



## Tourism Advisory Council – Meeting Minutes

**Meeting Date: June 7, 2023**

The June 7, 2023 meeting of the Tourism Advisory Council of West Virginia was convened at 1:00 p.m. at Heritage Farm Museum and Village (3300 Harvey Rd, Huntington, WV 25704) in Wayne County and via web conference call.

### **Advisory Council Members Present:**

Kara Dense, Thomas Price, Jeffrey Lusk, Audy Perry, Susan M. Riddle, Lisa Strader, Laurel Ziemanski, Randy Damron (representing Secretary of Transportation Jimmy Wriston), Garner Marks (representing Secretary of Commerce James Bailey)

### **Advisory Council Members Joining via Web Conference Call:**

John Klemish, Brian Helmick, and Robert Peckenpaugh

### **West Virginia Department of Tourism Representatives Present:**

Secretary of Tourism Chelsea Ruby

Staff: Krysten Wolfe, Jill Howard, Sarah Harmon, Hillary Balding, Lauren Hough, Ennis Smith, Perri Bone, Brenna Dugan, Sarah Smithson

### **Others Present:**

Anna Adkins

### **Call to Order:**

Chair of the Tourism Advisory Council Jeffrey Lusk called the meeting to order at approximately 1:00 p.m.

### **Welcome:**

Council member Audy Perry, Executive Director of the Heritage Farm Foundation, welcomed the meeting attendees to Heritage Farm Museum and Village.

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**Introductions:**

Chair Lusk introduced himself and invited the others present around the room – including Council members, West Virginia Department of Tourism staff, and members of the public to introduce themselves. The Council Members joining via web conference call also introduced themselves.

**Establishment of New Tourism Advisory Council:**

Chair Lusk gave some background about the Tourism Advisory Council (formerly known as the Tourism Commission). He explained that the Council is established in West Virginia State Code §5B-2I-7 entitled Tourism Advisory Council, that Tourism has been elevated to a department with representation in the Governor’s Cabinet.

*Meeting Schedule and Frequency:*

Chair Lusk went over the meeting schedule for the Council, noting that the group meets quarterly with the next upcoming meeting scheduled at Canaan Valley Resort State Park as part of the upcoming Governor’s Conference on Tourism in September, and with other meetings planned for November 2023 and January 2024.

*Summary of Roles and Responsibilities:*

Chair Lusk explained that the role of the Tourism Advisory Council is to provide expertise as tourism industry professionals on matters that are brought before the Council and raised by the members. He noted that the Council’s goal is to make the tourism industry as successful as possible in West Virginia, and to provide advisory support to Secretary of Tourism Chelsea Ruby and her team at the Department of Tourism.

*Reimbursement Policies and Process:*

Jeffrey Lusk invited Krysten Wolfe, Director of Administration for the Department of Tourism to go over the Council’s policies and process for travel reimbursement as it relates to the Council’s meetings and activities. Ms. Wolfe shared the details of how this will work.

**West Virginia Department of Tourism Report:**

Secretary of Tourism Chelsea Ruby provided a report to the Council, including economic impact, visitation, advertising performance, public relations, brand partnerships, and new initiatives, such as the West Virginia Waterfall Trail and its performance.

**New Business:**

Chair Lusk thanked Secretary Ruby for her report and noted that new business was next on the agenda.

*Workforce Development:*

Ennis Smith, Director of Destination Development for the West Virginia Department of Tourism, provided a report on the workforce initiative that the Department is undertaking in partnership with other state agencies as part of a \$5.1 million dollar grant from the U.S. Economic Department Administration. She noted that the Tourism Works program includes initiatives from middle school career exploration up through pathway programs for high school students and professional development funding for professionals who are already part of the industry.

*Governor's Conference on Tourism:*

Ennis Smith shared that the Governor's Conference on Tourism is scheduled for September 10-13, 2023 at Canaan Valley Resort State Park and noted that this year the conference will be featuring more hands-on opportunities for attendees including learning labs and off-site excursions.

*International Development:*

Secretary Ruby discussed the work that the Department of Tourism is doing to expand international tourism in West Virginia, including partnering with Travel South to take a regional approach to entering this market. She explained that assistance for tourism partners is available from the Department of Tourism through a consultant who is advising the agency and businesses across the state.

*Establishment of Committees:*

Chair Lusk invited Council members to join two suggested committees, which will be formally established at the next meeting: the Workforce Committee and the Economic Development Committee. Council members indicated their interest on cards that were passed around.

**Adjournment:**

Chair Lusk asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Kara Dense motioned. Ms. Susan Riddle seconded, and the Council voted unanimously to adjourn.

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