

**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:

**October 22, 2025**

Be it remembered that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of October, 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 12:10 p.m. The following members of the Board were found to be present:

**PRESENT**

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

**ABSENT**

**ALSO PRESENT**

Marlo Dorsey, Management  
Kristen Brock, Staff

**CITIZENS FORUM**

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

**MINUTES**

After a full review of the September 2025 meeting minutes, and upon motion by Joe Paul, duly seconded by Shawn Lowrey, there was unanimous favorable vote of the board to approve the minutes as presented.

With the absence of counsel representative David Ott, August 2025 Executive Session minutes will be presented to the board at a future meeting.

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

Dorsey presented the financial report ending September 30, 2025, including updated tax receipts for the commission's 2% special hotel levy which were down 7.0% year-

over-year, with a total collection of \$867,627 to end fiscal year 2025. However, actual market revenue does not match 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. She continues discussions with the Department regarding the issue, who has ensured an update in November 2025, and Dorsey will continue to ask for further updates until the account has been audited.

A separate report showed tourism tax proceeds down 5.36% over the previous 12-month calendar year, while restaurant taxes were up 3.81% for the same period.

Claims dockets for the months of August and September 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. The total interest gain in the treasury bond account over the past three years totals \$102,437.70.

Dorsey presented an unaudited 12-month budget update, noting that audited versions are in progress and will be presented at a Q1 2026 board meeting. Dorsey noted the FY25 year closed with a projected net income of \$44,316.21.

While the FY26 non-ARPA budget was approved at the September 2025 board meeting, Dorsey presented final copies with updated designated reserve allocations including \$20,000 for signage to help achieve Hattiesburg's strategic plan.

After full review and upon motion made by Shawn Lowrey and duly seconded by Bonnie Warren, there was unanimous favorable vote to approve the financial update as presented, including the FY26 budget proposal and updated allocated reserves.

### **Old Business**

Dorsey shared an update on the grant application for the Downtown Welcome Center that was submitted to the Mississippi Arts Commission Building Fund for \$400,000. Significant work was done on the application by Brock and her, and awards are expected to be announced in the next four weeks which would allow the project to move forward if funded.

Dorsey also noted that VisitHattiesburg was asked by Mayor Toby Barker to take over management of the Hattiesburg Half Marathon, one of Hattiesburg's longest running and most attended outdoor events. With VisitHattiesburg serving as the fiscal agent,

Rhonda Hayden has been hired by the organization as race director to handle day-to-day and event-day management of the race.

### **New Business**

Dorsey presented data from the 2024 Tourism Economics Visitor Spending Report, with key findings showing visitors spent \$604 million that year totaling an economic impact of \$914.3 million for a total 3.7% year over year increase. The recreation sector had the most significant growth, which closely aligns with the commission's five-year strategic plan to develop Hattiesburg as a year-round outdoor destination. Over this five-year period, tourism grew by 38%, significantly outpacing the state.

Dorsey also noted that the upcoming strategic planning process scheduled to be complete in 2026 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 FY25, 49 groups were serviced through Destination Services, totaling more than 8,000 attendees. Efforts continue to grow the meetings and conventions, sports, international, and leisure group markets to Hattiesburg through focused prospecting and development. She presented an update on TEAMS Expo, where Brock met with 34 national and regional sports rights holders about hosting their 2026, 2027, and 2028 events in Hattiesburg.

Brock provided a report of FY26 Tourism Grant Program recipients, where 33 events and activities have been awarded \$48,550 in funding.

A 2025 Hattiesburg Restaurant Week update showcased 45 participating eateries and a 52.09% increase in social media and website visitation surrounding the week. Preliminary reports show positive feedback and increased YOY restaurant sales.

A HAPA update was also presented, reporting on the *Vision of William Carey* mural and Phase 4 of the Utility Box Series, which will feature 22 new paintings. Eight large-scale murals have been completed so far in calendar year 2025 with more in the works. The commission continues to invest in public art as part of Hattiesburg's placemaking initiatives. This will be a continued focus of artistic growth for Hattiesburg.

Dorsey shared an update on a future public art project in downtown with a private property owner. Specific details still needed to be worked out, and she would give the commission an update at the next meeting.

A marketing and outreach update was presented, including details on an Atlanta Media Mission with Madden Media where Hattiesburg was showcased as a premier Gulf South destination and convenient weekend getaway to 9 influencers, bloggers, and journalists in attendance. Public relations efforts for the month included a feature in County Roads print and digital magazine, and a feature as a must-visit Civil Rights destination in national publication TravelPulse.

Key website metrics for the month of October 2025 show a 97.45% engagement rate with more than 31,000 total users. Social media performance for the same period saw a 1,100.8% increase in engagement and 1,835.5% increase in post link clicks, much in thanks to a curated spooky season and Restaurant Week campaigns. Visitor insights indicate an average length of stay of 1.2 days, with 65.4% of guests staying overnight. Top origin markets are Jackson, MS, New Orleans, LA, Biloxi-Gulfport, MS, Mobile, AL and Meridian, MS with cities like Memphis, TN, Dallas, TX, and New York, NY also making the top 20 list.

The board was invited to a Mississippi Country Music Trail Marker unveiling at Camp Shelby on November 4.

There being no further business, and upon motion by Melanie Archer, duly seconded by Bonnie warren, the meeting was adjourned at 1:26 p.m.

**Hattiesburg Tourism Commission:**

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Frank James, Chair

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Marlo Dorsey, CEO