

**MINUTES OF THE
HATTIESBURG TOURISM COMMISSION
BOARD MEMBERS & MANAGEMENT**

Minutes of the regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at the Hotel Indigo board room on:

December 11, 2024

Be it remembered that on the 11th day of December, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in person at the Hattiesburg Hotel Indigo board room. Michael Marks, member of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 12:08 p.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT

Dr. Joe Paul
Melanie Archer
Michael Marks
Bonnie Warren
Shawn Lowrey

ABSENT

Anthony Harris
Frank James
Paige Robertson

ALSO PRESENT

Marlo Dorsey, Management
Kristen Brock, Staff
David Ott, Counsel

Citizens Forum

With no members of the public present, Citizens Forum was not held.

Dorsey noted that both Frank James, board chair, and Anthony Harris, vice chair, were unable to attend the meeting. With quorum still met, Michael Marks was asked to preside.

Minutes from Previous Board Meetings

After full review of both regular meeting minutes and executive session minutes, provided by David Ott, and upon motion by Melanie Archer, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve both sets of October 2024 minutes as presented.

Financial Report

Dorsey presented the financial report. Updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy were down 3.1% to close out FY24, with a total collection of \$932,442. Dorsey noted that actual tax collections from the MS Department of Revenue do not match projected occupancy-based revenue from national reporting firm Smith Travel Research and that she has met with the department to address the inequality in what has been collected. A small portion of the back payments owed was applied in September, with more expected in the coming months as coding issues continue to produce inaccurate payments.

More than \$300,000 in hotel tax revenue has not been received during the last 24 months according to calculations. A separate report showed tourism tax proceeds down 4.08% year-over-year while restaurant taxes are up 2.07% for the same period.

Claims dockets and credit card reports for the month of October 2024 were presented. A listing of all ARPA and non-ARPA expenditures was provided in full detail by line item, which were all budgeted expenses. November's reporting will be included at February's meeting since the board met early in December due to the holidays. ARPA updates on procured vendors and overall budget were also presented.

The board was provided with reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission assets through October 31, 2024, showing a total balance of \$4,343,845.43. All reconciled accounts have been reported to the Mississippi Treasurer's office as part of compliance with year-end public funds. A statement of financial position through October 31, 2024 and comparative statements of revenue and expenses, provided by accounting firm McArthur, Slay, and Dews LLC, were also included.

After full review and upon motion by Bonnie Warren, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, there was unanimous favorable vote to approve the financial update as presented.

Old Business

Dorsey provided an update on the MS Main Street Revitalization Grant, noting she has been in regular conversation regarding funding. Until funds are received, Dorsey has continued meeting with VERB architecture firm regarding the Welcome Center design as directed by the board and will present a proposed concept in February. The board recommended moving February's meeting close to 300 Hardy Street so a building walk through can be completed with the architect.

New Business

Dorsey provided an audit update, noting she has worked with King CPA to finalize FY23 and FY24 which will both be presented to the board at the February 2025 meeting. She also noted that a new strategic planning process, funded through ARPA, will begin in 2025 as the previous 5-year plan expires. In addition, the MS Tourism Association has received workforce development funding, providing hospitality career pathway assistance that may be beneficial to board members and other tourism partners.

Brock presented a Sales & Visitor Services update overviewing current groups being served by the department along with recent sales efforts. Seven groups have been serviced through Red Carpet Services so far in FY25. Recent sales efforts include targeting the meetings and associations market at the MS Society of Association Executives annual conference and growing the international market at Travel South International Showcase, where Brock met one-on-one with 35 prospects from 12 countries. She reported that sports tourism will also continue

to be a focus in 2025, providing an estimated spending report for the recent MHSAA football championships, valued at \$8.4 million in economic impact.

Brock also presented a 2024 HAPA recap, where nine large-scale murals were unveiled and plans for the first Hattiesburg sculpture show in more than 5 years was approved, to be installed in Q1 2025.

Dorsey presented a marketing and public relations overview, including a domestic visitor overview reporting visitors spent an average of 1.7 days in Hattiesburg, with 73.3% staying overnight and 64.2% returning from a previous stay. Dorsey noted these visitor data and behavior reports provide insight on highest and best sectors for marketing campaign investments.

A FY24 marketing recap showed more than 45 million digital impressions in direct campaigns and website user growth of 60.3% from 2023. Additionally, 1.76 billion people were reached through Visit Hattiesburg's national public relations efforts including many attractions for the Hattiesburg Convention Commission, outdoor recreation, HBURG Public Art Trail, Downtown Hattiesburg and Midtown.

Dorsey presented a copy of MS Development Authority's America250 plans, which will celebrate Mississippi's 250th birthday in 2026.

Being no other business, and upon motion by Joe Paul, duly seconded by Melanie Archer, the meeting was adjourned at 12:54 p.m.

Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:

Michael Marks, Commissioner

Marlo Dorsey, CEO