

**TOURISM ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**Meeting Minutes – April 2, 2019 at 4:00 pm**  
**Courtyard Conference Room**

**Committee Members:**

Barbara Hochberg (Chair)  
Wynniss Grow (Vice Chair) - Absent  
Terry Hopkins  
Robert Hamlyn  
Tamara Bushnell  
Doug Bradley-Absent  
Sara Bristol  
Damion Trovato

**City/Staff/Council Liaisons:**

Susan Seereiter - City Business Advocate  
Aaron Cubic – City Manager  
Jon Bowen – Experience Grants Pass  
DJ Faszer – City Councilor  
Darin Fowler – JoCo Commissioner

**Guests:**

Patty Davis  
Germaine Cartmell  
Jan Bertaggia

1. **Roll Call** – Chair Hochberg called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.
2. **Items from Public** (opportunity for citizens to share information with the Committee regarding items that are not on the agenda).
  - Jan Bertaggia (Wild Rogue Emporium) – She feels she doesn't get sufficient answers when she asks about the Master Plan for the downtown. She mentioned it seems it has been put on hold and nothing has moved ahead. She is representing downtown merchants and wants to ask what is going on with that Master Plan? They are looking for unification that comes from the City. She also heard there is another parking study going on.
  - Jon Bowen responded that the parking study has just concluded.
  - Aaron Cubic talked about the parking study and that Council will be getting the report. A Downtown Parking Task Force has been organized to review these results and make recommendations.
  - Jan asked what kind of people get to join that task force?
  - Aaron Cubic answered that the committee membership is set up for individuals that are downtown merchants and/or property owners. He indicated the applications are upstairs in administration or available online.
  - Jan Bertaggia said downtown merchants keep up with each other via Facebook. They are really looking forward to attracting people to the downtown and feels they are moving forward and on the upswing.
  - Jon Bowen mentioned the Master Plan. The reason it hasn't moved forward is there are so many issues that are brought up at meetings and all of it must be looked at as a whole for the downtown so it is done right and in perpetuity for the next 20-years.
3. **Approval of Minutes –**

**MOTION/VOTE**

**Member Hopkins moved and member Bushnell seconded the motion to approve the minutes from March 5, 2019 as presented. The vote resulted as follows: "AYES": Chair Hochberg, Members Bristol, Bushnell, Hamlyn, Hopkins and Trovato "NAYS": None. Abstain: None. Absent: Vice Chair Grow, member Bradley. The motion passed.**

4. **Work Session Items:**

a. Airbnb and VRBO Lodging Tax –

- Susan talked about the lodging tax. Jay Meredith attended a spring conference, “Oregon Government Finance Officers Association”. He found out the most cities and counties are struggling to collect from the Airbnb and VRBO. He talked with the Corvallis Finance Director who mentioned these companies are arguing about the new state law that went into effect last year that was supposed to close a loophole in making these companies file a lodging tax return. Apparently, it only applies to the states since municipalities haven’t built those same terms into their codes yet. Jay will consult with our attorney.
- Member Hopkins added that it would be a huge boost because it puts them on a level playing field with brick and mortar hotels that are paying the tax. He is on the Oregon Restaurant Association Leadership Committee and they are addressing this at the state level.
- Jon Bowen mentioned he gave Jay the contract that Klamath has been using the past two years. They are getting \$75k/year that just comes in. We need to be more aggressive about it. Anything we can do to escalate this would get his vote.
- Member Trovato mentioned there is also boondocking and couch surfing. Couch surfing is essentially free.
- Member Hamlyn asked if they have to have a City business license? Currently they do not.
- They further discussed container homes in relation to affordable housing.
- Member Bristol asked how to turn this into some sort of action item?
- Aaron asked if more information is needed, it is on the agenda, and everyone has consensus, staff is here to help gather information, provide a presentation, and look into details. After due diligence, then the recommendation can be made to Council.
- There was some discussion on if the committee needed more information or do they need additional information making the recommendation to Council? Susan added that Jay will speak with the City Attorney about minor changes to the language in the City’s lodging tax in the Municipal Code so that these companies must comply both with state laws and local code. The Finance Director with Corvallis agreed to share the information and contacts with how she was able to get compliance with the Airbnb. Aaron suggested there be updates on progress forwarded to the advisory committee before it is presented to Council.
- The next action can be to have this as an ongoing agenda item and updates on the policy can be reviewed and then the recommendation can be made. Look at what other communities are doing to see what is successful and what’s not. Then we can formulate our own policy or make a recommendation to adopt another community’s policy that works well.
- Chair Hochberg suggested it be kept on the agenda.
- Member Bristol asked if staff could do a thorough presentation about what other cities are doing around the state.

