

**TOWN OF MOUNT PLEASANT, SOUTH CAROLINA
ACCOMMODATIONS TAX ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING**

**Thursday, March 27, 2014
12:00 P.M.**

Municipal Complex Building A - Public Meeting Room 1

MINUTES

Members Present: Edward Riggs, Chairman; Monique Semper-Flynn, Jennifer Bagwell, Matt Galvin, Cheryl Craven, Kenda Sweet, Su McManus-Frost

Also Present: Mark Smith, Council Liaison

Staff Present: Ashley Richardson

Call to Order: Chairman Riggs called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

1. Approval of Minutes from March 6, 2014 meeting

Ms. Semper-Flynn moved to approve the minutes; motion seconded by Ms. Sweet. Motion carried unanimously.

2. FY 14/15 Funding Presentations

a. Palmetto Bowl Committee, LLC – Medal of Honor Bowl

Tommy McQueeney & Kathleen Cartland presented. Mr. McQueeney said they had an excellent first year for the event and Mount Pleasant was central to that. He said they had 475 direct hotel room nights at the Charleston Harbor Resort & Marina and they have already signed a contract with them for the coming year. He said they will have more players and more scouts the next time. He said they will also have 35 Medal of Honor recipients in attendance, up from nine for the first event. He said they are looking to be bigger and better. He said the event is immersed in patriotism and they honor veterans and active duty military. Beneficiaries are the Wounded Warrior program and the Medal of Honor National Museum Foundation.

Ms. Cartland pointed out that the event is being held during a week that has the lowest hotel occupancy rate of the year. The date has been set for January 10 - 17, 2015.

Mr. Smith congratulated Mr. McQueeney for organizing a first-class event in such a short time. He thanked him for his commitment to the community and for honoring our veterans and their families. He said it was a tremendous half-time show and overall it was a wonderful event.

Chairman Riggs noted that the worksheet stated there were 2,750 room nights in addition to the 475 at Charleston Harbor. He asked if that is an accurate assessment of room nights affiliated with the Medal of Honor Bowl.

Mr. McQueeney said it will change upward next year because there will be more players and more NFL Scouts who are on the NFL expense account, which is always good for upscale accommodations/restaurants.

Ms. Cartland added that family members and supporters also come and stay in the hotels.

Chairman Riggs asked if they broke even monetarily.

Mr. McQueeney said they came out ahead about \$1,400 and he was pleased they were able to do that in the first year of the event since their total budget was \$654,000. They were tight-walking to pull it off in only 105 days. They had 41 volunteer committee chairs who all want to do it again next time, he said.

Chairman Riggs thanked Mr. McQueeney for the hard work and said he had done a great job.

b. The Citadel Athletic Department – Citadel Soccer Tournament

Coach Bob Winch presented. He said they are putting together two women's soccer tournaments this fall and will be bringing in six teams from outside the region. He said the teams, families and fans stay six nights and eight days in the Mount Pleasant area.

Ms. Frost said that Sleep Inn is the host hotel and tournament is played downtown Charleston. She asked if they are promoting Mount Pleasant at all in their marketing materials.

Coach Winch said they are encouraging everybody to stay in Mount Pleasant.

Chairman Riggs thanked Coach Winch for the presentation.

c. The Citadel Athletic Department - Citadel Volleyball Tournament

Coach Amir Khaledi & Lily Belter presented. Coach Khaledi said they had a great turnout last year for their tournaments and will host similar tournaments the first week of September. He said they required everybody last year to stay in Mount Pleasant and they did. He said they only provide a room for one night and they are requiring everybody to pay for the second night here. He said the only place they recommended was the Sleep Inn here in Mount Pleasant. He said Chick-fil-A and Sticky Fingers in Mount Pleasant were part of the sponsors and everybody ate there. He said they have teams coming from Florida, Georgia and Virginia and they love the tournaments and since they spend all their time in the Town of Mount Pleasant, they love the city.

Chairman Riggs noted that they listed 120 room nights.

Ms. Semper-Flynn asked if there is any potential for growth on the room nights.

Coach Khaledi replied it depends on the number of players and how many rooms the teams are requesting and also the parents and the number of fans/followers.

Chairman Riggs asked where they are playing

Coach Khaledi said they play at the McAlister Field House at The Citadel.

Chairman Riggs asked how many volleyball courts they use.

He replied there are three, but two are used to host the tournaments on Friday and Saturday. Sunday is a day off by the NCAA rules and Sunday is also not popular for the tournament, so they try to have everything on Friday and Saturday. He added that they require all of their officials to stay in Mount Pleasant as well.

Chairman Riggs thanked the coach for his presentation and the hard work.

d. Mount Pleasant Velo – 2014 Hellhole Gravel Grind Stage Race and 1-day Races

Geoff Duncan & Chris Moore presented. Mr. Duncan said they will talk about the Gravel Grind State Race. It will be the second year and they are predicting about a 50% increase in the turnout. There will be 150 riders for the three-day Staged Race and is the only one of its kind in South Carolina. Gravel Grind is one of the fastest growing races in the cycling community and it combines road racing and mountain bike riding so they are riding road bikes on gravel roads. Their particular race is 150 miles taking place in the Francis Marion National Forest. Their host hotel is the Comfort Inn and also the KOA Campground.

