



## **Meeting Summary**

Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC)

December 19, 2018

**TAC Attendees:** Joe Marinelli, Bill Lovett, Vaughnette Goode-Walker, Charlie Brazil, Mark Dana, Michael Owens, Daniel Carey, Melinda Allen, Michael Ambrose

**TAC Absences:** Nichelle Stephens

**City Staff:** Susan Broker, Amanda Hutson, Jonika Rountree

### **Chair's Report**

Chair Vaughnette Goode-Walker opened the meeting with visual representations of the last few years of TAC business, including an early draft of the Tourism Management Plan, a map of the residential neighborhoods, and an image of the double-decker busses prohibited by the TAC. Chair Goode-Walker stated that elections for the 2019 Chair and Vice Chair would be held at the end of the meeting, during other business. Chair Goode-Walker then introduced discussion on the tour restriction pilot program proposal crafted by the Office of Special Events, Film & Tourism (OSEFT).

### **Tour Restriction Proposal Feedback**

OSEFT Director Susan Broker began by thanking the TAC for their patience during this past Fall; it was a particularly busy season with film productions, races, and parades. However, the office will soon acquire a second staff person dedicated to the film division, which should allow for more time and resources to be dedicated to tourism projects.

Ms. Broker stated that the public meetings held to discuss the proposed tour restriction areas were difficult to mediate at times, but revealed several opportunities for change that were supported by both tour operators and residents. The largest accomplishment of these meetings was the creation of a tourism small-group made of 15 volunteers from both the tourism and resident attendees of the second public comment meeting. This group will have its first meeting on January 9, 2019 at 3pm in the Civic Center Mason Room. The small group will make recommendations for staff and the TAC.

Melinda Allen opened discussion by stating that general resident sentiment is that there is a lack of courtesy among late-night tour operators that can be addressed by implementing a cut-off time for tours in clearly residential areas. Charlie Brazil agreed that there are some easy solutions, but that the one-size-fits-all approach may not be appropriate. It may now be useful to treat walking tours and motorized tours differently at this time of night. Mr. Brazil further emphasized the need for the tour industry to self-police, identify and address the "bad apples," and advocate for greater compliance and enforcement "with teeth."



Daniel Carey asked if the TLC actively awarded/rewarded the tour operators who maintained excellent standards. Mr. Owens clarified that consideration is given to how nominees for awards operate their businesses. Mr. Owens and Mr. Marinelli, on behalf of their organizations, speak to those owners or operators who are causing issues in the community, but cautioned against attempting to “legislate out the bad apples.” Mr. Brazil recommended that violators should have their permits revoked, to which Ms. Hutson stated that there are no permits issued to revoke. The only possible avenue would be to revoke a Business Tax Certificate.

Mr. Brazil further recommended that an ombudsman or peer group be organized to address habitual violators and allow the industry to formally self-police. This could become a regular function of the TAC and/or a TAC task force to proactively address issues. Daniel Carey recommended that residents be allowed to participate in these meetings to provide greater support. Mark Dana recommended that problematic tour operators be sent a letter laying out consequences and/or sanctions should noncompliance continue, such as withheld business from affiliated hotels, restaurants, and businesses. This would be a solid example of the industry self-policing and protecting wider interests. Mr. Brazil supported this suggestion as a first action of the proposed regulatory task force, followed by individual meetings.

Daniel Carey suggested that the task force address problematic residents as well, such as those who aggressively confront tour operators. Mr. Owens was in favor of this, providing an example of the tit-for-tat nature of confrontation between aggressive residents and defensive tour operators. Ms. Allen reinforced the need for time parameters in residential areas downtown, as the voluntary policy to end tours by midnight is not being followed by every tour operator.

Mr. Lovett recommended that the discussion end until the small group could make its recommendations. Ms. Broker noted that the TAC discussions were valuable as they would help focus the small group conversations. Ms. Broker will organize the small group to produce immediate, mid-range, and long-term goals and recommendations for the TAC to consider. Chair Goode-Walker ended the discussion by supporting a proposal to reduce the size of tour groups from 30 to 20 maximum, thereby enhancing visitor experience and reducing safety concerns.

### **Other Business**

Chair Goode-Walker opened the floor to nominations for the Chair of the TAC, a position she has held for ten years. Mr. Lovett nominated Melinda Allen and Mr. Ambrose seconded the nomination. Ms. Allen accepted the nomination, stating that she would be rolling off as the DNA President in May and would have the time to dedicate to the position. All were in favor and Ms. Allen was appointed the TAC Chair. Mr. Carey then nominated Mark Dana as the Vice Chair, seconded by Mr. Lovett. Mr. Dana accepted the nomination and all were in favor.

Due to scheduling conflicts, the January meeting was changed to January 30<sup>th</sup> (instead of the 16<sup>th</sup>). Mr. Lovett inquired about the status of the Quadricycle Ordinance revisions to remove tours from residential areas east of Abercorn in favor of permitting operation on Indian Street. Mr. Lovett had further issues with the proposal to allow commercial tours as far south as Gaston



Street. After a clarification of commercial versus chartered boundaries, Ms. Hutson agreed to revisit the boundaries and to email the final information before the revisions are presented to Council.

In a final point of discussion, Mr. Marinelli reinforced the need to expand conversations beyond the historic downtown area. Visit Savannah and the Tourism Management Plan advocate for incorporating other areas of Savannah, such as Starland and the Victorian District, into long-term planning and consideration. Mr. Carey recommended using the TAC to collect data on the possibilities and limitations of tourism expansion in emerging areas. Mr. Ambrose stated that the Victorian District is open to expanding its tourism reach, which is already happening in areas surrounding Forsyth Park. Mr. Ambrose stated that his district appealed more to the historic tour experience, unlike the “party” experience to be found at the Plant Riverside District. Mr. Brazil encouraged extreme due diligence when considering expansion into districts outside of the downtown core, citing his company’s experience entering the Beach Institute area and the poor welcome they received from residents even after community engagement.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

**Next Meeting:**           Wednesday, January 30<sup>th</sup>  
                                  8:30am – 9:30am  
                                  City Hall Media Room