bridges along Factors Walk were lit nicely that caused a lot of attraction; \*Looking to continue that this year.

S. Broker stated the city plans to purchase all new garland and bows for all residential squares, replacing the live garland with faux garland for more cost efficiency. Yamacraw Square will also be included in that plan.

J. Marinelli intercedes and exclaims that the notion of a Winter Wonderland is not as important as developing a much-improved holiday décor in a realistic fashion. Therefore, as the person sitting in the seat this year, Winter Wonderland is not as critical as a more improved holiday décor for our community and visitors.

S. Broker redirects the focus to the tree on Bull Street; she would like to do something in Ellis Square, as well as small activations, throughout the city where people could visit and take photos.

M. Allen asked if the residents will be installing the faux greenery or are we hiring someone to do it?

S. Broker stated we will work on installation together because there is a certain way to install it and budget restrictions.

### **Office of Nightlife Report – RHI Summit – July 13**

S. Broker stated an email was sent out regarding the date for the presentation of report findings from Responsible Hospitality Institute study for the nightlife office. There will be two sessions on July 13<sup>th</sup> held at the Coastal GA Center. S. Broker stated she sent an email back in May to TAC but did not receive any feedback, she then requested if members had any feedback to please share it. The summit will be an opportunity for the consultant to present all the steps and statistics included in the process to reach these conclusions.

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S. Broker continued stating there has been multiple discussion internally on how this is the first opportunity to convey this to the public and it is very important how it's done. We don't want people to become skeptical about how much money has been put into this and is looking for support from the committee. She urges those who have participated and are supportive of the contract to be involved.

As we move toward opening the new office, there will be another committee set up to focus more on the nighttime activities. S. Broker invited TAC to participate, cautioning she hasn't fully discerned exactly how the committee will be constructed.

J. Marinelli intercedes and requests that everyone on the committee engage in at least one of those sessions on July 13, so when the next meeting occurs in Sept. everyone will have an idea.

J. Combs asked if S. Broker if she's contacted any media yet about trying to get stories out about it. S. Broker mentioned she's been working with the public communications team on creating a plan to present to the media.

S. Broker stated that another recommendation that RHI proposed, was to have an advisory group that brought together operators, residents, other types of businesses, and organizations like the Homeless Authority. Further explaining that several years ago, she gathered a group called the Downtown Collaborative and they met monthly to address daily issues and held the staff accountable. There have been numerous conversations around the topic internally about managing exceptions as well as concrete changes, focusing on balance and compliance starting this new office.

S. Broker has placed a service enhancement request for additional staff, and additional resources for the Ellis Square Office, but is unsure what will be approved. As of right now, all funding for the nightlife office will be pulled from the general operating budget which is extremely limited.

Charlie states that some of the most important issues are more so, mobility and public safety. While promoting the start of this is great, the measures taken around the runoff of the project don't seem to focus on public safety and managing it. Extreme issues are happening during nighttime activities and very little response.

S. Broker addresses an issue mentioned and says that she is doing her best to maintain the issue accordingly working on the public safety plan.

### **Patriot Run – September 9**

S. Broker presented a new partnership the city is engaged in, with the Garrison Commander from Fort Stewart Hunter Army, and the mayor. Every year Hunter hosts a Patriot Run at Hunter to commemorate 9/11. There are about 4,000 runners. This year, it is being moved off base, into Savannah using it as a great opportunity to start a local homegrown run that the participants can be supportive of.

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It's planned for Sept. 9th with an activity planned, the previous Friday night for registration. The event will be done around 10p.

**Bicycle Ordinance**

S. Broker concludes by stating the City Manager asked that the Bicycle Ordinance be put on hold back in April. She has just been informed that it will be presented in front of council sometime in September/October. She will be drafting a memo to the City Manager to get it on the agenda and will keep TAC updated as to when it is approved to be put on the agenda and if a workshop will take place.

**Meeting adjourned 9:30 a.m.**