

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

Minutes of the rescheduled April 30, 2025, meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held on:

May 7, 2025

Be it remembered that on the 7th day of May, the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission met in person in the board room of Hattiesburg's Courtyard by Marriott. The meeting was rescheduled from April 30, 2025, to ensure quorum.

Frank James, chair of the Hattiesburg Tourism Commission, called the meeting to order at 12:10 p.m. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT

Frank James
Melanie Archer
Michael Marks
Bonnie Warren
Dr. Joe Paul

ABSENT

Anthony Harris

ALSO PRESENT

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

Citizens Forum

With no members of the public in attendance, Citizens Forum was not held. A moment of personal privilege was taken by the board members present to congratulate Ms. Bonnie Warren on the occasion of her 84th birthday, which was that day, and to celebrate her many incredible and invaluable contributions to family, community and state.

Minutes from Previous Board Meetings

After a full review of the February 2025 meeting minutes, and upon motion by Michael Marks, duly seconded by Melanie Archer, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve the minutes as presented.

Financial Report

Dorsey presented the financial report. Updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy were down 15.1% year-over-year, with a total collection of \$461,615 to date. Dorsey noted that actual tax collections from the MS Department of Revenue continue to be lower than the projected occupancy-based revenue reported by national firm Smith Travel Research, with estimates that \$400,000 in hotel tax revenue has not been received over the

last three years. Dorsey continues to be in conversation with the Department of Revenue regarding the discrepancies.

A separate report showed tourism tax proceeds up 4.13% over the previous 12-month calendar year, while restaurant taxes were up 3.76% for the same period.

Claims dockets for the months of February and March 2025 were 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.

Dorsey presented a detailed 6-month budget update by account, showing total expenses at 37.5% of budgeted figures.

The board was provided with reconciled balances of all Hattiesburg Tourism Commission assets through March 31, 2025, showing a total balance of \$3,821,098.28. A statement of financial position through March 31, 2025, and comparative statements of revenue and expenses, provided by accounting firm McArthur, Slay, and Dews LLC, were also presented during the financial report.

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

Old Business

Dorsey shared an update on the Mississippi Main Street Revitalization grant program. The program move to the MS Department of Archives and History (MDAH) was vetoed by the Governor's office, where it was determined to keep the program at MDA. Additional outreach on steps for next session would be provided following the conclusion of this session. Gov. Reeves stated he believed in the program and would work with Main Street leaders and legislators to keep the program moving forward.

Senate Bill 2805, identifying tax compliance legislation for short term rentals, passed to allow collections of bed tax on short term rentals in Mississippi to match the current city or county special levy rate. With a 2% collection in Hattiesburg being remitted to the tourism commission, it is expected to add up to \$100,000 to the organization's annual budget and \$15 million additional tourism funding statewide. Dorsey expressed how critical it was that tax codes were entered correctly for the tourism commission to receive its funding. Dorsey thanked Sen. Chris Johnson (R-Hattiesburg) for authoring this bill and working to get it to the finish line. Governor Reeves signed the bill into law effective July 1, 2025. Additional outreach with MS Department of Revenue has been ongoing, and official letters will be shared with property owners statewide on the tax compliance for short-term rentals.

Completed audits and annual reports for FY23 and FY24 have been provided to the City of Hattiesburg and City Council. Once the full 2024 visitor spending numbers are released in early fall by Visit Mississippi and Tourism Economics, Dorsey will present updates to Hattiesburg City Council.

New Business

Dorsey announced that Michael Marks has resigned from his role as a tourism commissioner following this board meeting. Staff and commissioners thanked Marks for his service through kind words and a Heart of Hospitality award recognizing his embodiment of hospitality. Marks will continue to work closely with the Mississippi Miss Hospitality program in future months.

Phase one of VisitHattiesburg's strategic planning process is complete, with the conclusion of a kick-off visit and community feedback meetings held in April. The research process will continue over the next six months to help develop a 5-year strategic plan for Hattiesburg tourism through 2030.

Brock presented a Sales & Visitor Services update, overviewing current groups being served by the department along with recent sales efforts. 18 groups have been serviced through Red Carpet Services so far in FY25 and efforts continue to grow the meetings and conventions, sports, international, and leisure group markets to Hattiesburg through focused prospecting and development.

A HAPA update was also presented, showcasing 5 large-scale murals completed so far in calendar year 2025. A Miss Hospitality overview introduced contestants from 47 Mississippi communities participating in the 2025 program, the most since the competition began being held in Hattiesburg in 1998.

Board members were invited to participate in National Travel and Tourism Week activities scheduled for May 2-9, 2025.

Robertson presented a marketing and public relations overview, including a domestic visitor update reporting 7,198,067 impressions and 126,333 digital media clicks since October 2024. Public relations efforts for the same period resulted in a reach of 645,903,204.

Robertson also presented an overview of VisitHattiesburg's recent broadcast media activation that resulted in online readership of 1,071,810. A social media campaign with Pineapple PR has increased Instagram engagement 175.1% year over year.

In partnership with Visit Mississippi, two music markers have been unveiled in Hattiesburg in 2025. Lloyd Green's Country Music Marker was placed on USM's campus on February 25

and Craig Wisemen's Country Music Marker was unveiled on March 28 at Midtown Green Park.

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

Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:

Frank James, Chair

Marlo Dorsey, CEO