



Board of Directors
Regular Meeting Minutes

Date: March 22, 2022
Recorded by Cheryl Vickers

Board Members Present: Bill Bennett, David Bodenhamer, Susan Boggs, Bill Brett (Vice-Chair), Robert Craft, Penny Groux, Tony Kennon, Glen Kaiser (Chairman), Mac McAleer, Mark Stillings (Secretary-Treasurer) (**a quorum was met**).

Board Members Absent: Karen Bobe, Frank Reed

GSOBT Staff Members Present: Laura Beebe, Kim Chapman, Joanie Flynn, Beth Gendler, David Greene, Jo Phillips, Michelle Russ, Cheryl Vickers

Visitors:

Chris Blankenship, Commissioner, ADCNR, Gary Ellis, Gulf State Park Manager, Sheila Hodges

Call to Order

Chairman Glen Kaiser called the meeting to order at 8:30am in the conference room at the Orange Beach Welcome Center in Orange Beach, AL and via Zoom.

Beth Gendler introduced Chris Blankenship, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, who provided an update on the State's Park System. The parks system did well in 2020, all showed a profit except for Joe Wheeler State Park that sustained tornado damage. He reported that they have hired Matthew Capps, formerly the Parks & Rec Director with the City of Mobile, as the Deputy Director of the Alabama State Parks. There will be a \$85m bond issue on the May 24th primary ballot, this will be for renovations for the park system. Improvements to the Gulf State Park Golf Course include adding camp sites and plans for retail. Half of the campground bathrooms have been renovated and the other half in the process. There have been electrical upgrades in the campground, a new bathhouse built at the Beach access, partnering with the City of Orange Beach to make improvements to Cotton Bayou on parking and traffic flow. Tearing down old cabins and rebuilding new ones. Should open early 2023. Gary Ellis will be retiring soon as Park Manager, the hiring process for his replacement is complete and the new director will be named soon. Working with the Corps of Army Engineers and NOAA to obtain a permit to repair the pier. There are no plans for dredging of Cotton Bayou.

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Bill Brett made a motion to approve the February 2022 Board of Directors' meeting minutes, seconded by Susan Boggs. After no discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Consent Agenda Items

The following reports were included in this month's meeting packet as agenda items: Destination Growth Indicators, Communications, H & I Report, Sales and Sports Report, and Financial Statements.

Beth Gendler stated that Aletza Boucher, who was recently hired as the executive assistant, has resigned for personal reasons. Sally Westendorf, formerly with Gateway Initiative and currently with the Innovation Portal, in Mobile, has accepted the position. She will begin work on April 6. Cheryl Vickers will work through her training process.

She reviewed and highlighted numbers in the destination growth indicators. Hotel occupancy for the month of February is up over 2019 and 2021, with vacation rental management occupancy numbers down slightly. Taxable retail sales and lodging revenue for the month of January are up considerably over 2019 and 2021. She pointed out that bookings are down for the month of March and shared that Easter was 4/5 in 2021, 4/17 in 2022, and 4/21 in 2019, and it looks as though we are pacing much more with 2019 in reservations.

Joanie Flynn provided an overview of the communications report. All February traveler behaviors had double digit increases except for partner referrals which were up 5.5%. She will be contacting lodging partners to schedule a time for her and Morgan Barna, Senior Manager of Advertising, to meet with their marketing team to go over the Arrivalist's Visitor Dashboard. Recommendations for the "boost" campaign are listed on page 11 of the communications report. This is in addition to our regular advertising campaign. She asked for authorization to begin immediately to target the 25-35 year-old, unmarried professionals with incomes starting at \$120k. There was no opposition from the board.

Kim Chapman reported for the H&I Department. She provided an update from the Showcase Series held at the Wharf during January and February. We hosted 30 presentations that were attended by nearly 2,000 snowbirds, with an average group size of 63. We surveyed attendees and 83% of those visited an IP because of the presentation they saw, 89% were very likely to recommend our series, and 72% visited a business in the area while attending.

Michelle Russ reviewed the dashboard for Sales, Sports and Events. The numbers for the month of February are up over 2021. She reported that the International Powerlifting League had to cancel their championship being held in Russia due to the conflict in Ukraine. We were contacted by the Alabama chapter of the international association about submitting a bid, and it was accepted. The event will be held at the Orange Beach Event Center, October 23 – 25, 2022. She advised that there are 60 sporting events during March thru May.

David Greene reviewed the financials. He advised that February receipts (January business) were up 50% over last year and 76.5% over budget. The Analysis of Tax Revenue Receipts for March received late yesterday afternoon shows March receipts (February business) are up 33.4% over last year and 57% over budget.

Bill Brett made a motion to accept the consent agenda items, seconded by Robert Craft. After no discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

Action Items

There was lengthy discussion about the purchase of the property located on County Road 8. The board had originally approved for us to purchase the property from Garden Street Group who was going to purchase the land from Clarence Burke and they backed out. Today we are bringing to the board for approval a revised agreement for us to purchase the property directly from Clarence Burke.

There is ongoing conversation about road connectivity.

There are no more options for parcels of land. The property on Canal Road is no longer available. There has been no movement with Bama Bayou. This morning, Commissioner Blankenship shared their plans for the Gulf State Park Golf Course.

Chairman Kaiser reminded board members of the reason we are pursuing this property. Due to the rise in population, there is a need for additional sports fields. With the growth of school activities, the cities are pressured to let the schools use their facilities.

Bill Brett made a motion to revise the contract to pursue the property located on County Road 8. The starting offer will be \$50k per acre and the Executive Committee will be authorized to negotiate the purchase price up to \$57.5k per acre. Susan Boggs seconded and after a lengthy discussion, the vote to approve was unanimous.

The terms of the contract will be changed to 60-days to get a survey and appraisal, and \$100k in earnest money.

Bill Brett made a motion to approve the application for multiple enhancement event grants at the Gulf State Park. Susan Boggs seconded and after no discussion, the vote to approve was unanimous.

Bill Brett made a motion to approve a Special Event Sponsorship Agreement with the City of Gulf Shores and the City of Orange Beach. Susan Boggs seconded followed by a brief explanation from David Greene. He stated that these sponsorship agreements will be in lieu of the single event grant applications previously approved by the Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau over an annual period.

Adjourned

Chairman Kaiser adjourned the meeting at 10:21am.