



Tourism Development Council Meeting
Wednesday October 9th, 2024 2:04 – 3:45pm

Minutes approved 11/13/24

In person and virtual via Zoom - [Recording Link](#)

Members Present: Luke Spencer, Holly Pfortmiller, Tessa Koch, Brian Crow
Staff Present: Sarah Eckman, Lizzie Keenan, Janice Nilson, Jim Austin, Aaron Liersemann,
Danae Burke Jones, Amber Johnson **Others Present:** Tom Riggs, Kevin White

2:04 – 2:06pm Welcome/Call to Order/Introductions & Declaration of Conflicts - Luke Spencer, Chair

2:06 – 2:07pm Approval of Minutes for September 2024 - Danae Burke Jones, Administrative Specialist
Minutes will be approved at the November meeting due to lack of quorum.

2:07 – 2:50pm Clackamas River Alternative Floats summer 2024 update - Aaron Liersemann, Tourism Specialist, Sr. Tom Riggs, County Parks Manager

County Parks Manager Tom Riggs shared the background on how and why the Alternative Float Program was implemented in 2022 as a response to overcrowding and congestion at many parks with river access during the summer months. Demand for river recreation was creating long lines to enter parks along with causing safety and traffic concerns. After reviewing possible solutions to fix the issue, the decision was made for County Parks and County Tourism to partner for solutions and come up with alternatives for folks wanting to float the river. Since the programs' implementation - line wait times are down, there is less congestion on surrounding roadways, visitors have access to river floating information including etiquette, alternative routes, on-river signage for where to get out and can check how busy a park is before arriving.

Aaron Liersemann covered how the program came to fruition from the tourism side and noted that this project touches on three of our strategic priorities: Flow, Building Value, and Environment. The program has developed over the past few years, starting with Year One (2022) which Aaron referred to as the Experimental Stage. During this time four alternative floats on the lower Clackamas River were researched and promoted. These alternative float options were added to the Mt. Hood Territory website, a commercial was created with KOIN directing people to alternative float web page and laminated pocket cards were created for Park Rangers so they can offer visitors a QR code to scan directing them to alternative locations when Barton is full.

Year Two (2023) was about educating and improving the program. The four alternative floats were tweaked for easier user access, QR codes were made trackable, informational A-frame signs were posted at key locations for visitors, 45 "No Parking" signs were added along Bakers Ferry Road and Monty, the river otter mascot, was introduced to share what visitors "Otter Do" while floating. Year Three (2024) is where the project really hit its stride. Two more live cameras were added at Barton Park, the marketing team dialed in their targeting marketing and tested a new geotargeted ad that was super successful. A "How to Float the Clackamas River" blog was written as another resource and more signage and collateral, including river signage was added. 2024 analytics show that the average engagement time on the alternative float webpages is up significantly from last year and much higher than the rest of Mt. Hood Territory's site with high engagement and clickthrough rates. Aaron met with eNRG Kayaking which offers a shuttle service for floaters and they reported that many of their guests mentioned hearing about their shuttle service on OMHT's How to Float the Clackamas River Page. Alternative Float Program plans for 2025 include merging traffic cameras onto one webpage and adding an estimated re-opening count down clock.

A question was asked if the analytic numbers presented included campers or just day use visitors? Aaron answered that the numbers include both, and Tom further clarified that the numbers are only showing data for June, July & August 2024. It was also asked if all the alternative floats promoted have fees associated?

Aaron responded that some access points have free parking while others have day use fees. The website lists the usage fees for each location. Luke commented that Alternative Floats is a fabulous program and needs to continue to build. Clackamas River Outfitters gets a lot of calls inquiring about shuttle service and people looking for information on how to float the river. It is not lucrative for individual businesses to offer float shuttles and Luke wondered if there has been discussion on some type of subsidies or partnership for running a shuttle? Tom responded that one of the items in the Barton Park master plan considers four types of shuttle options including a subsidized private shuttle service. This shuttle service has been on the table in the past, but not being actively pursued. There was a private shuttle operator this summer and the Parks program still needs to debrief with them to see how it went.

2:40 – 2:55 pm Tourism updates on Clackamas River/Estacada Lake - Luke Spencer, Tourism Development Council Chair/Clackamas River Outfitters

Clackamas River/Estacada area stakeholders, including Luke, had a meeting with PGE last week to review and get project updates in advance of PGE's dam relicensing adjacent to Timber Park. That meeting included updates that the City of Estacada may potentially circulate a petition to change rules and regulations on Estacada Lake. Currently there are no rules surrounding lake use and stakeholders have been talking about wanting change for a while. The City of Estacada may come to Clackamas County Tourism for a letter of support.

Water access at Timber Park is right next to the PGE dam and it is unusual to have visitors accessing a lake and recreating that close to a dam. Currently, when PGE needs to do work on or access the dam, they shut down the entire park. Park users report not having advance public notice of closures and having to turn around/leave upon arrival. PGE often does projects in July & August because of predictable low water levels and Luke would like them to be encouraged to increase communications when they are having these types of closures due to high tourism use during these months, and fully evaluate and communicate whether or not full closures are necessary for the scope of work being done.

