



**Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting  
January 23, 2024**

**Meeting Attendees**

1. Susan Broker (City of Savannah)
2. Edward Grant (City of Savannah)
3. Rachel Buck (City of Savannah)
4. Jen Herman (City of Savannah)
5. Heath Lloyd (City of Savannah)
6. Sue Adler (TAC Chair)
7. Joe Marinelli (TAC)
8. Mary-Sue McCarthy (TAC for Melinda Allen)
9. Jason Combs (TAC)
10. Vaughnette Goode-Walker (TAC)
11. Charlie Brazil (TAC)
12. Stephen Brenneman (TAC)
13. Mitch Linder (TAC)
14. David McDonald (Guest)
15. Denise Flojo (Guest)

**Meeting Summary**

The meeting opened with a discussion about the approval of minutes from several past meetings and the transition toward utilizing technology for more precise meeting minute documentation. Additionally, discussions revolved around the establishment of a Task Force dedicated to addressing quality of life concerns related to trolleys and walking tours, intending to achieve resolutions. This Task Force aims to include representatives from both the tourism industry and neighborhood organizations.

During the meeting, trolley companies discussed new speaker systems designed to reduce noise levels, with potential adjustments estimated at \$12,000 per trolley. The TAC members engaged in extensive discourse regarding the necessity of a comprehensive solution involving all trolley and tour companies. They also discussed the progress made and challenges faced in implementing this new system. TAC also discussed ongoing research and dialogues about the horse carriage industry and bicycle ordinance.

The meeting concluded with actionable items, including follow-ups on the horse carriage discussion, as well as the finalization of recommendations for the bicycle ordinance.

## **Outline**

### **Minutes Approval and Transition to Technology.**

- Susan highlighted the importance of capturing accurate meeting minutes and the transition to using technology for this purpose. (Susan Broker)
- The minutes for October and December meetings were lengthy and important due to guest presentations. (Susan Broker)
- The option to vote on the minutes electronically or wait until the next meeting was discussed. (Sue Adler)
- Efforts were made to ensure accurate attribution of speakers' statements in the captured minutes. (Susan Broker)

### **Discussion on Electronic Voting for Minutes Approval.**

- Consideration of electronic voting for past minutes approval was discussed, with some members expressing no urgency for it. (Sue Adler)
- Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of electronic voting due to potential lack of review by all members. (Jason Combs)
- It was decided that meeting minutes from October, December, and today's meeting would be approved in person. (Group Consensus)

### **Role and Objectives of the Tourism Advisory Council.**

- The Chairwoman opened the meeting with a discussion about the role of TAC and reminded the group that TAC was assembled by the Mayor and Aldermen to provide advice and support to improve quality of life and tourism, with a focus on achieving agreement, particularly between the neighborhood and tourism industry representatives. (Sue Adler)
- The Chairwoman also acknowledged that TAC members are volunteers, and their time and contributions are much appreciated. (Sue Adler)

### **Proposal of a Quality of Life Task Force to address concerns about impacts of tourism.**

- Sue Adler stated that we must move forward with recommendations and initially suggested TAC could serve as the Task Force.
- Joe Marinelli stated that he sees this more as a "sub-committee" of TAC who would bring recommendations to TAC in a timely manner. Joe Marinelli specifically stated the need for timely resolution of the identified issues in the original DNA report.
- Steve Brenneman said it made sense to have an "ad hoc" task force to focus on trolleys.
- Vaughnette Goode Walker stated that there are more walking tours on the streets.
- Charlie Brazil stated that it makes sense to combine walking and trolley tours because there may be complimentary solutions. He further stated his agreement that it should be an ad hoc task force that addresses these issues because task forces are more nimble and singularly focused, not getting bogged down with a larger scope.
- Charlie Brazil stated that the trolley companies are already making steps to address some of the concerns.
- Sue Adler asked TAC to consider the makeup of the task force.

- Rachel Buck said staff has an idea of who they would like to serve on the task force based on specific issues. For example, if we are discussing walking tours, we would want Vaughnette Goode Walker present. Rachel stated it is important to give people who are not normally at the table an opportunity to participate.
- Charlie Brazil stated there could be core members of the task force and then bring in subject matter experts based on specific topics.
- Susan Broker stated that regardless of whom from TAC serves as the "core group" the task force needs continuity. Susan asked Sue Adler to ask for two tourism industry members and two neighborhood-based representatives from TAC. These members would be invited to every meeting, regardless of topic. This will give us continuity with TAC and allow us to bring in subject matter experts.
- Vaughnette Goode Walker thanked staff for communicating with the walking tour industry.
- Sue Adler asked for volunteers. Charlie Brazil and Vaughnette Goode Walker volunteered.
- Mary Sue McCarthy volunteered although she was in attendance representing Melina Allen.
- Steve Brenneman stated that Mary Sue would be a good representative for DNA, but not as a TAC member.
- Jason Combs volunteered.
- Steve Brenneman stated that either he or Melinda would volunteer. He will check with Melinda and let Sue and Rachel know who would be serving.
- Sue Adler stated the TAC members on the task force will be: Vaughnette, Charlie, Jason, and Melinda/Steve. Rachel and Susan will invite others outside of TAC to serve as subject matter experts.