Mr. Duncan said he and Chris Moore are working hard to make this one of the preeminent events not just in the southeast, but in the country. They want to grow the event and cap it at 500. They use volunteer organizations and advertising is a big segment of their budget. He said they have a large interest in their Facebook page with almost 800 likes. He said they have added a Saturday prologue which is an ‘appetizer’ of what is to follow. He said the racers come in on Friday night and there is a prologue that is a six mile ride in the dark in the forest. He said it is unique and has never been done before and this was Mr. Moore’s idea.

Mr. Smith asked if the entire 150-mile race takes place in the Francis Marion Forest.

Mr. Duncan replied that it does. Over 90% of the race is on gravel roads in the forest and they had it permitted by the National Park Service. He said very little of the race actually occurs on paved roads.

Chairman thanked them for the presentation and encouraged them to keep up the good work.

e. Charleston Restaurant Foundation - Southern Living Taste of Charleston

Kathy Britzius presented. She introduced Soraya McKay (Little Dog Agency), Melinda Patience (College of Charleston), Jenny Pepler (Charleston Restaurant Association), Bradford Bobbitt (Graze owner) and Steve Carroll (Charleston Restaurant Association President) who arrived late.

Ms. Britzius said that their 2013 event had 9,000 attendees and they spent an average of four nights in town. This year’s event is September 26th – 28th. They will have Iron Chef and also Sweet & Southern and on the 28th is the Taste of Charleston.

Ms. McKay gave an overview of their media marketing efforts. She said they are doing more on the digital side of marketing than they have in the past. It is working very well. She said for several years they have been going after the drive market and making this a visitor’s event as much as a local’s event. She said that last year their website was up about 9.5% for the whole year with 350,000 visits. For the August/September time frame, they were up about 11.5% to 172,000 visits with 46% of those were out of town. She said that equates to about 80,000 visits to their website from out of town which is fantastic which is where they want it to be. Last year in January, they launched a mobile app and they currently have 11,000 active users. She said that *Southern Living* magazine

is certainly a feather in their caps and they give them tons of support and exposure which includes Mount Pleasant which is fantastic.

Ms. Patience talked a little about 'heads in beds.' Last year's survey results indicate that almost 30% of visitors were from out of town and stayed at least one night. Of that 30%, over 25% of those room nights were in Mount Pleasant which was higher than downtown. She said that 58% stated that the Taste was one of the reasons they came to Charleston and Mount Pleasant for the weekend. She said the 20% of the respondents to the survey stated that *Southern Living* advertisements were the way they learned about the Taste of Charleston and the Mount Pleasant logo was included in some of the ads.

Mr. Bobbitt said he had been a part of the Restaurant Association for almost four years. He said he is sorry that more of his counterpart restaurants are not involved in The Taste of Charleston because it is a big boost. He said he pledged to add at least five restaurants from Mount Pleasant at the next event. He said that the money he makes from being a part of the event pays for everything he needs to be a part of the Restaurant Association so he recoups the fee and everything.

Mr. Carroll arrived and said that this is a great event and it is getting better each time, but they have had a lot of hurdles with traffic, which is improving at a cost. Having the Taste in Mount Pleasant is a big factor for the local businesses and it shows off Boone Hall Plantation. Visitors have to come through Mount Pleasant to get there. He said it happens at a slow time of the year and everyone benefits.

Ms. Britzius said they have a lot of various activities. They will have a Waiters Race, a Beer Garden, Ice Sculpturing and live entertainment and *Southern Living* has a big display also.

Chairman Riggs said it is a great event.

Mr. Smith congratulated the presenters and said this is definitely one of the Town's signature Red Carpet events. He asked how to take a great event to one that is even greater. He asked what the next level is for the Taste of Charleston.

Mr. Carroll said the event has grown tremendously. There is the Iron Chef, the Art Walk in the Past, and they have the Sweet & Southern which is a great event that is two years old. This will be the third year they have featured Shem Creek and they bring in Nashville songwriters, singers, etc. He said there is more than one thing going on that Sunday afternoon. It has turned into a weekend of events. People are coming from all over and enjoying what we have: restaurants, beaches, renting paddleboards on Shem Creek, taking boat rides, etc. He said that *Southern Living* has been a good partner and they have brought a whole new demographic to the events. It grows every year and is growing in quality every year too. He said the culinary side is coming together with casual/fine dining. He said it is a great weekend of events.

Ms. Semper-Flynn asked if shuttles will be added. Ms. Britzius replied in the affirmative. She said they were used at the Oyster Festival and they had three buses that circulated in three different places which was a big help. Another big help was working with the Town on traffic problems and last year there were no problems and it worked out very well.

Ms. Sweet had noticed a decrease in the number of fly-in visitors so she assumed that the drive market is up that much more.

Mr. Carroll said the price of airfare is the reason and they are driving in and spending their money here.

Mr. Galvin said as they grow and become the best event in the area, how do they get better? He said their partnership with *Southern Living* has benefitted them tremendously and it is a great platform. He suggested that they bring in the Food Network also.

