



APPROVED: December 28, 2016

**CITY OF ALBANY
TLT AD HOC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
City Hall, Santiam Room
Wednesday, November 16, 2016
3:00 p.m.**

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Scott Pierson called the meeting to order at 3:06 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Committee Members present: Scott Pierson, Julie Jackson, Steve Reynolds, Mitch Langjahr, and Betsy Penson (arrived at 3:10 p.m.)

Committee Members absent: Mike Martin (excused), Chuck Leland (excused)

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

October 24, 2016

MOTION: Committee Member Steve Reynolds moved to approve the minutes as presented. Committee Member Mitch Langjahr seconded the motion, and it passed 4-0.

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

Business from the Public

Reynolds introduced Dr. Gary Goby, a volunteer with the Historic Carousel & Museum, and Jennifer Weinmaster, the Carousel's new director. Reynolds wanted to make sure that Goby and Weinmaster were introduced to Leigha Thomas with the hotel association. Goby explained that the Carousel is set to open in June 2017, and they are anticipating between 10,000 and 20,000 visitors per month. He noted that they had 2,000 visitors per month when the Carousel was just a carving warehouse.

Committee Member Betsy Penson arrived at 3:10 p.m.

Reynolds explained that this year's budget still has funds available in the Cooperative Tourism Program (CTP) line item and that the Carousel would need to approach City Council if they'd like to request funding.

Goby stated that the Carousel building is being built by T. Gerding Construction and is pretty much on schedule, with cost overruns being typical. He pointed out that the building will be larger than what can be seen currently, with 8,000 square feet of additional space in the basement and 14,000 sq ft on the main floor. The Carousel building will be able to accommodate events of up to 400 people if the entire building is rented; they'll be set up for weddings, parties, fund-raisers, etc. There will be a concession stand for snacks, and the business meeting space will include an area where caterers can set up. Goby stated that this facility will be similar to the carousel in Kennewick, Washington, where they find that they use the space a lot for events, not just people coming to see the carousel. He also noted that the National Carousel Convention will bring in thousands of people for their event next year.

Leigha Thomas said she received a phone call from Shirley Stewart about the Carousel's grand opening, and hotels will offer a discounted "carousel rate" so they can track the number of stays associated with that event. Goby added that they will have several soft openings, followed by one large grand opening.

Pierson asked what the 10,000 to 20,000 visitors per month figure was based on. Goby said it is largely to do with the experience of Kennewick, Washington. Also, the carousel in Salem, Oregon, is only 7,000 square feet compared to the 22,000 square feet of Albany's; so there is potential to have a lot of events that Salem can't accommodate. Pierson said that one of the Committee's recommendations to Council is to form a collaborative group comprised of TLT recipients and representatives from hotels and restaurants. He feels this may be a great first event for the collaborative group to focus on.

Responding to a question from Langjahr, Goby explained that the hours of operation have not yet been determined, but the Carousel will be open seven days per week, typically from 9:00 or 10:00 a.m. until later in the evening. The idea will be that people can come to the Carousel after work or after dinner.

TLT Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Discussion

Pierson summarized that the last meeting was focused on reviewing the Committee's recommendations for changes to the current TLT policy. The Committee's goal with those recommendations is to bring the policy current and add flexibility for things that may occur in the future.

Responding to Reynolds' comment about CTP funds for the Carousel, Pierson said he wasn't sure that the Carousel would be eligible because they're not a current recipient, which may be a qualifier that the Committee should review and recommend be changed. Urban Renewal Officer Nathan Reid stated that the current policy actually allows for any recipient organization or outside organization to make application for use of those funds; so the Carousel would be eligible. Assistant City Manager/Chief Information Officer/Interim Economic Development Director Jorge Salinas confirmed that the CTP line item currently has \$49,400 available.

