

Board of Directors
Regular Meeting Minutes

Date: September 27, 2022
Recorded by Sally Westendorf

Board Members Present: Karen Bobe, Bill Brett, Robert Craft, Glen Kaiser, Frank Reed, Gerald Tipton; (a quorum was not met)

Board Members Absent: Bill Bennett, David Bodenhamer, Susan Boggs, Penny Groux, Tony Kennon, Mark Stillings

GSOBT Staff Members Present: Laura Beebe, Kim Chapman, Joanie Flynn, Beth Gendler, Jo Phillips, Sally Westendorf, Sarah Cooper, Valerie Robinson, Mary Statkewicz

Visitors: Tyler Morgan (Gateway Initiative), Ed Bushaw (Gateway Initiative)

Call to Order

Chairman Glen Kaiser called the meeting to order at 8:32 am in the conference room at the Orange Beach Welcome Center in Orange Beach, AL. Chairman Kaiser noted that a quorum was not met. Actionable agenda items will be presented during the October 25 meeting.

Representatives from the Gateway Initiative, Ed Bushaw and Tyler Morgan, provided a programmatic update, including example offerings and future goals.

The two explained that they report to four business representatives from each city. They reported working towards \$250,000 in grant awards for training programs, through collaboration with the Auburn Technical Assistance Center consultants (e.g., strategic alignment). Bushaw explained that they focus mostly on hospitality, and that their team has been fighting for the Hospitality and Tourism career path to be designated as high demand/high wage at the state level.

Bushaw outlined the program's education focus – that they facilitate regular program development, such as using Talk Hiring, an interview training software, with Gulf Shores High School, co-hosting job fairs, participating in mock interviews, and working with businesses on self-skill micro-credentialing options (e.g., they are currently working with Columbia Southern University).

Ed explained the Gateway Initiative places focus on Advocacy efforts, such as developing local consortiums, working to develop a local ARHA chapter, and collecting data through a number of studies. Tyler outlined Gateway's recruitment focus, with recent examples from Montego Bay Hospitality Institute. Ed mentioned the AWSP grant as an option for municipalities (e.g., the city of Foley is using this for chainsaw training; the city of Mobile has received almost \$1M).

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As for future funding use, Tyler and Ed explained the team is mostly hoping for more funds to aid in their incubation/acceleration goals (i.e., they need more team members to assist). For the scope of this initiative, incubation and acceleration mean reducing the failure rate for local startups.

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Chairman Kaiser and present board members discussed moving a vote to approve the August 2022 minutes to the following meeting.

Consent Agenda Items

The following Consent Agenda Items were reviewed and discussed:

Beth Gendler reviewed the Destination Growth Indicators (DGI) report: For the month of August, occupancy, average daily rate (ADR), and RevPar were all down from July. ADR was up over 2021 and 2019. YTD revenue was down slightly under 2021 and up over 2019. Taxable retail sales passed 1 billion in July, whereas this happened one month later in 2021. Lodging sales were up over 2021 and 2019.

Beth explained the new partnership with the State, contracting with Granicus to inventory rentals advertised on all online sites. Granicus is also working to land contracts with all the municipalities to further legitimize their database. Members present were interested to determine if Granicus could sort for unit number to determine the number of houses versus condominium units. The staff will make an inquiry.

Joanie Flynn provided an overview of the Communications Report. August travel behaviors: 2022 vs 21 main website average was down, but all activity KPIs were up (i.e., visitor sessions, pages, page views, and users). Total IP referrals were nearly 128,000, of which nearly 53,000 were lodging referrals. Joanie reported users were up 49%, new visitors were up 62%, and return visitors were up 17%. Vacation guide orders were up almost 10%.

E-Tidings Newsletter signups up 30% over 2021 and 210% over 2019. Golf and fishing signups were also up triple digits over 2019. Joanie reported that events produced 48,349 sessions with 112,587 page views. Wave 65 of the Longwood – Miles study was also presented; the results were positive although the authors mentioned interest rate hikes which may cause some travelers to press pause on their plans. Joanie also reported the first in-person marketing square table event in two years took place. And the team has also relaunched a revamped industry partner website which has already received positive interactions.

Bill Brett commented about lodging tax increases, which may justify a budget boost for our advertising efforts.

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Kim Chapman gave a brief overview of the H&I Report. Welcome Centers lead with guest interactions, with texting services leveling off, and a slight increase in calls and emails. There were significant increases in guest servicing, with a YOY increase compared to 2021 of 28%. Monthly guest servicing results saw significant increases across the board: welcome center referrals were up 14%, guest email opt-ins were up 29%, call center referrals were up 16%, and there was a double-digit increase in vacation guide distribution. As well, Kim reported that 35 States were represented in guest visitors in the Welcome Centers. Also, a number of new events and a few new IPs have been loaded onto the site.

Sarah Cooper, on behalf of Michelle Russ, reviewed the Sales & Sports Report: all categories were up excluding sports room nights, including year-to-date figures. She also reported that sales managers' recent conference attendance led to 41 appointments and produced 8 facility leads. Sarah also reviewed a few key upcoming events: the upcoming Food Truck Festival, Coastal half-marathon, NAIA Soccer Championship.

Jo Phillips, on behalf of David Greene, provided a brief update from the Finance department. Revenue receipts show the month-to-date proceeds (for August business), which were down slightly. However, another deposit is expected, and Jo reported the budget should be on target. Jo noted a large expense for content development. The new content will be used in the fall and spring campaigns.

There was also a brief discussion about the movement of funds into a capital project fund, per the recommendation of CPA, Matt Taylor. No action will be taken until the next Finance Committee meeting.

Action Items

Without a quorum, items requiring votes will be transferred to the agenda for October's meeting.

The present members briefly discussed actions to be taken by the executive committee regarding the farming land lease as well as an enhancement grant for the State Park.

Glen Kaiser explained the lease, to Mr. Lipscomb, would be for one year, at \$100/acre. Members of the board recommended lease agreement language to include accountability for the appropriate use of approved substances and chemicals. The executive committee will further discuss and approve the land for this use. The content of the lease will be presented at the October board meeting for approval.

The Enhancement Event Grant for the Gulf State Park Coastal Christmas Nights of Lights will go before the executive committee for review and approval.

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Discussion Items

Beth Gendler highlighted the new economic impact handout, which was recently given to our local legislators at a recent GUMBO stakeholder event. She noted that the data comes from a research organization that this organization is in discussions with to commission a more finite study.

Adjourned

Chairman Kaiser adjourned the meeting at 9:48 am.

Next Regular Meeting Date:
October 25, 2022
Location: OBWC