



Resort Advisory Commission
2101 Parks Avenue, Suite 302
Virginia Beach, VA 23451
(757) 385-4800
FAX (757) 422-3666

RESORT ADVISORY COMMISSION MINUTES

DATE: June 6, 2019
TIME: 3:00 pm
PLACE: Virginia Beach Convention Center, 2nd Floor, Rm 4AB

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT

BJ Baumann
Randy Thompson
Billy Almond
Bobby Melatti
Bryan Cuffee
Craig Roback
Gerrie West
John Hawa
Kristina Chastain
Laura Habr
Michael Cloud-Butler
Michael Levinson
Preston Midgett
Russell Lyons
Sam Reid
Sylvia Strickland

Tyler Brown

COMMISSION MEMBERS ABSENT

Keith Ireland
Phil Boyer
Ron Villanueva

OTHERS PRESENT

Caryl Thompson, VB Aquarium
Mike Hilton, IMG
Domenick Fini, IMG
Guy Tower, Council
Rosemary Wilson, Council
Emily Archer, SGA
Brad Van Dommelen, CVB
DCM Ron Williams, Jr.
Stacey Parker, The Virginian-Pilot
Robin Hart, CVB/Recorder

BJ Baumann called the meeting to order at 3:00pm. The Commission paused for a moment of silence for reflection.

Motion carried to approve the May 2, 2019 RAC minutes as written.

Virginia Aquarium Update – Caryl Thompson

Caryl Thompson introduced herself as the Marketing Director and current interim Chief Operating Officer for the Aquarium.

She shared a background on the Aquarium, which opened in 1986 as the Virginia Marine Science Museum. The mission is to inspire conservation of the marine environment through education, research, and sustainable practices. Their focus is on the rest of the world as much as it is on Virginia.

Their turtle stranding conservation program is one of which they are most proud. Part of their mission extends outdoors with boat trips (dolphin-watching, whale-watching and ocean collection trips).

Over the last 3-4 years, they have been updating their onsite experience. They have refreshed the entranceway carpets, food and bathroom facilities in anticipation of the expansions, to keep the

area looking new. They have increased the floor staff, who carry animals or artifacts to raise interaction with guests while they wait in line for tickets.

Construction is underway right now for two facilities: the Darden Animal Conservation Center and the South Building.

The Darden Center is an offsite facility that will not be visited by the public, but will enable better assistance for their stranding response program for sea turtles, dolphins, seals and quarantine facilities. An \$18M project (\$16M from the City and \$2M from their foundation) that they hope to have open spring 2020.

The former Owls Creek Marsh Pavilion has been renamed the South Building, and the building will now include more than specifically marsh animals. They will add an otter's display, touchable jellies (rotating featured jellies every three years) and a marine debris exhibit. A Super Power Gallery will replace the Macro Marsh, which will include invertebrates such as a giant Pacific octopus. A surge tank will serve as a touch pool for sea stars, and other animals that might be seen in the Vancouver area. They will have roleplay areas for the kids at the vet wing with a "Windows into Animal Care" interactive area, and at a boating exhibit where kids can roleplay as researchers and identify animals. It is a \$27MK project (\$18M from the City and \$9M from their foundation).

The Owls Creek Master Plan is being revised and they would like to create an Aquarium Master Plan that would help the City realize its mission as a year-round tourist destination.

They want to improve aging infrastructure and increase parking from the current 750 available spaces. They have a parking garage feasibility study underway for as many as 1,800 spaces for the 100-year lease at Camp Pendleton, possibly to include an elevated crosswalk.

The Aquarium staff would like to improve the entrance to better guide visitors, and rehab the aging seal exhibit. They need to revamp the giant screen theater to a better use of the space, as that particular attraction is in decline. They want to tie those ideas into a longer-range expansion idea to increase entertainment, research, conservation and drive tourism.

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS

Kristina Chastain asked if their marketing efforts are separate or in concert with those of the CVB, and Caryl Thompson replied that they do a lot of their own marketing, and have two segments that they target. One is year-round for the residents that they coordinate themselves, and the other (summer) segment that includes tourists includes efforts from Brad Van Dommelen's team at the CVB to get visitors to come to the city. Once they are here, the Aquarium does their own advertising to draw them to the attraction.

