



Tourism Advisory Council – Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: November 28th, 2023

The November 28th, 2023 meeting of the Tourism Advisory Council of West Virginia was convened at 1:00 p.m. virtually over Zoom.

Advisory Council Members Present on Call:

Kara Dense, Thomas Price, Jeffrey Lusk, Susan M. Riddle, Lisa Strader, Laurel Ziemianski, Dominique Ranieri, Robert Peckenpough, Audy Perry, and Garner Marks (representing Secretary of Economic Development Mitch Carmichael)

Advisory Council Members NOT Present on Call:

Randy Damron, John Klemish, Brian Helmick and Sydney Weber, James Bailey

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 and Brenna Dugan

Others Present on Call:

Katherine Skeldon (WV Metro News), David Rodgers (WV Department of Economic Development), and Nicholas Nunnery (WV Department of Economic Development)

Call to Order:

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

Welcome:

Council Chair, Jeffrey Lusk welcomed everyone to the call.

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Roll Call:

Chair Lusk presented the roll call with each member noting if they were present.

Approval of Minutes:

Approval of the Meeting Minutes from 9/12/23:

Chair Lusk asked for approval of the meeting minutes from the previous meeting on September 12th, 2023. Kara Dense moved to approve and Susan Riddle seconded the motion. All members approved.

West Virginia Department of Tourism Report:

Secretary of Tourism Chelsea Ruby provided a report to the Council, including public relations efforts, WV tourism being featured in almost all major tourism publications at this point, the media spot used for fall advertising, new market expansion (including partnerships with Breeze Airways, Orlando Magic, Weather.com and new Billboards), social media growth (particularly with reels), new winter media campaign (which grew from last year with new markets added), the US Capitol Christmas Tree Event (thanked partners for participation), and our new partnership with the Hopper App.

Workforce and Economic Development Update from Ennis Smith (Director of Destination Development - WV Department of Tourism):

Ms. Ennis Smith discussed the investment in 2023 generated by the Tourism Development Act Tax Credit. Ms. Smith discussed the workforce and educational initiatives that the Department of Tourism is undertaking in collaboration with other state agencies. She notes that these workforce initiatives are funded through a \$5.1 million federal Economic Development Administration grant.

Ms. Smith also mentioned that the chairs of the two respective committees – Economic Development and Workforce – plan to convene meetings before the next meeting of the Council in January, and these committees will conduct more detailed reviews and discussions of the resources and incentives in each area of focus.

Chair Lusk noted the Hatfield-McCoy Trails also saw an increase in numbers from the fall season, which marks their highest numbers to date.

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Tourism Workforce Presentation - Train your Team:

Ennis Smith introduced David Rogers (Senior Manager of Training Programs) and Nicholas Nunnery (Apprenticeship Program Coordinator) from the WV Department of Economic Development. Mr. Nunnery shared information about the tourism workforce programs currently taking place around the state. He also introduced the workforce apprenticeship team from the department and what the program offers.

Secretary Ruby noted that workforce development is vital to the tourism industry in West Virginia.

Chair Lusk asked if their team would advise applicants on which trainers and courses might be most helpful for their goals. Mr. Nunnery said yes, they will definitely provide advise applicants on this matter as needed.

Tourism Works Training Modules:

Ennis Smith asked for feedback on the Tourism Works program and shared that Blue Ridge Community and Technical College will attend Tourism Day at the Legislature 2024 with an online course pilot for partners to test and collect feedback to make sure they are beneficial and meet the needs of the industry. Ennis Smith and Chair Lusk asked if there are any more questions about the Tourism Works Program.

Secretary Ruby stated that the goal is to spread this far & wide. This program is for convenience store workers, hotel managers, grocery store clerks, it is for every single person that interacts with visitors to West Virginia.

Kara Dense asked if there is an age requirement for the courses and Ennis Smith responded that an age has not been placed on these courses but that the inclusion of high school students is a high priority because of the college credit available through the program.

Susan Riddle asked if the program is being promoted within the State Chamber of Commerce and Ennis Smith stated that the program is intended to be spread far & wide. There is marketing behind the program and it wants to be shared to all associations.

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New Business:

Chair Lusk thanked Ennis Smith and Secretary Ruby and noted that new business was next on the agenda.

Laurel Zemanski announced that the Route 340 project is complete and opening this week, just in time for the local Olde Tyme Christmas Event!

Next Meeting:

Chair Lusk announced that the next meeting will be held in Charleston, West Virginia during Tourism Day at the Legislature on January 22, 2024.

Public Comments:

Chair Lusk asked if there were any comments from the public. There were no comments.

Adjournment:

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

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