

## TOURIST DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Council President Tommy Hazouri, TDC Chairman  
Thursday, April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 - 10:00 A.M.  
Lynwood Roberts Room – City Hall

TDC Members In Attendance: Tommy Hazouri (Chair), Sam Newby (Vice Chair), Matt Carlucci, Angela Phillips, Craig Smith, Dennis Chan, and Steve Grossman

Excused: Kirit Patidar                      Absent: Jeff Truhlar

TDC Staff: Lillian Graning (Executive Director), Phillip Peterson (Council Auditor's Office), David Migut (Office of General Counsel), Jeff Clements (Council Research Division)

### WELCOME

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- Call to Order: the meeting was convened at 10:03 and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.
- Public Comments - none

### OPERATIONS

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- 1) Employee Services Briefing: Diane Moser, Director of the Department of Employee Services, addressed the group, at the request of the City's Inspector General, about the services that the Employee Services Department can provide to boards and commissions. The department has 3 divisions: Talent Management, Employee and Labor Relations, and Compensation and Benefits. The department is available to assist boards and commissions that have staff (such as the TDC) with classification and compensation studies, employee disciplinary matters, COVID-related issues, and the like. Issues related to discrimination, harassment, etc. should be referred to the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission, and any ethics or conflict of interest matters should be referred to the City Ethics Office. In response to a question from Chairman Hazouri, Ms. Moser said that the City is not actively tracking which employees have been vaccinated for COVID, but is strongly encouraging that all City employees be vaccinated.
- 2) Approval of Minutes: the minutes of the January 21, 2021 regular TDC Meeting and the March 25, 2021 UNF Track & Field announcement event were **approved unanimously** without amendment. Members gave positive comments about the UNF announcement event.
- 3) Financial Report: Assistant Council Auditor Phillip Peterson gave the financial report. TDC bed tax revenues were down 39.42% for the last year (12 months ending March 2021 vs. March 2020); collections for the last 6 months were down 29.18% year over year; month of March collections were down 19.62% year over year; but actual collections for March of \$2,738,104.85 exceeded budget for the month by \$169,104.85. Mr. Peterson reviewed the budgetary balances remaining in the TDC's various accounts: Destination Services - \$100; Marketing - \$27,055.91; Convention/Group Sales - \$12,979.68; Planning and Research - \$1; Event Grants - \$75,001; Remaining to be Spent in Accordance with TDC Plan - \$498,510; TDC Administrative Budget - \$154,509.96; Convention Grants - \$263,557.77; Promotion of Equestrian Center - \$7,936.05; Special Revenue Fund - \$105,212.50; Contingency Account - \$1,163,000; Development Account - \$1,371,075.63. Ms. Graning said that prior year returned funds from Visit Jacksonville will be addressed later in the meeting, and the CVB and Equestrian Center grants are listed in detail in the agenda attachments.
- 4) Market Report: TDC Executive Director Lillian Graning gave the market report. Consumer and traveler sentiment continues to dramatically improve reflecting 88% of travelers with plans to travel within six months, which seems to reflect an inflection point in the long recovery from the COVID pandemic. This is an important trend even though the majority of these fall outside the traditional overnight visitor

demographics (4 in 10 staying with friends or family, 1 in 10 utilizing short-term rentals, and 1 in 10 staying outdoors). Continuing the trend from 2020, road trips, day trips, in-state travel, and outdoor pursuits remain the top activity for travelers at their destination. STR forecasts suggest that after Labor Day 2021, corporate travel should return in earnest, spurred by transient travelers and some group demand. 2019 will remain the benchmark of recovery but given the trends pre-pandemic figures will likely remain out of reach until at least 2023. The TDC adopted a fiscally responsible FY 20-21 budget by decreasing revenue figures by more than 40% to \$5 million. Now almost half way through FY 20-21 revenue remains 30-35% of the pre-COVID volume and revenue mark, indicating that budgeted amounts are still on target. As people become more comfortable with the state of the pandemic recovery and the growth of vaccinations, their changes in willingness to travel will have a large impact on the TDC's revenues which will in turn impact on the proposed budget for next year.

