

**Tourism Development Council Meeting – Approved**

**Wednesday**  
**May 12, 2021**  
**2:00-4:00 pm**  
Zoom Meeting

**Members Present:** Jody Carson, Betsy LaBarge, David Penilton, Hans Wipper, Luke Spencer

**Staff Present:** Samara Phelps, Ithaca Janzen, Janice Nilson, Annie Bailey, Lizzie Keenan

**Commissioners and Policy Advisors Present:** Gary Schmidt, County Administrator, Tootie Smith Clackamas County Chair, Commissioners Martha Schrader, Sonya Fisher, Paul Savas and Mark Shull, Policy Advisors Tracy Moreland, Everett Wild and, Kimberlee DeSantis, and Christina Terwilliger, Interim Clerk to the Board

**Others Present:** Thelma Haggemiller, Slow Poke Tours

**Action Items:**

**Welcome/Call to Order/Declaration of Conflicts—** Jody Carson, Chair

**Approve April 14, 2021 Minutes—** Janice Nilson, Management Analyst

Motion to Approve by David Penilton and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Luke Spencer, voting was unanimous.

**Approve updated letter of support for National Designation of Willamette Falls & Landings Heritage Area - Samara Phelps, Executive Director**

- Letter of support seeking support for the National Designation of the Heritage Area. These new letters of support will replace ones previously made.
  - David – I would love to renew support. Is there an ask that is tied to this as well?
    - Tourism had Coalition support in budget for a long time and now County Admin has taken it over. It was \$15,000. Several other cities additionally support this effort.
    - Motion to approve was made by Luke Spencer and 2<sup>nd</sup> by David Penilton. Vote was unanimous.
  - Update on the Locks bill in the state for creation of a public corporation which can receive ownership of the locks from the Corp of Engineers. The State House has passed and now hopefully moves quickly through the State Senate.

**Discussions:**

**Overview of joint meeting with the BCC – review agenda and roles - Samara Phelps**

- In years more average than 2020, we have come together with the Board of County Commissioners to look at a theme for a path forward for tourism.
- Last year we were working on layoffs, lease agreements. They have seen trauma and impact to the industry.

- Today is a look forward. You will be able to share your perspective for needs and opportunities for your communities that you would like to see happen.
- Structured with introductions – please share your perspective you bring to the TDC; lodging, recreation, etc. and the community you are tied to.
- There will be a short presentation of where we've been, where we are going and the approach we are taking – forecasting from Jody, I will share the four issues we built our program around.
  - COVID, Fire and the other disasters' impacts.
  - Perception of our destination as a safe welcoming destination.
  - Mitigating the difference between over use and underuse.
  - Finally organizational resiliency.
- We will then open the discussion and give them the chance to ask clarifying questions. This is not a place to solve
- Then Open Discussion gaps, projection going forward. This is not a place to solve it, but there are lots of people in room that are able to help.
- The County is seeking input on how to spend the dollars received from the rescue plan. Common interest is the road to recovery.
- This is a time to talk about opportunities to serve our communities – not at time to ask the commissioners to do something, but rather for possible assistance your community would like to see, throw it out there to be talked about.
- Staff will have time to share bright spot highlights.

#### **TDC Member Reports—Roundtable**

- David – Things are ok. We're struggling looking at things and social distance. How are we going to operate and be efficient, we're hanging in there, but it's a struggle.
- Luke – It's good. I'm alive and that's good; I got a vaccination. Things picking up in Estacada. Training new staff. Struggling with supply need. Trying to get gear. Sales are heavy and we are running out of stuff. It'll be bad if we're not able to get more for summer season.
- Hans – Going along trying to keep up with open / shut and capacity limits. Starting summer camps June 21<sup>st</sup> – the 20<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> of July. We're still restricted to 50 people in the building at a time. We have resumed having Birthday Party and Private Rentals. It's getting the word out that we are open. Able to get restaurant revitalization grant that will help a lot and still looking for more grants. On the mountain Ski season is closed for the year. Ski bowl is looking for a Memorial Day weekend opening for summer activities but possibly won't be until about the middle of June for summer.
- Betsy – My situation is different than everybody else. We are busy, everything surpassing 2019 revenues and will surpass 2020 as well. My problem is getting people to apply for jobs. All of my employees have good pay and benefits and we still can't get people to come and apply. People have it too good on unemployment right now and until they begin restricting those benefits, I'm not sure how summer will go. They're not getting foreign workers on the east coast as well. Ski Bowl and Timberline are having the same issues. Many have to shut a couple days a week because they don't have people to work. How do bookings look? For the most part we are still getting people who can drive here. We are seeing more people who can fly. Many of our bookings for the summer are bookings from last year. Still predominately people who