Committee Member Julie Jackson raised concerns over the wording choice under Section 1, Policy Statement, which currently reads "and the increase of TLT revenue" in the last line of that section. She believes it is redundant to say that TLT revenue should be focused on increasing TLT revenue, and she's not sure that adding that language is appropriate or necessary. Discussion followed.

Penson said it can't be assumed that the other items listed are going to attract visitors and increase TLT revenue. Jackson believes this is along the same lines as the City saying they want to spend taxes to improve the livability of the city so that they can collect more taxes. Reynolds and Penson said they were okay with the wording as written. Pierson stated that the language is important to identifying the objective of the Committee; the Policy Statement section is outlining the focus of the Committee, not the focus of the tax.

Langjahr said he sees that increasing revenue can be done in one of two ways – by increasing the percentage of the tax or through additional stays in hotels. He suggested that the language be changed to put emphasis on increased hotel stays, which end up driving additional TLT revenues. Jackson agreed with that approach. Reynolds and Penson said they were still okay with the current wording.

Thomas pointed out that by saying "increase of TLT revenue," that could also be achieved through an increase in hotel rates, which is not the goal. She stated that the hotels prefer the language to increase hotel stays. Joel Palmers with the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association added that future committees or City Councils may interpret the increase of revenue language as a justification to increase the tax rate. Discussion followed.

The Committee agreed to change the wording to read "increase the number of overnight stays" instead of "the increase of TLT revenue."

Pierson said the Committee's goal from the beginning was to come up with ways to measure activities in order to provide constructive feedback; the focus is more on hard metrics as opposed to soft metrics. He would also like to have talking points prepared for what they will present to the City Council. He feels it should be kept short, but they need to highlight what they've discovered and their recommendations.

Salinas handed out a copy of the hard metrics the Committee has discussed so far (see agenda file). The handout contains the same information as what is in the agenda packet, but with larger font so it is easier to read, and with the soft metrics removed.

Salinas said he had a conversation with Councilor Rich Kellum earlier in the day. Kellum wants to make sure that the Committee addresses what is not working and what is being done to move things in the right direction. Langjahr said that Kellum has brought that up to the Committee several times; they are taking it into consideration. Pierson stated that while that has been the focus of the Committee's meetings, most of the feedback has already been directed to the current TLT recipients, and they're the ones with the power to make changes and improve. Pierson said it will be important to relay that to the City Council, but it will be recipients who take the Committee's feedback and take action. Jackson agreed that the Committee's most important goal was to decide on hard metrics. Then, based on those metrics, it can be determined whether or not the recipients are using their TLT funds wisely. She doesn't believe the Committee can say what was or was not done well previously because they didn't have metrics in place to evaluate prior performance.

Pierson believes a few things could be identified right away that weren't performing well; web presence being one of them. He said the Committee also didn't see a very collaborative effort among recipient organizations, which should improve. Jackson said this group doesn't have expertise in running non-profits, and she doesn't believe the Committee was every intended to micromanage what recipient organizations are doing. She believes the City is essentially hiring a contractor with these organizations; in which case, you don't get to tell the contractor how to do the job, only the results you want. She feels the Committee needs to focus on how to measure the results.

The Committee moved ahead with reviewing the hard metrics outlined so far for recipient organizations. Pierson asked those who were present representing recipient organizations to speak up if they felt a metric was not achievable.

In response to questions from the Committee, Rebecca Bond, Historic Resources Coordinator for the Albany Visitors Association, explained that the 649 figure represents all visitors to the Monteith House including stamp attendees and Albany elementary school children.

The Committee discussed a goals-setting process and whether it was the responsibility of the Committee, the recipient organization, or the collaborative group to set goals. Salinas gave the example of the process that City staff goes through with the City Council each year in preparing the Strategic Plan document. It is a collaborative effort between City Council, the City Manager, and Department Directors. He did not feel it is appropriate for the Committee to tell recipients what their goals should be. He pointed out that each organization is different, and the Committee does not have the time or the expertise to get into the goal-setting process. John Pascone, Albany-Millersburg Economic Development Corporation, shared Salinas' concerns over the Committee setting goals for organizations. He feels it is the role of the Committee to set the metric of what the group wants to see measured, and then the goals would be set by the organization. Pierson and Jackson agreed.