Luke expressed concern about delays to the re-opening of campgrounds on the Clackamas River which were damaged during the 2020 forest fires. Aaron expressed interest in seeing the reopening timeline as Tourism has granted money to the Forest Service with the idea that they'd be using it to continue opening campgrounds. Jim added that he had recently learned that the Forest Service will be signing a five-year contract with The Forest Foundation to rebuild and start opening campgrounds faster, and after talking to The Forest Foundation Jim was under the impression that things were happening sooner than expected. Luke and Jim agreed to re-group and share notes on campground opening timelines.

2:55 – 3:14pm TDC Recruitment Plans - Lizzie Keenan, Interim Tourism Manager, Sarah Eckman, Interim Executive Director

Brian Crow and Mike Quinn were approved to join the board in September and Catherine stepped down from the TDC, which leaves the board with three empty positions and a priority to bring more TDC members on board. Two of these open positions must be filled with lodging partners and one can be At Large. One suggestion from staff would be to bring in a destination/environment stewardship voice to that At Large position. For the recruitment process, staff will work with the County to put a listing online, let TDC members know and do direct outreach to anyone that may be a good fit.

Luke requested that the board have more transparency and timeliness on when applications come in and how the recruitment process is going. Sarah responded that the board would be kept more up to date on the recruitment process and Lizzie added that staff would see about speeding up the process of getting board

members approved. A question was asked about categories need to be represented and Lizzie responded that the bylaws state that at least four positions should be lodging, and the rest have historically been filled with heritage, recreation and agrotourism partners. A suggestion was made to consider having more event producers and people that drive guests to the lodging.

3:14 – 3:18pm Q1 Financials - Lizzie Keenan, Interim Tourism Manager, Sarah Eckman, Interim Executive Director

Sarah reviewed the Q1 financials with the reminder that while 25% of the Fiscal Year is behind us, not all spending follows a systematic usage pattern. So, while some categories such as payroll sits around 25% of budgeted spent, there are outliers such as dues and memberships category sitting at 72% spent which is because to most department dues and memberships are paid in the first quarter of the fiscal year. By and large everything is running to plan, and we are on track.

3:18 – 3:34pm Program Updates - Staff

Lizzie shared that the Executive Director recruitment went live last week and will remain open until filled, with the first round of reviews being October 23rd. It is still County Administrator Gary's vision to hire by the end of the year and the interview process will likely including meet and greets with staff, TDC members and County Commissioners for final candidates.

Tessa mentioned she received a call from someone interested in the position who had questions about the reasoning for the listing to not be posted until the previous director had left. Tessa asked if anyone else had received calls. No one else had and Lizzie said the timing of the recruitment being posted was due to the County's recruitment process timeline.

Lizzie was also excited to share that the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge RDMO, which Clackamas County Tourism manages, was once again awarded an eight-year management contract from Travel Oregon.

Jim, Lizzie & Tessa recently attended the Meaningful Travel Summit in Eugene run by Tourism Cares and Tessa spoke on a panel about agritourism and rural community engagement. Lizzie shared a photo and gave a shout out to Tessa for doing an amazing job.

Jim shared that the Strategic Investment Grant Program has been extended one additional week to be open through 5pm October 18th. Review committee training will be October 24th.

Aaron said that year two of the Harvest Trail is nine days in and farms are already needing more passport cards. Goal for the program is 200 redemptions. Aaron brought copies of the new Clackamas River Outdoor Recreation maps and shared thanks to everyone that participated in getting this out.

3:34 – 3:45 pm TDC Updates - TDC Members

Tessa: TMK debuted an IPA "Thirsty Heffers" and Tessa is happy to send the press release to anyone that would like it.

Holly: Still really busy for October, rates are lowering, but still doing good. Waiting on new furniture to arrive and carpeting to be installed for the remodel.

Brian: Celtic Festival was a good event, and they have signed for three more years at the fairground. This weekend is Adult Prom and have already almost doubled the attendance over last year's event. Working on



getting more smaller events. Looking at adding a resource fair in the future that will host various government programs.

Luke: Starting planning for next years White Water Festival, business has slowed down and are working on switching over their e-commerce site. Had a meeting with Commissioner Schrader last week who has interest in working with those putting together new zoning related to agritourism. Rezoning the farmland would allow for retail sales and Commissioner Schrader is looking for support from the TDC. She would like to encourage the TDC to do a site visit to North Willamette Research and Education Center. The center is a Wilsonville property owned by Clackamas County and operated by OSU Extension Service to conduct experimental farming practices.

Met with someone from Willamette Falls Locks, would also like to have the TDC come out and view the historic locks and Luke things this would be a good idea for a field trip. Suggestion was made to take a tour after a future TDC meeting.

3:45pm Adjourn Public Meeting