### **Trolley Route Changes.**

- Sue Adler asked staff to provide an update on the progress being made with the trolley companies, specifically regarding the routes and noise.
- Rachel Buck stated she has met with the trolley companies who have made recommendations for route changes. These route changes are in direct response to the DNA concerns.
- Charlie Brazil stated Old Town Trolley has eliminated their tour along Rainbow Row. He said the DNA presentation resonated with them and so they elected to remove that section of their tour entirely. He believes that this change coupled with what Old Savannah is doing will yield about an 80% reduction in trolley traffic in that area. Old Town Trolley will continue to look at where potential pinch points are and identify solutions.
- Rachel Buck stated Old Savannah Tours has several options to partially avoid Washington Square and she was working with them to find the best solution. She also stated people need to be mindful because there is always road construction, development, and other reasons roads are closed. When this happens, trolleys often have to make decisions in the field to detour around the road closures. Kelley Tours does not operate in the Washington Square area unless they have a chartered tour or a special occasion like a wedding.
- Steve Brenneman asked when the route changes will go into effect. Charlie Brazil stated they are just waiting on approval from the City.
- Steve Brenneman also stated that he and others will now have to conduct data collection again because these changes will just move the problem elsewhere.
- Charlie Brazil answered that his route changes are being based on the DNA report and his intention is to relocate the trolleys to areas with lower or no residential.
- Sue Adler thanked Charlie for his commitment to change.

- Susan Broker said the good news is all three trolley companies listened and are actively addressing the issues. Now that we have our task force, we will bring them back to the table and determine if we are creating different "pinch points." Ultimately, staff will bring TAC a map showing all of the routes and where the pinch points are located.
- Charlie Brazil stated we need a consensus on the definition of a "pinch point." For example, if one person complains, does that constitute a pinch point?
- Vaughnette Goode Walker questioned whether all walking tours strictly adhere to the routes they submit to the City.
- Jason Combs stated the City has software that will map the routes.

### **Trolley Noise Reduction.**

- Charlie Brazil stated the trolley companies discussed the installation of new directional speakers to reduce noise. Old Town Trolley conducted a test of the new speakers and observed a tremendous difference in sound. You cannot hear the sound outside of the trolley, even when standing next to it.
- Rachel Buck stated the cost to modify each trolley with new speakers was estimated to be around \$12,000, potentially taking over a year to complete.
- Joe Marinelli had the opportunity to participate in the demonstration and reports that the sound difference is remarkable. Joe suggests a demonstration for the neighborhoods, the City Manager, and the Mayor so everyone can see what a difference the speakers make. Joe also stated that 12K is a big hit but that some folks in the industry, like Michael Owens, were looking for ways to assist with the program. Joe said he was initially in favor of the in-ear technology he has experienced in other cities but said this product is much better. The clarity is perfect.
- Charlie Brazil apologized to anyone who is "put off" by not being invited, but the demonstration was actually the installation of the speakers. Charlie wants the first impression to the larger group to be perfect and he knew that there were issues with integration with inverter and existing PA system so it may not be perfect. He will have another demonstration when everything is installed correctly.
- Charlie Brazil stated he invited the other trolley companies because this can't be an Old Town Trolley solution, it needs to be a comprehensive solution.
- Charlie Brazil is planning for a demonstration once everything is functioning as planned. He said that the issue of noise was brought to them in December, and they have found a solution in January; he hopes this commitment resonates with the DNA.
- Joe Marinelli agreed and said the efficiency with which Charlie and his company brought forth a solution should not be lost on this group. This is another example of the collaboration with the trolley companies.
- Sue Adler agreed and said the trolley route changes are also indicative of the commitment on behalf of the trolley companies.
- Sue Adler asked if all the trolley companies are on board.
- Charlie Brazil said he cannot speak for all of the companies about this particular product as there may be other solutions that are better for a different company. However, there is an overall commitment to reduce sound. Old Town Trolley is already looking at budgeting and timelines for implementation.
- Joe Marinelli said Will Green from Old Savannah Tours ordered speakers and tested them but after seeing the speakers Charlie Brazil has, he is returning his speakers.
- Susan Broker asked Charlie to let her know when he might be ready for a demonstration to a larger group.

- Sue Adler said she would like a report at the next meeting of where all the trolley companies are in regard to addressing the noise issue. She has concerns about the cost for the other companies.
- Steve Brenneman stated the task force may come back with a recommendation that the City mandate the trolley companies to utilize the speakers so it wouldn't matter if they can't afford it.

#### **Horse Carriage Industry Research and Meetings.**

- Rachel Buck stated she had her initial meeting with the horse carriage owners and activist groups. Everyone was asked to bring, in writing, a list of pros and cons regarding the industry. The next step is Rachel will meet with the activist group and the carriage companies separately to get a better sense of what they are really requesting in terms of ordinance modifications.
- The activist group members are not all on the same page. For example, one person wants a complete ban of the industry while another just wants changes to heat/seasonal regulations.
- Susan Broker reminded the group that a directive was given from the City Manager for staff to find consensus, primarily on the heat and seasonal operations of the carriages.
- Steve Brenneman mentioned that he and Michael Owens had the chance to visit one of the carriage companies' operations. There was also a vet present during the meeting.

#### **Bicycle Ordinance and Tourist Service for Hire Ordinance.**

- Mary Sue McCarthy asked about the status of the bicycle ordinance.
- Susan Broker stated the bicycle ordinance is ready for review by the city manager. We were asked last year to place this on hold.
- Susan has a meeting with Heath soon to discuss how to address all of the Tour Service for Hire ordinance changes. We know we will have a lot of changes to the ordinance in the next year and we need to decide if it's better to handle those one by one or as a group.
- Susan Broker also stated once staff has written the ordinance and Legal has approved it, it is the City Manager's decision about when to place it on Council agenda.
- Sue Adler asked Jen Herman if Legal had an opinion about presenting ordinance changes singularly or in a group. Jen Herman replied she does not.
- There being no further business, Sue Adler thanked the members for a good first meeting and adjourned the meeting at 9:37AM.