



**Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC)
June 25, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Date: June 25th, 2024

Location: Savannah City Hall, 2nd Floor Media Room

TAC Attendees: Sue Adler, Steve Brenneman, Jason Combs, Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Mitch Linder, Ryan Madson

Absentees: Melinda Allen, Charlie Brazil, Joe Marinelli, Michael Owens

City Staff: Ashley Anderson, Susan Broker, Rachel Buck, Edward Grant

Guest Attendees: David McDonald (Melinda Allen), Gary Patrick (Charlie Brazil)
Patricia Perry (Michael Owens)

Call to order: 8:31 AM.

Summary

The TAC meeting held on June 25, 2024, covered key topics including the introduction of new executive-level leadership, Special Events, Film and Tourism (SEFT) budget requests for 2025, and a presentation of a new tour company, Dining Around Town. Discussions included logistical challenges for the proposed tour company, enforcement staffing needs, and the ongoing debate regarding a ban on horse carriages in the city. The meeting also addressed a recent FOIA request impacting several City employees. Key decisions involved drafting a recommendation on the horse carriage industry and implementing a pause on new tour company applications until January 2025. The meeting concluded with agreed action items and was adjourned at 10:04 AM.

1. Approval of meeting minutes

- S. Adler initiated the meeting by requesting a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the April 23, 2024 meeting. A motion was made by M. Linder and seconded by V. Goode-Walker. The motion was unanimously approved.

2. Special Events, Film and Tourism staff update

- S. Broker announced the new Chief of Planning and Economic Development, Faye DiMassimo from Chatham Area Transit. S. Broker stated F. DiMassimo will most likely attend August 2024 TAC meeting.
- SEFT staff also introduced Ashley Anderson as their new Tourism Project Coordinator.

Budget Request for 2025

- Susan presented the 2025 budget request, highlighting staffing deficiencies and enforcement requirements. The request sought to address these issues by proposing the addition of two coordinators and eight enforcement team members, with a particular emphasis on nighttime safety and quality of life compliance officers. The goal is to alleviate pressure on the police force while enhancing the capability to resolve community issues effectively.

3. Potential New Tour Company Presentation: Dining Around Town

- Ms. Bonet introduced Dining Around Town, a new tour company aiming to offer a unique experience combining culture, history, and cuisine. The company plans to operate six motorized tours daily using a converted school bus equipped with climate control, wheelchair accessibility, and gourmet offerings. During discussions, topics included the tour route, coordination with existing tours, and logistical considerations.
- Feedback from TAC members prompted revisions to comply with the Tour Services for Hire Ordinance, specifically regarding vehicle requirements. Concerns were raised about restroom breaks, with G. Patrick questioning how the company would accommodate restroom breaks adding logistic issues with the use of the tour service stands and size of vehicle. Additionally, he noted challenges with navigating around town due to existing trolley routes and the amount of other tour service vehicles on the street. R. Madson proposed conducting a trial run to address these operational issues.
- The TAC expressed concerns about the proposed tour company's type of vehicle, length of tour, how the size of the proposed vehicle would impact the tour duration, tour route, restroom stop/utilization of tour bus stops and logo and bus design. The TAC proposed revising the business plan to address the concerns and coming back to the table.

4. Staff Report: Horse Drawn Carriage Industry

- R. Buck provided a brief update on the industry emphasizing the advocates pushing for a ban on the horse drawn carriage industry. TAC members deliberated on the potential impacts of such a ban on local businesses and the welfare of the animals involved. They considered issuing a formal statement to the City Manager, Mayor, and Council regarding the matter. V. Goode-Walker drew parallels with Charleston, recalling her experience with horses and noting differences in regulatory requirements. R. Madson confirmed TAC's commitment to reviewing relevant research and offering recommendations accordingly. The group also discussed the current number of horse-drawn carriage companies in Savannah and reviewed global trends where other cities have implemented similar bans.
- S. Breneman reviewed the horse-drawn carriage task force research and concluded that the current ordinance is robust, advocating against any revisions. J. Combs concurred, citing his own observations and research that carriage companies are compliant with city regulations under the tour services for hire ordinance. He emphasized the historical significance of carriage tours to Savannah.

5. Other Business:

- During the meeting, the board discussed implementing a six-month pause on approving new tour companies to address concerns about potential tourism saturation. R. Madson raised questions about the board's responsibility in evaluating proposals without

escalating existing issues. He emphasized the importance of establishing limits on growth, suggesting strategies such as capping, medallions or setting specific quotas for tours per day, week, year, or season. Other members also expressed community concerns regarding over-tourism.

- R. Madson made a motion that from June 25, 2024 there would be a pause on the approval of any new tour company registrations excluding tour companies who had already engaged with the Office of Special Events, Film and Tourism. S. Brenneman seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously, resulting in the implementation of a pause on new tour company applications until January 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 10:04 AM

These minutes were prepared by Ashley Anderson, reviewed, and approved by Rachel Buck.

Next Meeting: July 23rd, 2024, at 8:30 a.m., Savannah City Hall, 2nd Floor Media Room