The Committee also discussed whether every recipient organization could be held accountable for room nights. Langjahr said that if an organization is receiving tax revenue, they should be held accountable. Pierson stated that the TLT revenue is not just going to organizations that generate hotel stays. There is a whole list of organizations that do not contribute directly to TLT revenue. He argued that Police and Fire do not generate any hotel stays, but they are a supportive organization. He added that he feels it is important to remember that a lot of these organizations contribute to the bottom line in other ways than heads in beds.

The Committee decided that the Monteith House will be responsible for metrics related to the number of visitors, how many stamped passports they have, how many schools they work with, and how many people participate in special events.

The Committee agreed that the five hard metrics listed for the NW Art & Air Festival (NWAAF) would be used as common metrics for any special event. This includes the number of room nights directly related to the event; percentage of total room nights attributable to multiple-night stays; percentage of total participants travelling three hours or more to Albany; average daily expenditures for lodging and food/beverages by those travelling three or more hours to Albany; and the number of media inclusions created for the event.

Because of time constraints, the Committee changed their review process from the order listed in the hard metrics document to order of importance, moving on to the Albany Visitor's Association (AVA).

In response to a question from Jackson, Jimmie Lucht, Director of the Albany Visitor's Association, explained that the Dean Runyan report does not give specific figures for Albany, but is instead broken down by County, and the Longwood report is for the Willamette Valley. Pierson questioned whether outside companies should be relied upon for reporting. Penson agreed that the information is good to have, but she's not sure how they can use it to measure success. Reynolds believes that two simple metrics for AVA are the traffic coming off of their website to hotels and how that translates to room nights as well as the marketing that AVA has agreed to do for other agencies and outside events. Penson suggested tracking the number of support hours associated with those events. Langjahr said his concern is what are those events doing to generate hotel stays and drive revenues. Pierson suggested looking first at web traffic; things such as calendar accuracy, how many links are imbedded to other organizations within the city, links to hotels, and to be able to track how much of that traffic leaves their side to go to those other entities. Pierson also suggested tracking response cards received and the time it takes AVA to respond. Langjahr said he did not want to turn AVA into a metrics collection agency.

Palmers stated that is a good idea to remember what a destination marketing organization is there for. They have marketing through their website, which is one thing, but their principal job is selling to the community to overnight visitors. He said that once you can buy into that mission, the Committee can determine how that can be accomplished. He believes to take the question of metrics first, is really putting the card before the horse.

Pierson agreed that the AVA needs a sales-driven position, not a marketing-driven position. The sales position is selling the community and selling people on bringing their events to Albany. He sees that AVA has basically agreed to take on the position that was once housed with the Linn County Fair & Expo Center. Reynolds pointed out that one of the metrics could be related to the number of contacts they've had with people looking to have events and what the conversation rate is for those contacts.

The Committee discussed how to track revenue associated with groups and events. Thomas explained that the hotels can easily measure where the revenue and room nights are coming from for groups or by using a special rate code. Reynolds said that two good metrics for AVA would be the group stays associated with events and the number of stays as a result of pass-throughs from the AVA website. Discussion followed regarding opportunities for tracking using a special AVA rate.

Thomas asked the Committee whether they were interested in tracking old groups or new groups only. Penson stated they should track all groups since retention is just as important as new ones. Pierson noted that the collaborative group is going to have to come up with a list of groups and review those to target retention and how to identify new group targets. The Committee agreed to track all groups as a metric.

