



APPROVED: November 16, 2016

**CITY OF ALBANY
TLT AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
City Hall, Santiam Room
Monday, October 24, 2016
3:00 p.m.**

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Scott Pierson called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Committee Members present: Scott Pierson, Julie Jackson, Chuck Leland, Steve Reynolds

Committee Members absent: Mitch Langjahr (excused), Mike Martin (excused), Betsy Penson (excused)

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

Business from the Public

Leigha Thomas, Director of Sales at Comfort Suites – Holiday Inn Express, said that her hotels are already booked for the entire three-day weekend of the August 2017 eclipse. The eclipse will be highly visible from this area, and people are coming from around the nation and the world for the event. She understands that some organizations are considering eclipse-related events, and she questions whether TLT funds should be used for that purpose when hotels are already full. Brief discussion followed regarding the eclipse and associated events being planned or assisted by the Albany Downtown Association (ADA) and the Albany Visitors Association (AVA). Pierson expressed appreciation for the communication and noted the importance for all of the organizations to work collaboratively in situations like this.

TLT Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Discussion

Pierson commented on the process to date. At the last meeting, the Committee worked to come up with an example budget with the intent that it would be applied to a policy, analyzed how the budget and policy support one another, and then adjusted to get to a recommendation for the City Council. He stressed that the example budget was simply an exercise and that there was an assumption there would be adjustments. The Committee generally agreed with Pierson's comments.

Pierson invited suggestions about how to proceed. Steve Reynolds suggested that a hard metric could be established based on the amount of TLT revenue that each recipient organization directly generates. Soft metrics could be established for areas where return cannot be quantified but where information can be drawn from things like surveys, web traffic, and bookings. He expressed concern that the AVA has only 256 on its email list, and he asked if it would be possible for the City to ask people on its email list if they would agree to be added to the AVA's email list. Julie Jackson noted that people generally don't want their emails to be shared, and she questioned how beneficial it would be to add these mostly local emails to the AVA's list. Brief discussion followed.

Jackson referred to previous comments from hotel representatives encouraging the use of a booking site. When traveling, she generally goes through the website of a specific hotel or a large booking site like

Expedia; she wondered what benefit would be provided by a custom booking site. In discussion, Thomas expressed support of the use of a booking site due to its tracking capabilities and the ability to have the hotels listed and easily bookable. AVA Executive Director Jimmie Lucht said that his counterparts in Portland have indicated that their booking site does not see a lot of action. Pierson said that it isn't clear whether we would get better data from an intermediary booking site over requesting that the recipient organizations provide those metrics.

Thomas said that sales for group bookings are easy to track and measure and are very important to the hoteliers. The group discussed the funding that was previously provided for a marketing position at the Expo Center, the fact that the objectives for the position were not met, and comments from the Expo Center representative that refilling that position wouldn't be worthwhile in his opinion.

Reynolds said that the hotels need to sell their inventory and that doing so is the only way to generate TLT dollars. In response to his inquiry, Thomas said projections for next year are looking light, particularly in the category of groups. There are no national dog shows booked, and the Expo Center isn't necessarily motivated to bring in groups because their funding doesn't depend on it.

Jackson said that it will take everyone working together to create a successful program; however, there doesn't appear to be a lot of cooperation among the recipient organizations and hoteliers. She suggested the formation of a group to include representatives from each of the concerns, including the hotels and the Expo Center, with metrics established for that cooperative group. Discussion followed during which it was suggested that the participant committee could be directed to meet monthly; track, support, and collaborate on events and bookings; hold one another accountable; and report to an oversight committee at least annually. The participant committee could be directed by both hard and soft metrics related to active and passive marketing efforts, with participation required as a condition of future funding. Organizations could be held accountable by funding contracts with metrics attached.

Assistant City Manager/Chief Information Officer and Interim Economic Development Director Jorge Salinas distributed hard and soft metrics established for each recipient organization, as drafted by a prior TLT review committee.

Reynolds said that the AVA receives a large portion of the TLT budget and has the infrastructure in place to market Albany and the Expo Center; however, information from the hoteliers indicates that organization is not providing a return on investment related to the generation of TLT. To generate TLT, it is necessary that some organization do the heavy lifting of marketing for group events. He asked what it would take for the AVA to be able and willing to do this work.

Lucht said the AVA currently has a contract person working on groups about one-third time. To have a full-time sales position would require additional funding. He will check with his Board, but he thinks the AVA could house the position. He noted that AVA can't negotiate contracts for the Expo Center and isn't directly aware of availability at the venue.

Thomas suggested that AVA could collect proposals from hotels, venues, etc., and submit that as a package to potential group events, similar to what has been done successfully in other communities. She commented that the AVA was allocated additional funds in 2007 for outgoing sales. Lucht noted those funds were for several activities including niche marketing. Pierson said there are multiple examples of what hasn't worked well; going forward, he would like to create a system with a support mechanism and accountability.

ADA Executive Director Peggy Burris noted that funds were previously allocated to the Expo Center for marketing. She understands that the individual hired didn't work out, but she questions why the position wouldn't be under the Expo Center which knows the availability of the venue. Pierson noted that in previous discussions with the Expo Center representative, it didn't appear that organization had the energy or motivation to oversee the marketing position.

Salinas commented that consideration should be given to whether responsibility for marketing the hotels is within the AVA's Charter and skillset. Pierson agreed, noting that the City Council will need to decide and communicate whether outbound sales is expected of the AVA; however, he believes a recommendation on the question of how to fund a marketing position is within the Committee's scope given that Council indicated support of such a position when it allocated \$50,000 of TLT to the Expo Center for that purpose. Discussion followed regarding organizations that could potentially oversee the marketing function, including the AVA, the Parks & Recreation Department, the Expo Center, or putting out a Request for Proposals.

Urban Renewal Officer Nathan Reid suggested that the TLT participant committee could present a great opportunity for an internship through Oregon State University.

Pierson summarized the following from the previous discussion:

- AVA will follow up with its Board as to whether there is interest in having a sales-driven position that would market community assets and group events.
- Staff will email a draft TLT Policy to Committee members for review.
- Consideration will be given to recommending the formation of a committee that would meet monthly with participation by the Expo Center, AVA, ADA, Airport, AMEDC, Parks & Recreation, and the hoteliers, with potential participation by restaurants and retailers. The committee would report to an oversight committee at least annually on hard and soft metrics related to active and passive marketing, with the results linked to evaluation of future funding. Consideration could be given to utilizing an intern to facilitate the committee.

Staff updates and issues

None.

BUSINESS FROM THE COMMITTEE

There was no further business.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Wednesday, November 9, 2016; 3:00-5:00 p.m., Santiam Room

ADJOURNMENT

Hearing no further business, Chair Pierson adjourned the meeting at 5:10 p.m.

Submitted by,

Reviewed by,

Signature on File

Signature on File

Teresa Nix
Recorder

Jorge Salinas
Assistant City Manager/ Chief Information Officer
Interim Economic Development Director