On membership and guest count, Kristina asked the status over the last three years. Caryl replied that, as Marketing Director for 4 ½ years, they had their highest attendance 4 years ago at 670K people. Last year they had 640K. When they were very busy, they had bad reviews, due to the rush to get through the exhibit. They slightly raised ticket prices to \$24.95 for adults and, attendance is lower, but reviews are better and revenue is up.

The Adventure Park is a contracted vendor, with their own operations. The Aquarium leases the space and the trees, and approves their messaging. They do their own advertising, and the Aquarium will provide advice; however, attendance is down due to construction. They are working with zoning for the code enforcement regarding construction fencing, and they are worried about the effect.

John Hawa verified that they have two CIP projects underway, and asked if the State is contributing any additional money. Caryl replied that the state funding has dwindled, so they are currently relying on the City and their nonprofit foundation.

Tourist versus local attendance is 80/20 in the summer and 35/65 the rest of the year. They have an approved position for a Group Sales Coordinator for this budget cycle, to begin July 1, and are working on that process.

The Master Plan is a long range vision for 20-, 30- and 40 years. They want to be on par with the reputations of the Monterey Bay and Georgia Aquariums.

Live! On Atlantic Update – Domenic Fini

Domenick Fini recognized Creative Director Mike Hilton and Vice President Bobby Melatti. The LOA contract requires that they produce three different types of events: large events, a nightly entertainment program and holiday events. The mission is to provide entertainment for residents and guests to the city and once they are here, increase the economic impact for the area.

He has been in the business for 25 years and at the resort area for a couple of years. The programming is well-rounded, and designed to attract a wide audience.

Domenick reviewed nine months' programming, which started in April with the East Coast She Crab Soup Classic, designed to highlight the area restaurants. He reviewed pricing for each event, where applicable, and the surveys for each event that indicated how much participants liked the event and how likely they were to return. The Holiday Parade at the oceanfront in December, with New Year's Eve Last Night on The Town at Town Center rounded out the year's events.

IMG is pleased to work with Brad Van Dommelen and the CVB on the Live! On Atlantic program and are excited about the season.

QUESTIONS / COMMENTS

BJ Baumann asked for more information about the Holiday Lights program.

Domenick replied that they will always have electrical issues with the displays, due to the salt air, wind and sand environment, but they are looking at ways that they can enhance last year's 2nd to 22nd Street footprint. They did look at increasing the number of light displays, but since they are so expensive, they are trying to reprogram what they have in existing inventory.

BJ asked whether the Holiday Lights program could incorporate something like projection art, if the city were to purchase the equipment, and Domenick was open to the idea.

Russell Lyons asked to see the total cost to get the Holiday Lights display to where it was as popular as it used to be.

Bobby Melatti believed that, although aspirational, they cannot go back to where they were, when the displays reached to 33rd Street. The elements that affect the displays cannot be ignored. We need to ask ourselves if we have laid the groundwork for something comparable.

Russell and BJ clarified that they would like to have something be implemented that could give the Holiday Lights the momentum that it used to have.

John Hawa thinks that it can be figured out, and he believed that the Commissioners are talking about the "small world" effect that the display has, as people drive through it. You have to have the twinkling lights, but it is time to come around the corner. Seeing how people engage all these moving parts is priceless. He feels that not all his neighbors, however, know about this attraction.

Chairman's Report

Letters to City Staff and Council

BJ Baumann asked the Commissioners to look at two letters in their packets regarding the incident at the municipal center on May 31, 2019. One is addressed to Dave Hansen and one is addressed to Chief Cervera. She felt that the Commission needed to say something in appreciation for what they have done.

Guy Tower believed that the letters expressed the proper sentiment. Kristina Chastain motioned to support directing the letters to the parties, Billy Almond seconded. **Motion carried to send the letters written in appreciation to the City Manager and the Chief of Police.**

BJ referenced the third letter to Council requesting help in addressing the violence at the resort, and expressing a willingness to participate in whatever way possible. A motion was made by Randy Thompson to forward the letter to Council, and Billy Almond seconded the motion. Laura Habr requested copying Bob Matthias, Jim Cervera and Dave Hansen. Kristina Chastain asked if there were any specific items that might be mentioned and BJ clarified that the letter was an open call for assistance and offer to participate. **Motion carried to send the letter on RAC's behalf concerning starting a meaningful dialogue on making the citizens, guests and city safer.**

BJ indicated that Rosemary Wilson would be available to assist on a broad-based committee to begin those discussions and clarified that the items that could come out of discussions from the third letter might make their way into the legislative package; therefore, Bob Matthias was copied on the Council letter. Those conversations need to happen concurrently. Rosemary will discuss with the Mayor.

