

Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC)
April 22, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Date: April 22, 2025, 8:30AM

Location: Historic Savannah Foundation, Conference Room

TAC Attendees: Charlie Brazil, Jason Combs, Vaughnette-Goode Walker, Mitch Linder, Michael Owens, Marysue McCarthy, -Brad Baugh for Ryan Madson

City Staff: Faye DiMassimo, Jason Pagliaro, Rachel Buck, Cynthia Knight, Denny Henderson, Donna Cooper, Willie Gillison

Guest Attendees: David McDonald (DNA), Paul Cobet (DNA), Stephen Plunk (TLC), Hamp Murphy (TLC)

Summary: Discussion of need to update and set priorities to address in Tourism Management Plan. Nine of the committee members submitted their priority items. One of the most indicated was Noise Abatement. Requested Joe Shearouse speak to committee re: previous study. June workforce housing zoning amendment for certain areas coming before Council and TAC will support. Bicycle Tour Ordinance has been in limbo for two years. Motion was defeated to update language in ordinance and make Segway and bicycle rules consistent. Horse Drawn Carriage tours current standards are sufficient, and committee saw no need to reopen discussion. New Assistant Director of SEFT will begin June 2 and reorganization of department will commence. Code Enforcement head Cynthia Knight will attend TAC meetings going forward.

1. Approval of Meeting Minutes

M. Linder called the meeting to order at 8:30AM. March minutes were approved unanimously. Discussion was held regarding use of otter.ai for transcription of meeting minutes. C. Brazil volunteered to do editing of recording/transcription for the April meeting.

2. Tourism Management Plan (TMP)

M. Linder noted TMP hasn't been updated and hasn't received public attention. Members were asked at March meeting to submit their priority items in the TMP and submit to M. McCarthy for collection. During April, McCarthy organized and listed the priority items submitted and indicated on the document provided to the committee how many of each Business rep (B) and Resident rep (R) under each category. Noise Abatement was one of the most sighted for priority (R4/B2.) J. Combs had contacted Joe Shearouse regarding the Noise Ordinance study done but was paused due to the Covid pandemic and which needs to be re-engaged. M. Owens suggested reaching out to Shearouse and Kevin Rose to discuss study results with us. M. McCarthy mentioned the need to verify who is currently owning the issue and to provide context for TAC's May

meeting. M. Owens offered to share original email. F. DiMassimo said she would reach out to Shearouse to arrange to come before TAC.

3. Workforce Housing

There is a zoning amendment that has been presented to Council in Workshop to create an overlay in certain areas that lack sufficient workforce housing and would benefit from higher residential density. Vote is scheduled for next Council Meeting. Workforce Housing appeared on TAC's priority list as (B3/R1) and after discussion, J. Combs offered to write a letter to Mayor and Council to state TAC's support for the zoning amendment. Combs will send to TAC for all to review before sending.

4. Bicycle/Segway Tour Ordinance and Horse Drawn Carriages

M. McCarthy and M. Linder discussed the Bicycle/Segway Tour Ordinance which was written and approved by TAC over two years ago and has yet to be presented to Council for consideration. R. Buck explained the history of the ordinance and the merging of one off the bicycle tour companies and the Segway company. There is one other bicycle tour company licensed in the City. M. McCarthy highlighted inconsistencies in the ordinance that should be addressed, i.e., rules for bicycles and Segways should be the same regarding use of sidewalks, hours of operation, clarity of language, etc. Motion passed to recommend to City Manager that the Bicycle/Segway Tour Ordinance be sent to Council.

M. Linder and M. Owens discussed the importance of maintaining the current Horse Drawn Carriage Ordinance and the high standards of care for tour horses. Noted that the businesses welcome TAC members and City staff to visit the facilities at any time. R. Buck stated she continues to research and monitor the industry.

5. Staff Updates and Future Plans

F. DiMassimo provided update on Special Events, Film and Tourism (SEFT) staffing, including the hiring of a new Assistant Director who will begin on June 2, 2025.

DiMassimo is close to naming a new Director of SEFT who will have public safety and security administration experience. Duties and responsibilities for the department's staff will be adjusted accordingly. DiMassimo also mentioned the Tourism Compliance Officers will now work under C. Knight, Director of Code Compliance. R. Buck will continue to be informed of their activities.

F. DiMassimo and Sgt. J. Pagliaro discussed the Savannah Southern half marathon/5K scheduled for November and said SEFT and the City would make sure the organizer is in compliance with all the current obligations to hold the event.

F. DiMassimo state the results of the Walking Tour Pilot will be available May 1 and will be distributed to TAC members.

M. McCarthy emphasized the need for the public being informed regarding the results and any actions taken regarding the various and numerous studies for which the City is paying. (Currently underway are the Savannah Moves transportation study which will contain a dashboard of accountability and a study and the MLK corridor project.)

6. Additional Updates

R. Buck announced Ashley's departure from SEFT and was thanked for her contributions.

Examination of the RHI study to find possible suggested solutions for stakeholder concerns which can be implemented.

An in-depth analysis of River and Bay St. will be done first to see if it best serves the CID vision plan.

M. McCarthy emphasized the need for a systematic approach to addressing the TMP items and the importance of communication with Council.

No additional Old or New Business was raised. Meeting was adjourned.

7. Tasks

~A letter will be written to Council from TAC supporting the zoning adjustment to allow types of housing not currently within code in certain areas to encourage the building of workforce housing by J. Combs.

~An invitation to Joe Shearouse to speak to TAC concerning the previous noise ordinance studies by F. DiMassimo