



## Tourism Advisory Committee

### May 18, 2022, Meeting Minutes

**TAC Attendees:** Sue Adler, Melinda Allen, Jason Combs, Nancy Maia, Joe Marinelli, Michael Owens, Vaughnette Goode-Walker, and Jay Wiendl

**TAC Absences:** Charlie Brazil and Steve Brenneman

**City Staff:** Susan Broker, Rachel Buck, Edward Grant, Steve Henry, Jennifer Herman, and Michele Strickland

**Guests:** Melissa Austin, Caila Brown, Deborah Caldwell, Dee Ann Geeslin (Assisting with Meeting Minutes), Mary Sue McCarthy, Chris Medford, Garry Patrick (Filling in for Charlie Brazil), and Will Reyes

Call to Order: 8:39 a.m.

- Approval of Minutes from April 20, 2022 Meeting

Jason Combs requested a motion to approve the minutes from the April 20, 2022 Tourism Advisory Committee meeting.

Joe Marinelli made a motion to approve the minutes. Vaughnette Goode-Walker seconded the motion to approve the minutes. Minutes passed unanimously.

- Director's Report: Rachel Buck

- **Bicycle and Segway Ordinance**

Rachel Buck introduced the purpose of the discussion by explaining the bicycle companies would like to revisit the recently approved Bicycle and Segway Ordinance. Representatives Melissa Austin (Savannah on Wheels), Chris Medford (Sip & Cycle), and Will Reyes (Savannah Bike Tours) were in attendance to express their concerns. Susan Broker introduced Steve Henry and Michelle Strickland from the Traffic Engineering department who were present to clarify traffic questions as it pertained to bike tours. J. Combs reminded the group to be mindful of the length of comments and to try to avoid repetitive comments.

Will Reyes of Savannah Bike Tours addressed the room and expressed his concerns with the ordinance:

- **Time restrictions:** Companies avoid main arterial roads to avoid impeding rush hour traffic. They adjust times and routes depending on traffic patterns. This is why bikes have boundaries instead of routes. To his knowledge, there haven't been negative issues relating to the current



hours of operation and the removal of these hours would have a devastating financial impact on the business and would negatively impact Savannah's only Spanish speaking bike tour at 5:30p. The city is very calm before 9a in the morning.

- **Size of groups:** Cars are far less aggressive towards large groups of bikes than small groups. If Savannah Bike Tours continued selling 25 tickets for a tour but split the group into two ~~and~~ separate tour routes. This would mean more bikers on the road at the same time and W. Reyes would have to pay an additional guide which would be financially devastating.

W. Reyes stated, "he can lead 30+ vehicles safely in an active war zone so he is more than capable of leading 18/25 people on bicycles across a Savannah street safely."

Time restrictions and size of groups are Savannah Bike Tours' main concerns because it would be financially devastating to his family and business.

W. Reyes stated the next three points are minor but still concerns.

- **Forsyth Park restriction:** the new restriction to a perimeter only is too restrictive. He requests that bike tours continue to be allowed to be anywhere bicycles are allowed by the city.
- **The number of bike tours in squares at one time:** Bikes must dismount before walking into a square there for they should be considered a walking tour and allowed in the square. This restriction would force groups of bikes to stop on the street outside of the squares. This is more dangerous than being allowed in the square.
- **Impeding traffic flow:** W. Reyes stated that according to Georgia Law. Every person riding a bicycle may take the lane turning left or avoid hazards. Safe cycling lanes are too narrow to share safely with motor vehicle. Most importantly here, when traveling at the same speed as traffic or when passing or standing apart vehicle.

W. Reyes stated they share roads with horses, Segways, trolleys, etc. and bike tours move at the same speed as traffic so therefore do not impede the flow of traffic. He stated bikes move faster than trolleys, etc. they should not have to pull over if trolleys do not have to pull over. Bike tours should have the same rules as trolleys. Same road, same rules. The company's electric bikes can go faster than the speed limit and would not impede traffic at all.

W. Reyes comments concluded.

Chris Medford with Sip & Cycle stated his main concern is time restrictions. He requested more explanation on time restrictions and areas of concern from Traffic



Engineering. Sip and Cycle currently offers tours at 10a, 1p, and 4p. He stated that the time restrictions would negatively affect revenue by 30% by not allowing tours between 4:30 and 6p. Sip and Cycle is prepared to offer tours at 8a later in the Summer. C. Meadford stated as the operator of the company the safety of his customers is his main concern.

C. Meadford also requested justification on why more than one bike tour is not allowed in a square. He stated it is significantly safer to gather in a square than on the outside of the square. Bike tours should be treated as a walking tour and allowed in the square to give a high quality tour.

C. Meadford concerns concluded.

Melissa Austin (Savannah on Wheels) stated the main provision she had a concern with in the ordinance is the statement "At no time shall a tour company employee stop traffic on a through the street to let a tour group cross." M. Austin Stated that though Savannah on Wheels does limit their tours to 10 people and if they book over 10 people, they send a second guide for safety there are times when the tour may get separated. She used the example of turning on Whitaker and stated if the group was to be separated the tour guide would put his or herself in between the car and cyclist to ensure everyone stayed together.