- Susan mentioned currently the City collects lodging taxes quarterly. We don't know what the slow seasons are, months vs quarters. Member Bradley provided feedback that it would be extra work for them, but he would be happy to provide a look at both monthly and quarterly.
  - Jon added that it would really help if the state would report monthly rather than quarterly.
- b. Travel Southern Oregon Symposium recap -
- Chair Hochberg talked about attending this symposium along with member Bushnell, Susan Seereiter and Jon Bowen a few weeks ago. The speaker from the Congo was to be there but wasn't. Some members didn't get notice of the symposium. Anyone interested in tourism or travel can attend and sign up via the Travel Southern Oregon website.
  - Susan mentioned a speaker that talked in depth about diversity and how it effects communities. Grants Pass was mentioned by an attendee that said he did not feel safe here and has to work and socialize in Medford, so he can feel safe. Jon spoke about up against that comment.
  - Commissioner Fowler arrived late but wanted to add a comment as a member of the public. He wanted to update the group about the Fair. This year the theme is Veterans of Past, Present and Future. They would like to make it free for all Veterans to attend the fair. They are going to have a parade of Veterans for the kick off. Lee Greenwood is going to be the musical act. They are trying to improve the entertainment. They will have some parking challenges as Dutch Bros is using the entire infield. They also have to house 400 horses for racing. This will be a huge boost for tourism. Also, commissioners are placing a lodging tax question on the May ballot. The question is "Should the County have a lodging tax"? It could be either 9% to match the City's or 11%. Darin asked for members opinion, so he could share this with the other commissioners.
  - Member Hamlyn asked what the discussion has been regarding using it for promotion and tourism or what other expenses? Commissioner Fowler responded that the discussion hasn't completed but he is sure it would be for tourism or economic development or both. Aaron Cubic added that the State requires that 30% to be spent on travel and tourism.
  - Susan Seereiter noted that this was on the agenda for last month. Motion was approved by this committee to support a tourism improvement area/district over a county lodging tax. Commissioner DeYoung is very familiar with the concept.
  - Jon Bowen asked if the percentages are following the new regulation or the old one (10 years ago). Aaron confirmed that we follow the old regulation. He also noted that the industry discussion has been that the TID is a better vehicle because it is self-regulated, and we can pick and choose where the money goes.
  - Susan noted that this committee has a vacancy since Colene Martin's resignation and Barb Hochberg and Robert Hamlyn's terms are expiring but they can reapply. So far there are six applicants. The amount of members permissible per the committee by-laws is eight.
- c. Quarterly Report – Jon Bowen
- Jon Bowen talked about the quarterly report and the things that are coming up.

1. San Francisco Travel and Adventure show that had 22,000 attendees.
  2. They are preparing for the coming events such as Balloon Fest, Rally on the Rogue, July 4<sup>th</sup>, and Back to the 50s. Then gearing up for their marketing campaign.
  3. They attended the Travel Southern Oregon Symposium. The Great Race is also coming up. It will be 150 plus vintage cars that will come through Grants Pass on June 26. They are spending the night on their way from Eureka California and then go to Bend, Oregon. There will be a street party for them on 5<sup>th</sup> and G streets in the Owl parking lot. Cars will arrive and cross a finish line by the Welcome Center with announcements of the drivers, etc. They will line up the cars just like Back to the 50s along with a nice reception and it should attract a lot of people.
  4. They are making a designated area for free speech at First Friday Live. It will be behind the Welcome Center.
  5. Back to the 50s is a coordinated event with the City and the Chevy Club. He has been trying to get it more cohesive but it's not working.
  6. There was a joint meeting with Travel Southern Oregon and Commissioner DeYoung and the lodging tax issue.
  7. They handled some photo requests for the City.
  8. There were two PAVE Tourism meetings this month.
  9. They are currently working on the next newsletter for the downtown merchants.
  10. The Puget Sound Antique Air Club event will be on July 9 and will have antique planes flying in. They will stay at the airport. There will be a ceremony with kids from the Southern Oregon Air Academy and other festivities. He will work on getting them to the downtown as well. This is the first time for this event. He also noted that the airport has made huge progress in the past few years and notes more events will occur and its only going to get better.
  11. As part of the PAVE process, he has been adding more content to the expgp.com website.
  12. They wrote an article for the Chamber Profile magazine about downtown and tourism.
  13. Volunteers are a challenge. They have been very proactive with it this year and that will help with all the events coming up.
  13. Miscellaneous things such as updates to the Travel Grants Pass website, First Friday Live integration, mailing visitor guides, weekly meetings with Parks & Community Development at the City, working with Susan on a lot of projects and meetings, social media updates, and downtown integration with the merchants.
- Chair Hochberg asked about the Santa Run. Caleb LaPlante will be presenting that at a merchant meeting. The next merchant meeting is on April 30 at 8:30 am.
  - Member Bristol asked what happened to the Rogue River billboard. Jon said they let it expire because the contract with the billboard company was ending before our RFP response. The billboard is a huge expense

for the office and he would like to go very conservative until the PAVE audit comes in. Highway billboards are high demand and low availability.

- Member Bristol added the importance of having a well-designed billboard to bring people to historic downtown instead of stopping uptown to get gas and eat. Some utilize Facebook but there are thousands that drive by or just stop at In-N-Out and not realize what else we have to offer.
- Member Hamlyn mentioned having some signage that says to start downtown. Susan added there will be a wayfinding sign up by the Visitor Center. Jon said there are a few signs. One is on the freeway and there are a few in town. They are identifying new spots for the wayfinding and historic district signs.

5. **Information Sharing:**

a. **Items from Staff**

- None.

b. **Items from Committee Members**

- None

c. **Items from City Council Liaison**

- Councilor Faszer (DJ) recapped on the Airbnb/VRBO lodging tax opinion. He asked if this committee regards these organizations responsible for a lodging tax but currently investigating the vehicle to do that? No council action is needed at this time because the committee seems a little uncertain of what that action might be? Member Hopkins said the action would be to gather more information on how cities have successfully implemented a lodging tax against these types of organizations. Councilor Faszer asked if there is anything he can do to try to expedite the information? Susan said she will gather information from Klamath Falls and Corvallis and will bring that report to the next meeting. She will ask Jay Meredith to contact Councilor Faszer then members of the sub-committee can get together and talk about it.
- Member Bristol said she feels she would like more information before she can recommend that Council take any action.
- Susan asked if they also wanted to talk about County membership at the next meeting also? They indicated yes.
- Member Bristol said if anyone wants to know what our recommendation is we have already recommended the TIA instead of the County tax.
- Jon Bowen talked about the way the TIA works and some of the benefits.
- Member Hopkins mentioned House Bill 595 that suggests instead of 70% to tourism, 30% of that would go to affordable housing.

6. **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned at 5:08 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING: May 7, 2019 at 4:00 pm in the Courtyard Conference Room**

*Minutes prepared by Donna Anderson, City Administration*