## **ACTION ITEMS**

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- 5) Visit Jacksonville Payroll Protection Plan (PPP) Funding Authorization: Ms. Graning said Visit Jacksonville went above and beyond their duties to apply for, and were awarded, \$367,600 in federal PPP forgivable loans. While those loan funds have been distributed to Visit Jacksonville, they will be segregated until they are applied to a detailed budget and deliverables approved by the TDC. Given the 24 weeks to use the funds and the length of time for forgiveness post-application, it's likely these funds will need to be considered separately from FY21-22 budgeting. Visit Jacksonville, with the support of TDC's Executive Director, is seeking formal authorization from TDC that any savings resulting from inhibited operations in FY 20-21 as well as the full amount of forgiven PPP loans would be available for Visit Jacksonville commitment at a future date to be determined based on the PPP process timeline.  
**Motion** (Carlucci/2<sup>nd</sup> Newby): authorize Visit Jacksonville to make future requests for use of budgetary savings from FY20-21 and the PPP forgivable loan revenue received from the federal government – **approved unanimously**.
- 6) FY 20-21 Budgetary Adjustment Authorization: Ms. Graning reported that pursuant to the three current Visit Jacksonville contracts, an advance payment request is allowed at the beginning of each fiscal year to allow operating cash for otherwise reimbursement-based functions. During the 2019-20 fiscal year, Visit Jacksonville didn't deploy all available funds as allowable by the contracted maximum indebtedness. They incurred such significant savings as a result of pandemic restrictions that after the full fiscal year was reconciled and audited they were able to return all three advances in full to the City. Due to limitations of COJ's financial system, simply adding returned funds from a previous fiscal year into the current fiscal year isn't possible without going through a budgetary adjustment process, which requires appropriations and City Council approval.  
**Motion** (Carlucci/2<sup>nd</sup> Newby): adjust the budgetary authorization via City Council legislation per the attached BT accommodating the budgetary savings from FY19-20 into the FY20-21 budget for future distribution – **approved unanimously**.
- 7) Grant Adjustments
  - UNF NCAA Grant Adjustments: UNF Athletics requests a reduction in its room night guarantee for the NCAA Track and Field East Regional Meet from 10,000 to 6,700 for the May 2021 event due to a reduction in the number of athletes participating as a result of the COVID pandemic. Council Member Carlucci asked if there is historical data that might help project future attendance trends for events that have a history of funding. Ms. Graning said she would work with Visit Jacksonville to look at a trend projection methodology. Michael Corrigan of Visit Jacksonville said that the reduced attendance at the NCAA East Regional meet is a result of schools pulling out of the meet. Nick Morrow of UNF Athletics said the NCAA reduced the field from 48 down to 32 participating schools. He also noted that UNF recently hosted a Big 10 Conference track meet on short notice that produced over 1,500 room nights.  
**Motion** (Newby/2<sup>nd</sup> Carlucci): approve the reduction in the room night guarantee to 6,700 as requested – **approved unanimously**.
  - Springing the Blues Grant Adjustment: Due to event cancellation because of the COVID pandemic the event organizer requests adjustment of the event date to 2022 for the same event. Alan Verlander of Airstream Ventures said the event is the largest blues festival in the United States and has traditionally produced very substantial tourism and room night bookings.

**Motion** (Carlucci/2<sup>nd</sup> Newby): approve the shift of the funding from the cancelled 2021 event to the 2022 event – **approved unanimously**.

- Spartan Grant Adjustments (City Sprint, DEKA, and Combat Wrestling): Ms. Graning said the Spartan organization requests several changes to previously approved special event grants to reorganize their schedule. Specifically, they request a reduction in the \$60,000 grant awarded to the Spartan City Sprint race scheduled for May 2021 to \$50,000 and to change the event from a City Sprint to a DEKA event to be held in June 2021. Spartan also requests an increase in the Spartan Combat special event grant funding from \$50,000 to \$60,000 and to move the event from June 2021 to May 2021. The net effect is no change in total funding for the two events, and a reversal of the event dates between May and June. Alan Verlander said the request reflects a shift in the Spartan organization's branding and event types, but should produce the same, if not greater, tourism impact.

**Motion** (Newby/2<sup>nd</sup> Carlucci) – approve the Spartan grant amount and event date adjustments as requested – **approved unanimously**.

- Furyk & Friends Champions Tour Grant Reconsideration: The tournament organizers are requesting an increase in the TDC's special events grant from \$75,000 to \$100,000 and the addition of a marketing grant for \$50,000. With no change in the \$25,000 in-kind contribution from JTA for transportation support, the request is to increase total TDC funding for the event from \$75,000 to \$150,000. Chairman Hazouri thanked the JTA for their participation in supporting the event. Craig Smith asked Ms. Graning if she is comfortable with the requested funding increase; she indicated the funding is available. There are very few requests left to consider for funding in this fiscal year. Adam Renfro of Constellation Furyk and Friends thanked JTA for its generous participation and said that the request for increased funding is due to the substantial start-up costs the event faces for its first year. In response to a question from Craig Smith, Ms. Graning explained the room night guarantee ramifications of granting a special events grant versus a marketing grant.