M. Austin concerns concluded.

R. Buck called on SAV Traffic and Engineering to address the aforementioned concerns: Steve Henry Director of Traffic Engineering explained that the concern is during peak hours when traffic is heavier. He asked if other cities have time restrictions. S. Broker answered that research has not uncovered any other ordinances that address groups of this size. She believes that Charleston doesn't allow bike tours in downtown at all. She commented that TAC recognizes that bike tours are different than trolleys and allow for boundaries instead of routes so paths can change if needed. She also said that the city must be diligent about citizen safety.

S. Henry expressed that he is open to more discussion with bike tours about safety, routes, and group size and is willing to compromise. The biggest concern is safety and liability.

W. Reyes stated that there have been zero accidents with cars since 2009 and that larger groups are far more visible than small groups and crossing busy streets all at once is safe. W. Reyes stated he is against having a second guide on the tour because he would rather pay one person for a good quality tour than two people. The guide's head is always on a swivel.



J. Combs directed the conversation forward. Mr. Owens stated that crossing a street assumes the group is going all at one time – can't assume this.

R. Buck suggested a separate discussion be held that addresses adjusting routes or group number according to time of day. This suggestion was met with favorable feedback. S. Broker expressed that boundary flexibility is allowed but maybe consider establishing a set route during busy times. J. Combs suggested maybe just not crossing busy streets at rush hour. M. Allen remarked that examining traffic patterns at certain times of day could help with adjusting routes. Vaughnette Goode Walker extended her compliments to the bike tours for practicing safety and asked if all tours will be capacity at 25 people. Answer is not always – depends on time of year.

R. Buck asked the group's opinion on number of 25 participants on tours. M. Owens answered that size groups looks daunting but is not aware of any safety incidents. He asked, "where is the problem?" Suggests that the City of SAV shouldn't regulate just to regulate. Regulations should be based on facts (not concerns or looks).

J. Herman explained that a bike tour does not have the same rights as an individual biker by GA law.

M. Owens expressed that the current ordinance recommendation is too stringent.

J. Marinelli suggested safety track record must be considered as regulations are put in place.

N. Maia said that the VNA's main concerns are around Forsyth Park. The area is already congested, and the main concern is the size of bike tour groups. VNA is solidly against allowing bikes in the interior of the park and in the pedestrian right of way.

M. Allen said the DNA shares the same opinion as VNA on the number of bikes allowed.

Traffic Engineering clarified that parks fall under the jurisdiction of Park and Tree – not Engineering. M. Strickland remarked that not every square can accommodate 25 bikes. That many bikes can damage landscaping that the city is responsible for replacing/repair. S. Broker offered that there was much conversation and research that went into the ordinance but that the concerns are being heard and acknowledged. She suggested taking this matter back to the city staff level to further develop. A motion was made to refer the matter back to staff with a report given at the next meeting. Move: Combs, M. Owens seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.



- **RHI Update: Edward Grant**

S. Broker announced the approval of a contract with RHI for a study of our city activity during nighttime hours. There are numerous opportunities to give feedback and participate. She hopes many districts and people will give input. This study does not only include historic district. This will be a comprehensive study. First visit from RHI is June. This visit will include late night tours, addressing businesses, entertainment, crime, tourism.

E. Grant said there will be listening sessions with a wide variety of citizens and communities. He iterated that nighttime management is not restrictive but rather results in advocacy for those involved in late night commerce. Public safety measures will be a high priority. Sound, crowd density, type of district (residential, commercial) will be taken into consideration.

J. Combs asked if the old committee would remain or dissolve moving forward. E. Grant said that question remains TBD.

J. Wiendl asked how one defines a social district. Mr. Grant answered vibrant economy, shops, restaurants, mixed use. J. Wiendl asked who will define this for regulation. M. Owens remarked that the TAC has done a good job with involving city entities in addressing social issues – public drunkenness, disorderly conduct. Suggested that more measures can be taken to improve nighttime experience and safety, e.g. transportation plans, bar closing times, etc.

J. Marinelli requested that an outline of RHI expectations and timeline be presented to the TAC next month. S. Broker responded that this request has been presented to RHI already.

- **New Tour Company:**

**Hearse Tours Limo:**

Tabled the topic until the company has a business plan.

**Creeper Van Savannah**

R. Buck referred to an email she sent earlier in the week with the business plan for Creeper Van Savannah. The van is decorated with Creeper Van Savannah and other verbiage such as “free candy.” The company is petitioning for a tour permit/business approval. R. Buck mentioned she spoke with M. Owens about the company in passing and M. Owens stated he had concerns.



M. Owens examined city ordinance and said that the Tour Service for Hire Ordinance states that businesses must be compatible with aesthetic of the city. M. Owens stated he will be voting no.

M. Allen had concerns about the van and addressed the number of children that are downtown.

R. Buck said the main point of the business is a bar crawl and tour narration.

R. Buck stated TAC should follow the guidelines in the Tour Service for Hire Ordinance. Any person seeking to operate a tour service vehicle that is not recognized by the City may petition the Tourism Advisory Committee for review. The Tourism Advisory Committee should consider the application and make a written recommendation to the Mayor and Aldermen.

J. Combs made motion to approve Creeper Van Savannah. By a unanimous vote, the recommendation was denied.

G. Patrick interjected that the TAC must be careful about setting a precedent to decide what is appropriate or not.

J. Combs asked for any other new or old business.

J. Combs moved to adjourn the meeting. M. Owens seconded.

Adjourn 9:38 a.m.

**Next meeting: August 17, 2022– City Hall Media Room – 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor**