



Board of Directors
Regular Meeting Minutes

Date: July 25, 2023
Recorded by Sally Westendorf

Board Members Present: Bill Bennett, David Bodenhamer, Susan Boggs, Bill Brett, Robert Craft (joined at 8:39 am), Penny Groux, Glen Kaiser, Tony Kennon, Frank Reed, Mark Stillings; Gerald Tipton (a quorum was met)

Board Members Absent: Karen Bobe

GSOBT Staff Members Present: Laura Beebe, Kim Chapman, Beth Gendler, David Greene, Crystal Hinds, Jo Phillips, Michelle Russ, Todd Walton, Sally Westendorf

Visitors: Bentson Richardson (A&R Group), Sheila Hodges (STARR, Meyer), Dustin Gontarski (Compass Media), John Flanagan (presenter, StaySense)

Call to Order

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

Board Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes from June 2022 were presented.

Bill Brett made a motion to approve the June 27, 2022 minutes, seconded by Mark Stillings. After no discussion, the motion passed. Members absent from the June meeting abstained from voting.

Consent Agenda Items

The following Consent Agenda Items were reviewed prior to the meeting.

David briefly touched on June Tax revenue, which was 6% down from June 2022.

Susan Boggs made a motion to approve the consent agenda items, seconded by Bill Brett. With no discussion, the motion was passed unanimously.

Discussion Items

Susan Boggs indicated that she will be able to report back at the August meeting regarding the Rice's Whale 'critical habitat' proposal from NOAA.

Presentations

Beth Gendler provided an introduction for the first presentation.

John Flanagan and David Angotti with StaySense: a product that allows for a seamless booking site for accommodations.

John Flanagan joined the meeting in person and David Angotti joined via Zoom.

Amplify by StaySense started as Smokeymountains.com, a VRM, which then sold, but kept the rights to the domain, allowing them to keep the tech side of the operation; similarly, they have expanded to FloridaPanhandle.com and HawaiiIslands.com).

They pitched a *hyper-local focus* and only work with licensed property companies. While John showed a mock-up of the website, he explained that a potential visitor would see real-time results with real-time rates and availability, content pulled directly from the property management PMS. The cancellation policy is that of the local property management company.

John explained the service fee is the profit to StaySense, while there is another separate fee that goes directly to the property management company.

The final presentation was to be shared with GSOBT staff and then shared with the board members and visitors.

Beth Gendler introduced Tiffany Gallagher with Civitas, a company that helps DMOs and similar entities establish Tourism Improvement Districts (TIDs). Civitas worked with Mobile, Montgomery (in progress), Florence (in progress), and Huntsville (potential).

Tiffany provided a short introduction and explained that Civitas was initially a ‘business improvement model’, first formed in 1990, and reported that there are now 209 districts established across the country. She explained TIDs and Tourism Revenue Districts (TRDs) are called “assessments” and are developed and used to provide sufficiency and stability for the tourism industry in a given area. Tiffany explained that tourism businesses will pay an assessment (that looks like bed tax but it is not the same).

The assessment is collected by a local government (can be the State), then managed by the DMO. The funds are required to be held and managed by a private entity – specifically a non-profit must be the recipient of the funds, which can then contract with a professional agency to execute its plan.

Tiffany explained that TID/TRDs can be designed with security in place for economic or environmental changes to the community (e.g., storms, COVID, oil spill) to protect other entities from demanding the funds be halted.

Fifty-five percent of districts use a gross revenue percentage for funding, while 43% use a fixed dollar amount (e.g., \$1/ restaurant ticket).

A 10-month timeline for enacting relevant legislation was outlined, but Tiffany noted that the timeline could last longer. Then a secondary timeline, which would be initiated after legislation was passed, was explained. The secondary timeline includes garnering local support and pitching

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the plan to local tourism businesses (affected by the assessment). Sixty percent of impacted businesses would need to approve of the plan, and vote 'yes'.

Tiffany then provided examples of similar destinations that established TRDs/TIDs.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the present board members discussed the history of establishing taxes in the area, the history behind pitching the development of a sports tourism complex in the first place, as well as the theoretical cost of inaction (i.e., not building a complex).

Adjourned

Chairman Glen Kaiser adjourned the meeting at 10:52 am.