



Tourism Advisory Committee
Tourism Advisory Committee
October 22, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Date: October 22, 2024

Location: Historic Savannah Foundation, Conference Room

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

Absentees: Joe Marinelli and Michael Owens

City Staff: Ashley Anderson, Susan Broker, Donna Cooper, Faye DiMassimo, Will Gillison

Guest attendees: Dee Ann Geeslin (Joe Marinelli), Lee Hughes, Keith Lanier, Marysue McCarthy, Brenna Michaels, Timothy Michaels, Steve Mott, Hamp Murphy, Gary Patrick, Patricia Perry (Michael Owens), Stephen Plunk, Nancy Radke

Call to order: 8:31 AM

Summary:

The meeting focused on proposed modifications to the walking tour ordinance, including limits on participants, time restrictions, and geographic boundaries. A consensus was reached on the need for a pilot program to evaluate these changes. Key decisions included recommending a maximum number of participants per tour and establishing restricted areas and times for walking tours. The discussion also addressed safety and compliance issues related to Lulu lift services, upcoming TAC leadership changes, and plans for updating tourism industry management and ordinances. Additionally, the Savannah Waterfront CID initiative was discussed, along with the need for a more efficient process for moving proposals to city council.

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes

S. Adler initiated the meeting by requesting a motion to approve the meeting minutes from September 24, 2024. A motion was made by V. Goode-Walker and seconded by M. Allen.

Staff report:

Walking Tour Ordinance Review and Proposed Modifications

- S. Broker presented a PowerPoint outlining recommendations from the walking tour task force, with input from TAC members, regarding the Tour Services for Hire Ordinance. Staff proposed a maximum of 20 participants per tour, DNA proposed a max of 15, while the task force recommended allowing up to 25 participants per tour. Tours with 10 or more participants would be required to use in-ear technology, and enforcement of the current noise ordinance was also recommended.

Tourism Compliance Officer Gillison has been monitoring nighttime walking tours for three weeks, during which no violations of the noise ordinance were observed. Geographic restrictions were discussed, with differing recommendations from the city and the walking tour industry. A time restriction of 10:30 PM was agreed upon, but further discussions are needed concerning geographic boundaries and participant numbers.

Walking Tour Pilot Program Proposal

- S. Broker proposed a pilot program to test the suggested changes before making a full modification to the ordinance. The pilot will include a map of restricted areas to support enforcement and educational efforts. The goal is to find a solution that balances business operations with the community's quality of life. Feedback from the task force will be incorporated into the pilot program prior to its submission for approval.

The discussion continued with opinions on what areas should be restricted, and which Squares should remain accessible. In addition to the previously mentioned squares, areas like Franklin, Ellis, and Reynold Squares experience heavy commercial traffic until 3-4 a.m., primarily from pub crawls. These tours are already operating in areas with no expectation of quiet hours.

Lulu Lift/Rides Compliance Issues

- S. Broker discussed ongoing issues with Lulu Lift vehicles, which are driving erratically, including up sidewalks, and causing disturbances. These vehicles are not classified as shuttles, as they have fewer than seven seats, but they operate similarly to pedicabs. Complaints include loud music, unsafe loading and unloading in crosswalks, and safety concerns with passengers sitting in laps or hanging out of the vehicles. Citations will be issued based on state code, and efforts are underway with Code Compliance and Mobility and Parking to explore local solutions. City Attorney and A. Anderson are involved in monitoring and addressing these issues.

A. Anderson also shared that two meetings were held with Lulu Rides after receiving video footage showing their vehicles driving down one-way streets. Lulu Rides acknowledged the issue and expressed a desire to fix it, promising to address the violations with their employees. However, there is uncertainty about their compliance, and until fines or compliance officers are in place, the situation will need to be monitored. Recently, there was another incident involving their scooters, where someone nearly got hit, highlighting ongoing concerns with their operations.

November Meeting + Nominations for 2025 (2026 non-tourism)

- S. Broker inquired about potential candidates for vice chairman. S. Adler mentioned that Mitch Linder was interested, and confirmation could be made at the next TAC meeting. S. Broker also noted that Eddie Grant will be leaving for a position in Dallas, which will significantly impact the department. R. Buck will soon be on maternity leave, and Ashley and S. Broker will be stepping in during her absence.

Upcoming Events and Safety Measures

- S. Broker discussed the upcoming Pride event that is anticipated to attract large crowds, requiring heightened monitoring and management to ensure the safety and smooth operation of the events. All permits for these events are issued through the Special Events Department, and staff will be closely monitoring activities throughout the weekend to address any potential issues that may arise. To support this effort, stakeholders are encouraged to report any concerns or incidents via email, allowing the team to respond quickly and effectively to maintain a safe and enjoyable environment for all participants.

Faye DiMassimo to discuss tourism industry

- F. DiMassimo emphasized the importance of partnerships in managing tourism and addressing community concerns. A unique transportation plan is being developed to tackle local issues, including truck traffic and preserving Savannah's beauty. The plan is in the RFP process and will be tailored to the city's needs. F. DiMassimo added a pilot program will also evaluate tour service companies, such as walking tours and quadricycles, to inform potential ordinance changes. Additionally, the Savannah Waterfront CID project aims to improve urban design and mobility, with an RFP expected in the coming months.

F. DiMassimo emphasized the need for a data-driven approach to decision-making, noting that while there are no easy solutions, the goal is to balance tourism, the economy, and the preservation of the city's beauty. She acknowledged the concerns raised by the community and reiterated the importance of a collaborative, community-focused effort to ensure Savannah remains a safe, beautiful, and livable place for both residents and visitors.

S. Broker opened the floor for questions and answers.

Other Business

Process Improvement for Completed Ordinances

- S. Adler shared her preference for sending ordinance changes to city council as soon as they are complete, suggested submitting them as completed versus concurrently.

S. Broker agreed and suggested that ordinance changes could be submitted after the pilot, without waiting. M. Allen noted that the pilot had not yet been discussed, to which S. Broker responded that the pilot was her recommendation before making any decisions. The purpose of the pilot would be to assess whether changes are needed, such as reducing the geographic area or the number of participants, based on real-world data observed on the streets.

The meeting adjourned at 9:27 AM

Next Meeting: December 10, 2024, at 8:30 a.m., Savannah Historic Savannah Foundation, Conference Room. These minutes were prepared by Ashley Anderson, reviewed by Rachel Buck.