**Motion** (Carlucci/2<sup>nd</sup> Smith) – approve a \$25,000 increase in the special event grant (to \$100,000) and add a \$50,000 marketing grant for the event to be funded through the unallocated TDC operational fund– **approved unanimously**.

8) New Grant Considerations:

- 2021 Street League Skateboarding World Championship (Marketing Grant) – requested amount \$75,000; anticipated room nights 4,457; anticipated tourists – 15,000; tourist guarantee – 7,500; estimated economic impact - \$3,474,566
- 2021 Street League Skateboarding World Championship (Special Event Grant) - requested amount \$100,000; anticipated room nights 4,457; anticipated tourists – 15,000; tourist guarantee – 7,500; estimated economic impact - \$3,474,566

Ms. Graning noted that this event will overlap slightly with the Super Girl Surf Pro surfing event which will draw the similar demographics from out of town. Alan Verlander said that Jacksonville was chosen from 3 finalist cities (Oslo, Norway and Paris, France) to host the world championship event. A 6,000 seat temporary arena will be erected at the former Jacksonville Landing site on the riverfront to hold the event. In 2019 the event in Sao Paolo, Brazil drew over 50,000 attendees. Angela Phillips asked if there will be opportunities for pre- or post-championship events around the city (perhaps at Kona Skatepark); Mr. Verlander said he is exploring possibilities.

**Motion** (Grossman/2<sup>nd</sup> Newby) – adopted the recommended score of 53 out of 60 and to approve both grants as requested, to be funded from FY 20-21 unallocated operational funds. – **approved unanimously**.

- 9) TaxSlayer Gator Bowl Multi-Year Contract Proposal: Ms. Graning said the TDC has supported the Gator Bowl Sports entity in its production of the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl for many years at varying financial commitments ranging from \$250,000 to \$500,000. The commitment for the current year was not multi-year due to the market uncertainty in May of 2020, the meeting month when budget commitments were being determined. The Mayor and Gator Bowl Sports are currently negotiating a 5- year stadium lease extension for the game, and the association is requesting a multi-year, gradually reducing commitment from the TDC to the event as follows: FY21-22 - \$420,000; FY22-23 - \$390,000; FY23-24 - \$360,000; FY24-25 – \$330,000; FY25-26 - \$300,000.

Rick Catlett, recently retired President of the Gator Bowl Association, thanked the TDC for its continued generous support of the Gator Bowl game and said he hoped that Jacksonville will be a player in the

expanded College Football Playoff in a few years. He introduced Greg McGarrity, the new President of the Association and described his long background in college athletics at the universities of Florida and Georgia. Ms. Graning described the history of TDC's support of the annual game at varying levels. The association is committed to hosting the game through 2025-26 and she described the proposal for a gradual decrease in TDC funding over the 5 year period. The funding will be in the form of a multi-year contract rather than annual grants.

Mr. Carlucci asked Mr. Catlett if the proposed reduction of TDC funding over time could impede the Gator Bowl Association's ability to react to future circumstances and pursue bigger events if opportunities arise. Mr. Catlett said the Association's new contract with the City for the game will include some General Fund support from the City rather than just TDC funding. The association may want to come back to the TDC in several years when the College Football Playoff expands to bolster its efforts then to be a player in that expansion. He noted that Jacksonville's greatest competitive drawback, with the demolition of the Jacksonville Landing, is the lack of a well-known entertainment venue in the city compared with other potential competitor cities (e.g. Tampa, New Orleans). Mr. Carlucci recalled that Jacksonville created temporary entertainment options when the city hosted the Super Bowl and suggested that something similar might be done for big college football games, which will require some City funding. He hopes that thought and creativity will be applied to making Jacksonville a more attractive destination when that time comes. Mr. Catlett noted that the City's Office of Special Events has not given much support to college football game event support in the last decade. Craig Smith said that the recent downtown concerts on the riverfront show what can be done with portable stages and food and beverage trucks and tents without permanent facilities that achieve the desired end result. Steve Grossman asked if it would be appropriate for TDC to request that the City study infrastructure needs at several potential sites in downtown (former Landing site, Metropolitan Park, Shipyards) to see what may be needed in the way of utilities, drainage, etc. to facilitate this type of temporary entertainment venue when needed.