can drive from Oregon, Washington and California. Some camps are returning causing some houses to be fully booked for July. I've tried pushing rates for July hoping to book in June and August and people still want July.

- Thelma – want to thank Ithaca and Annie for the FAM tour. The reason I am late today is because I went to talk to the owner of the Corner 14 food carts. We're looking at doing redevelopment at the Elks Lodge by the Light Rail in Milwaukie
- Jody – Already gave updates on the locks legislation. I'm seeing lots of farmers markets are either opening or will be opening soon. We've had more vendors than ever apply. Not sure why. We are working with the city to increase the size of the market.

### **Short Break**

**Welcome to BCC and Guests** - Jody Carson, TDC Chair

**Introductions** - All Attendees

**Tourism on the Road to Recovery** – A sustainable tourism approach - Jody Carson, TDC Chair

**Identified Critical Issues for Tourism Recovery** – Review of Stakeholder Feedback - Samara Phelps, Executive Director

**Program Strategies for Tourism Recovery** – Plan for FY21-22 - Samara Phelps

**Discussion** - Stakeholders prioritized support for the hardest hit communities and local businesses. Who is hardest hit? Looking forward, what do Tourism businesses need to recover? Is the need different in each community? How can the County help the tourism sector recover?

- A slide show was shared showing the loss of revenue during Covid and that it is now recovering. It's not looking like we will be back to "normal" until 2024, Visitor Sentiment – travel state of mind; additional impacts – Wildfires; Workforce Shortages; Projected Road to Recovery – not expected until 2024; Why tourism Matters; Sustainable Destination Lens; Planning for Recovery: Stakeholder Engagement
- Samara continued sharing the four key issues
  - Address Covid and Wildfire Impacts on Tourism
  - Negative perceptions of destination around safety.
  - Overuse in specific locations with underuse in others.
  - Department reduced capacity and financial stability.
- Additionally shared the strengths and how all are going to drive business to local communities.
- Who was hardest hit and what do we do for recovery?
  - Commissioner Savas – Hospitality was hit pretty hard and there are labor shortages. Hearing from family restaurants. Even though they have the staffing they aren't seeing people in the door due to fear. There will be a recalibration of sorts – we don't know how that will play out but if there is a fear factor, how do they do that in a way they feel

safe. The places people don't want to go right now are Seattle and Portland, due to fear. Probably money to be spent but how they do it that is the question.

- David – everything you said is true. Bookings are on the rise, people are making plans. I think people want to travel, to get back to normal. We are having to make hard decisions early. It makes it hard to know what to commit to as we still don't know what will be open later this year. There's opportunity, we need to be in a readiness position. I don't think we are quite there yet.
- Chair Smith commented in "chat" as she has to leave early  
The road to recovery requires the lease to be satisfied, looking toward the future. I don't see how this department can successfully move forward without satisfying that debt. Dependency upon the general fund to pay the lease is not sustainable. I will need to leave at 345 for another appointment. This has been a very good presentation Tootie Smith.
- Samara – Chair Smith, just to clarify, general fund is not used for the lease. The Tourism Development Council takes on full responsibility for that through the Transient Room Tax Fund. It is an obligation and that's money not going into these programs we're talking about.
- Chair Smith – Somehow we have got to get that space subleased. I have had conversations with the owner and he thinks it can be done. I would like to have another business entity talk to them regularly. Looking at your budget presentation, what efforts are being done to satisfy that lease? It's not sustainable, for this group. Its scary for me, it's scary for you.
- Luke – Talking about safe travel and where people may want to go. The outdoor industry is one of those. Estacada is one of those places. There are multiple places in Estacada, Molalla and other small communities. All of these have safe places to offer. Multiple outdoor activities are available for visitors use. The more we can invest in these areas, the more we create assets. We will recover in Estacada, but we need everyone's help to do that.

