

**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 on:

February 25, 2026

Be it remembered that on the 25th day of February, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in person at Hotel Indigo's conference room.

Frank James, chair of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 12:07 p.m. The following members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT

Melanie Archer
Bonnie Warren
Frank James
Dr. Joe Paul
Shawn Lowrey
Anthony Harris

ABSENT

ALSO PRESENT

Marlo Dorsey, Management
Kristen Brock, Staff
David Ott, Counsel
Emily Gallaspy, DHA
Rion Snowden, VERB
Ethan Hartfield, VERB

CITIZENS FORUM

Marlo Dorsey welcomed Emily Gallaspy of the Downtown Hattiesburg Association and Rion Snowden and Ethan Hartfield with VERB Architecture as guests for the meeting.

Dorsey presented the ratified agreement with the City of Hattiesburg on the lease of 300 Hardy Street, future home of the Hattiesburg Welcome Center. She presented estimated costs for the renovation alongside reserve allocations and grant funding previously approved by the board.

VERB Architecture provided a timeline and progress set for the Welcome Center renovation and outlined the bid process, scheduled to be complete by early summer. Interior and exterior renderings of the facility upgrades were also presented to the board. Final bid documents will be presented to the board at future meetings.

With no further business, Citizens Forum was adjourned, and Snowden and Hartfield exited the meeting.

MINUTES

After a full review of the December 2025 meeting minutes, and upon motion by Anthony Harris, duly seconded by Melanie Arhcher, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve the minutes as presented.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Dorsey presented the financial report ending January 31, 2026, including updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy which show a 6% decrease year over year for the first quarter of FY26. However, HTC's portion of tax revenue continues to fall below actual market sales.

Dorsey reported ongoing discrepancies between MS Department of Revenue hotel tax collections and Smith Travel Research / Co-Star projections, noting an estimated \$400,000+ in unreceived revenue over the past three years. The Department has identified coding errors and is working to remedy the discrepancies moving forward while considering how to best audit the last 36 months.

A separate report showed tourism tax proceeds down 2.84% over the previous 12-month calendar year, while restaurant taxes were up 1.01% for the same period.

A claims docket for the months of November, December 2025 and January 2026 was presented. A listing of all ARPA and non-ARPA check and credit card expenditures was provided in full detail by line item; all were budgeted expenses.

Account balances as of January 31, 2026, were presented, showing strong financial standing across all organizational and umbrella accounts. The board reviewed reserve allocations for other projects, including the renewal of the current Region's Bank treasury bond when it matures in April 2026.

A four-month budget update was presented, showing 20.87% of budgeted expenditures spent to-date. An accompanying balance sheet for FY26 was also presented, as completed by accounting firm McArthur, Slay, and Dews PLLC.

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

Old Business

Discussion continued with the Hattiesburg Welcome Center project. Following the presentation of materials by Dorsey and VERB Architecture and upon motion by Bonnie Warren, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, there was unanimous favorable vote to accept the presented timeline, permitting Dorsey to continue the bid process in conjunction with VERB Architecture.

New Business

Dorsey presented a draft resolution requesting the Mississippi Legislature to extend the repealer imposed on the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission's special tax levy to July 1, 2031.

Upon motion by Shawn Lowrey, duly seconded by Melanie Archer, there was unanimous favorable approval for the matter to be brought forward during the next Hattiesburg City Council meeting.

Dorsey noted that the strategic planning process with Young Strategies is still in progress, with next steps revealed this summer following extensive research and surveys. The results will provide data, research, and recommendations on strategies to continue the development of the tourism economy. Specifically, increased accommodations offerings and sports tourism will be key focuses.

Brock presented a Sales & Visitor Services update, overviewing current groups being served by the department along with recent sales efforts. In the first quarter of FY26, 24 groups were assisted through Destination Services, totaling more than 5,700 attendees. Efforts continue to grow the meetings and conventions, sports, international, and leisure group markets to Hattiesburg through focused prospecting and development.

Brock provided a report on the FY26 Tourism Grant Program. Recent partner events included Midnight on Front Street, 40th Annual Coca Cola Classic Rodeo, Mardi Gras activities, and the Raising Cane's Spring Classic, which welcomed more than 200 soccer teams to Tatum Park.

An update was also provided on the Hattiesburg Recreation and Sports Event Center, a construction project of the Pinebelt Foundation, which will build a 117,000 square-foot indoor sports facility that amplify the programs and sports tourism events Hattiesburg will be able to host. Dorsey and Brock will attend the Sports ETA Conference and Tradeshow in Las Vegas in April to begin marketing and selling the facility to sports event

rights holders and will remain active in promoting the complex through the construction phase and once completed. Upon completion, the facility will be owned and managed by the city. Visit Hattiesburg will work alongside the city to secure sporting events with rights holders and tournament organizers.

Hattiesburg Alliance for Public Art updates were provided for 2025, including the addition of 10 large-scale murals, 22 new painted utility boxes, and return of the 2025-27 Hattiesburg Sculpture Show. Dorsey shared updates on a future public art project in downtown with a private property owner.

VisitHATTIESBURG is now managing this year's Hattiesburg Half Marathon following discussions with Mayor Barker. Registrations are far surpassing previous year numbers, with an expected sell-out field of 1,700 athletes. The board was provided with a marketing and campaign update for the marathon, featuring a refreshed look and tactics.

An organizational marketing and outreach update was presented. Social media engagement is up 69.3% year over year with an increased audience of more than 27% or 45,230 users. Public relations efforts remain a core focus, with 882 total articles featuring Hattiesburg over the last 12 months. Top engagement markets are Jackson, New Orleans, and Dallas, with 57.9% of visitors to Hattiesburg traveling from out of state.

Dorsey noted that VisitHATTIESBURG has entered into an agreement with the City of Hattiesburg, Area Development Partnership, and Mississippi Power to prospect tenants for hotel developments.

There being no further business, and upon motion by Melanie Archer, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, the meeting was adjourned at 1:15 p.m.

Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:

Frank James, Chair

Marlo Dorsey, CEO