Guy Tower reported that they had a presentation at Council that indicated that the Governor will be calling a special session for discussion, so other conversations will be happening.

Capt. Shannon Wichtendahl, of the second precinct, stated that they are appreciative of any assistance they can get to reduce the amount of shootings.

Related Support

BJ Baumann also mentioned an effort that is underway concerning the resort community doing something for the families, and the VBHA, VBRA, AAA, ViBe, MOCA, 17th Street Association are all involved. There was further discussion on providing gift cards, and other activities to do for the families that are in town for the process, and providing support for those families trying to get back to normal moving forward. She asked the attendees to help spread the word to show their support of the community.

Speakers Review

Lastly, BJ reviewed upcoming speakers for the July meeting: Neptune Festival and 5G towers briefs. They have requested Bob Matthias, Eric Terry and Barry Knight for August to discuss the legislative agenda for this year. Tentatively, they have Kathy Warren providing an update on the comprehensive plan in September.

Committee Reports

Transportation, Parking, Pedestrian Committee (TPPC)

300 Block Meters and RASAP

Preston Midgett reported that the TPPC met last week and they discussed the 300 blocks off mid- and north Pacific Avenue. They discussed putting parking meters on these streets and if there was a way to use those streets for employee parking with their passes. The conversation evolved so much, that they deferred that item until they could figure out what the overall plan was coming from RASAP.

New Parking App

They also reviewed a parking app called Spot Angels, which provides real time data access for parking. They were excited about the app and encouraged people to look at it online. The parking office has not initiated it for the whole area yet, but there will be more to report next month.

Shuttles

The shuttles for the SITW festival that traveled up and down Atlantic Avenue and to and from the VBCC carried 11,700 people. They started talking about the need for shuttle operations to come back to the VBCC regularly, for conventions, as well as the Sportsplex and the ViBe District. HRT will report to the TPPC after further research. They have to consider expense and potential ridership. The residents do not like the shuttle coming down Shore Drive going to the Fort Story lighthouse on base. The service has been suspended pending conversations between residents and HRT.

Median Project 34th Street

Two years of discussion has resulted in the median construction and the plan is to take the project to 40th Street. The area is safer and more aesthetically pleasing. Commissioners agreed. Preston added that there will be ambient lighting and the trees will provide a canopy and will hide the overhead lines on the east side.

Planning & Design Review Committee (PDRC)

Billy Almond reported that they had discussion on 5G poles that have about 160 permits pending throughout the city. They noted pole locations between 5th and 18th Street at the resort. They had discussion on the potential, and what will happen with existing lease agreements. Rosemary Wilson noted that they fought it at the city level, as did other municipalities across the state.

Oceanfront Enhancement Committee (OEC)

Sam Reid deferred to Randy Thompson to report for the OEC regarding projection art. Randy told the committee that they had some early costs to get a project together and are looking at the history of the region being the subject. They are now looking at the creative costs, and the goal is to be able to come back next month with a presentation to the RAC during the OEC report.

Resort Investment Committee (RIC)

BJ Baumann reported that at the last RIC meeting they reviewed the letters approved at today's RAC meeting, as well as the speakers list.

Oceanfront Strategic Growth Area Committee (OSGAC)

BJ Baumann reported that the OSGAC is not meeting while the RASAP Steering Committee is meeting; the RASAP meeting will occupy the same time slot. The consultants are online and moving ahead to where they will begin prioritizing goals.

G.R.E.E.N.

Laura Habr reported that they met briefly for discussion on the beach cleanup after SIWT. Beach Ops and Public Works did a great job, so they cleaned areas where they were unable to reach.

Staff Report

Mike Eason not available. No staff report.

Old Business

None

New Business

None

Public Comment

Kate Pittman thanked everyone for their support during the mural festival, and invited everyone to take a moment to visit the area to view them.

Kristina Chastain also thanked Kate for her tireless support of the artists and educating people about the ViBe.

Meeting adjourned at 4:26 p.m.