**Bright Spots** – Program highlights from this year - Annie Austin, Marketing & Communication Coordinator; Ithaca Janzen, Programs Assistant; Lizzie Keenan, Regional Program Coordinator

- Main Street Meet the River – We have been working with dollars from the Portland Region. It has been a Portland region message but we will use it as well. The focus has been on the Willamette River and the Willamette Water Trail which is new. Starting in June, banner ads will return driving to the Willamette Water Trail. These include Wilsonville, Gladstone, and Canby, these are communities that have downtown's within a half mile or less to get to the water. Your Story Everywhere is a story housed on Travel Oregon and is being promoted through Travel Oregon that gives a fresh take on the Main Street Meets the River.
- We are still working on Agritourism and Farm Loops.
- Wine & Tap trails are going well. Wine Trail is the newest piece is the Wine Trail and we have Clackamas County specific ads targeting multiple screens.
- Lizzie – Through the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge, the regional cooperative tourism programs, there are separate funds from the territory. They are funding two projects into this summer. One is for \$10,000. The Artback Murals will be getting \$1,000 to add QR codes to all of the murals in town giving more information. Also funding an Estacada Field Guide

encouraging people to visit all the businesses, see the murals and see/do all that Estacada has to offer.

- Ithaca – We are doing a series of hybrid virtual and goodie box frontline FAM tours. These are to get our frontline staff such as hotel front desk, guides and operators, people who will be interacting with visitors so they can get people to various places in the region.
  - The first was tying the River to Main Street.
  - Next will be the Mountain, Boring, Estacada and Sandy.
  - And finally the Valley area, and Wilsonville.

#### **Closing Comments from Participants - Jody Carson, TDC Chair**

- Mark Shull – Luke, if we were able to encourage ODOT to move the closure point upriver a ways, say by the middle of July how far would that be? How can we better target, California, Oregon, Washington to let them know that Clackamas County is not Portland or Multnomah County?
- Martha – thank you for the privilege of being the liaison. Tourism is going to take off again in our county because of staff and because of this board.
- Betsy – Mark Shull comments reminded me, I don't know what kind of relationship Clackamas County Roads can have with ODOT. In February there were three feet of snow in 48 hours on the roads over a weekend and many of the roads were not plowed until Monday. ODOT got roads done and were sitting around. Many of the county roads were not plowed until Monday. We often get forgotten when things like this happen.
- Hans- I know the county is looking the best way to spend the money which is coming. Restaurants were hardest hit. Grants kept us going. If it hadn't been for them I wouldn't be in business. If Clackamas County could get more grants going like you did last year it would help to keep businesses open.
- Paul - The County has invested some time in the Business Recovery Center's working with chambers of commerce to make sure we are connected to business. Work with your local chamber. We don't know how/when the money will be dribbling in. We don't know how or when Governor has assured us the counties that were harder and we were one of them, perhaps more than any counties in the state. Keep an eye on the Business Recovery Centers. Recovery will go beyond 20/21.
- Jody – Grants were helpful for businesses here along Willamette Main Street. We also had an ice storm which closed many of them for 9 days. One of the comments we had was we have businesses are minority born businesses with English as a second language. They struggled with filling out the applications and luckily we have a mainstream manager who could help. Please look at having assistance with people who would have problems completing grant forms.
- Sonya – I really enjoyed the update. We had some really good discussion today and look forward to working with you in the future.

**Adjourn 4:02pm**