Ms. Britzius said that is a great idea. She said they also expanded their children's area for the past several years and it has been tremendous and is bigger and better, so they are working on it.

Chairman Riggs said it has come a long way and the committee challenged them and pushed them to do multiple days and that is coming together great.

Mr. Carroll pointed out that being in *Southern Living* magazine means they are in four states, two editions and those advertisements in SC, GA, FL and NC are \$187,000 a page and they have eight pages in them. That is almost a million dollars' worth of marketing that is all about where it is in Mount Pleasant (Boone Hall) and of course, the restaurants. He said they are in an exclusive deal with them so it is hard to do a lot more since their contract with *Southern Living* is thick and detailed. He asked Ms. McKay to expound on *Southern Living's* web pages.

Ms. McKay said that outside of the print media, they link their website to us. Digital media is becoming a lot more prominent and is a very important component. She said they link us to everywhere on their website. It has really been a tremendous partnership and reaching out to other media in the nation could be a slap in the face to *Southern Living* because they are so good to us. If we do anything, we should expand what we are doing with them.

Mr. Smith said that he likens the Taste to the Jazz Festival in Newport because it is a high quality regional event that gets national press. He said his advice is to stay the course and keep on keeping on. He thanked them for what they do.

f. SC United FC Mount Pleasant – Women's Charleston Select Shootout

Matt Parmer presented. He said the event will be held in the fall, September 26th through the 28th. He said last year they had 95 teams in attendance. They used the fields in Mount Pleasant: Cheryl Woods-Flowers Complex, Park West, Carolina Park, Moultrie Middle School, Trident Academy and the College of Charleston Stadium. He said it benefits them to hold the tournaments in Mount Pleasant since the players prefer these fields over others played on in the past. He said they had 225 room nights here in Mount Pleasant and they estimated around 2,500 guests and they are projecting similar numbers in 2014.

Chairman Riggs asked what happens to the income.

Mr. Parmer said it goes toward reducing the fees for their expenses throughout the year and also helps fund their scholarship program. He said they are a nonprofit organization

and they have the ability to not turn any players away based on merit and ability to pay the fees to play soccer at this level.

Mr. Smith had a couple of questions about the budget. He said the referee fees, the sports medicine staff and general staff; whose staff are they?

Mr. Parmer said they are outsourced. RCC and Gregg Banks are the medical staff at this point. There is a Coastal League Referee Assigner, Bobby Jones, and he handles all the referees for the event. It is not within their organization.

Mr. Smith said their only expense from the Town of Mount Pleasant is the \$5,000 field fees. Is that correct?

Mr. Parmer replied in the affirmative.

Chairman Riggs thanked him and said it is a great event and to keep up the good work.

3. Review of FY 2014/2015 Budget

Ms. Richardson presented a PowerPoint and discussion of the budget. She discussed the revenue for the upcoming fiscal year. They are projecting state accommodations tax revenues of \$945,000. The last few years they have budgeted conservative numbers and have received more than the projections. She said they will hold the number for the actuals the same as FY 2012/13.

For the expense side of the budget, she reminded that 30% must go to the Charleston Area Visitors Bureau and that amount is just over \$298,000. She said that Perrin Lawson (CVB) will be at next week's meeting to give a presentation explaining the Town's relationship with them, what they do and the purpose of the funds they receive from area municipalities as well as a brief overview of what their marketing plan will be next year.

Ms. Richardson said that \$5,000 is always set aside for maintenance of the visitor's center. They will hold the advertising budget at \$100K for the upcoming year as well. She noted the following advertising proposals:

Advertising Proposal

- Official Charleston Visitors Guide
- TravelClick
- SCPRT + CVB Co-Operative Advertising Opportunities
- TAG GRANT:
 - South Carolina Vacation Guide
 - South Carolina Welcome Center
 - Southern Living
 - TripAdvisor.com
 - Food Traveler

Ms. Richardson said that the TAG Grant match is \$45,000 and they will know by June if they will receive those funds. Essentially if granted, instead of \$100,000, they will have \$145,000 for advertising outside of the area.

Concerning expenses, Ms. Richardson said that last year they discussed the parking garage on Coleman Boulevard and \$150,000 was put toward that project. For the coming year, that is expected to increase to \$185,000.

Ms. Richardson said they are almost done with the GO Bond to build the visitor's center. She said they have been paying \$80,737 for several years now, but that will be completed by 2015.

Ms. Richardson said that another change for next year is the recommendation to bring in one more position into the Community Development & Tourism Office to assist with all of the tourism and advertising programs. Rather than the three current positions, they are requesting four positions.

Ms. Richardson said that if the committee accepts the event requests made today, it will leave a balance of \$98,141.00 for the remaining fiscal year requests which is very similar to last year.

Mr. Smith asked the GO Bond balance and what amount did it begin with.

Chairman Riggs replied that it started at about one-half million dollars and has been running for 5 – 6 years at about \$80,000/yr.

4. Adjourn

*Ms. Craven moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:58 p.m.; motion seconded by Ms. Frost.
Motion carried unanimously.*

Submitted by:

Patty Wallis

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