Ms. Graning noted that the concert series on the riverfront received TDC funding and has already proven to be a fantastic success and venue with substantial capacity. She also noted that the TDC's Contingency and Development accounts could be used for the type of infrastructure improvements for temporary venues discussed earlier. She will speak to the DIA about identifying sites and needs. She noted that the City Mayoral Administration is negotiating with the Gator Bowl Association on establishing a reliable contingency fund for the Gator Bowl that will help make the game more sustainable in the long term. All vendors and grant recipients have the option to return to request adjustments in funding if circumstances change. Mr. Catlett said that Visit Jacksonville has been a tremendous help to college football events over the last few years.

**Motion** (Carlucci/2<sup>nd</sup> Smith) – approve the multi-year contract for the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl as presented to be allocated from the budget year in which the funding will be utilized and distributed. - **approved unanimously.**

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

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- 10) Determine Revenue Base for FY 21-22 Budget: Ms. Graning asked for direction from the board about what revenue base to use for development of next fiscal year's budget. She said she will be looking back at least 2 years for a pre-COVID ("normal") budget as well as the COVID-year budget to consider in developing a baseline for next year. She reported that the current year's revenues are slightly over-performing the revised budget, so that indicates that the current model is very accurate. She is proposing a base revenue amount of \$7,225,000 which reflects a 46% increase over the current (COVID) budget and a decrease of 15% from the last pre-COVID "normal" budget. With the board's approval, she will develop a detailed budget for discussion at the next meeting based on that revenue. Angela Phillips asked about the potential impact of the U.S. Marine Corps booking the Hyatt Hotel for 6 months and FEMA and other federal government agencies booking substantial numbers of rooms that do not produce bed tax revenue for the TDC. Ms. Graning reflected that while the Hyatt was generating less TDT, its occupancy increased market compression for surrounding areas that do. The fact that the Hyatt is full doesn't change whether other visitors will stay in Jacksonville, just the property at which they will stay. Given the toll COVID has taken on those properties, that compression will make a big difference in the speed of their recovery.
- 11) Visit Jacksonville Update: Michael Corrigan said that hotel occupancy is recovering rapidly. The Omni Hotel has been sold to a national ownership group that plans to invest millions in an upgrade of the facility

which is open and operating until that time. He thanked Rick Catlett for his decades of operation of the Gator Bowl Association and his continual cooperation with Visit Jacksonville. Regarding convention and group sales, Mr. Corrigan said that the Marine Corps has extended its full booking of the Hyatt hotel through July 11<sup>th</sup>, generating an estimated 23,000 room nights per month. The Florida High School Athletic Association relocated its state championship track meet from Gainesville to UNF which generated 3,000 room nights and 7,000 visitors. The American Council for the Blind has booked 4,900 room nights for an event in 2024. Nine bookings have been confirmed from the Group Giveaway Promo mini-grants accounting for over 3,000 room nights. Bookings for the future are well ahead of pace with both re-bookings and new bookings. Marketing became very important during the COVID pandemic and the hard work is paying off in good publicity and increased tourism planning, especially for people looking for outdoors experiences. The Destination Experience team has recently launched a concierge service with Visit Jax employees staffing a table in the lobby of any hotel that is hosting an event coming to serve visitor needs. All of Visit Jax's tourism brochures are now available electronically; iPads have been installed in all visitor centers to do trip planning electronically, facilitate purchase of tickets to events, etc. The Seymour Jax mobile visitor center is extremely active and plans are being made to add solar charging technology so Seymour can do more, such as phone charging stations and a photo booth, that are not possible with the limited power now available. Visit Jax is upgrading its kiosks to the same app platform as is available in the visitor centers. Chairman Hazouri asked about the availability of Jacksonville historical tours; Mr. Corrigan said there are self-guided tours on the app, or several private operators do guided tours, all of which can be accessed via Visit Jax.

## 12) INFORMATION MATERIALS

The meeting packet included a listing of CVB grant commitments and a listing of Equestrian Center grant commitments which required no discussion by the board.

## **CLOSING CONSIDERATION**

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Next meeting: Thursday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 10am, Lynwood Roberts Room of Jacksonville City Hall

Meeting adjourned 12:00 p.m.