Jackson suggested considering the number of engaged stakeholders as a metric for AVA, looking at the number of Albany businesses/organizations that were supported, that participated in area programs, or

that AVA reached out to. Jackson said she believes part of the reason the Committee was formed is because of communication issues and that stakeholders may not be aware of how they benefit from everything the AVA does. Pierson said she liked the idea but wasn't sure how this could be tracked. Jackson suggested tracking Facebook likes, shares, or check-ins. She mentioned that she would also like to see AVA using Facebook to reach outside of the immediate trade area, which would mean using Facebook as more of a marketing tool. Langjahr mentioned that he would also like to see AVA sell banner advertising on their website. He believes business owners would want to be part of that advertising and would probably support it simply because AVA is a community organization. Pierson said he believes the message that the Committee is trying to convey is that AVA needs to focus on being the hub of the community and linking to other organizations within the community, which will also allow them to better track that traffic. He added that AVA is the group that pulls everyone together from a website perspective.

The Committee decided to eliminate the Dean Runyon, Longwood, and Smith reports as hard metrics for the AVA. The metrics for AVA will include website links, website click-throughs, and use of an AVA rate at hotels. It will be up to organizations to make sure that their page is linked on the AVA website. Discussion followed related to how these items will be measured or evaluated and who will be responsible. Pierson stated that AVA will also have the obligation to report back that they have evaluated and corrected any website issues. Pierson added that it is important to identify these as hard metrics because the Committee feels it is extremely important that the website function properly and all of the links work. He said if we don't set these as metrics, it will simply be lost in the minutes, and years down the road, this will still be an issue. He believes that even if it's a yes or no metric, it's still important.

Albany Downtown Association (ADA) Director Peggy Burris explained that ADA does a lot for downtown right now, even without the Carousel being open yet. She said that it is tough to measure certain efforts, such as how much people appreciate the hanging flower baskets. Pierson noted that ADA's mission isn't really to bring tourist dollars in but rather to bring economic development to downtown. Reynolds pointed out that ADA has many events they are responsible for, such as the Wine Walk. Pierson suggested that surveys of other organizations could be incorporated into evaluations and become one of the metrics, perhaps a collaboration survey done once per year. Jackson suggested that a metric may be to survey downtown business after major events to gather information about the impact the event had on their sales; stores may share that business was up or down, or that they met their goals. Weinmaster commented that her current position is with a survey company, and it is extremely difficult to get a good return on voluntary surveys.

Pierson said she is concerned that they are creating some false metrics for ADA related to building occupancy. Reynolds would prefer to focus on one event and use the five common NWAAF metrics that the Committee agreed to use for all events. He'd like to see them take a sampling of one event, rather than try to measure every event. Burris explained that design, promotions, organization, and economic development are the categories she is evaluated on nationally. Pierson pointed out that ADA is one of the groups she feels the Committee can't look solely at whether or not they generate TLT revenue. Discussion followed. Burris said she can try to collect metrics for the Committee by tracking the number of attendees at events such as Movies at Monteith; but the event is run strictly on volunteers; so that may be difficult. Langjahr said he's not concerned with how many people attend Movies at Monteith; he cares how that event affects businesses downtown. Pierson stated that if ADA brings three new restaurants downtown, those are support businesses for area hotels, even though that effort may not bring in direct TLT dollars.

Burris pointed out that there were 33 businesses open on Veterans' Day, which was much better than last year and was the result of her urging those businesses to be open.

Pierson recapped the discussion by saying that the Committee only wants organizations to collect data that leads to a business decision. He said he hopes that everyone understands that they're not being asked to generate a bunch of information or data that's not going to be used.

Weinmaster asked how to become involved in the collaborative effort. Thomas and Burris said the effort is underway and they will reach out to her.

Possible next meeting dates

The Committee agreed to provide the City Council an update at the December 5, 2016, City Council Work Session on the work the Committee has done so far. The Committee also made plans to meet again at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 7, 2016.

Staff updates and issues

None.

BUSINESS FROM THE COMMITTEE

There was no further business.

NEXT MEETING DATE

December 7, 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 of File

Holly Roten
Administrative Assistant I

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