

WICOMICO TOURISM AND CIVIC CENTER COMMISSION MEETING

MAY 18, 2020

Minutes

The Wicomico Tourism and Civic Center Commission met May 18, 2020 via Webinar due to the coronavirus restrictions. Chairman Delano called the meeting to order at 11:00 am.

The following board and staff members were on the call:

Board Members

Mike Delano
Bill Chambers
Mike Getzey
Dave Ryan
Ed Urban
Stephanie Willey

Staff Members

Steve Miller
Chuck Rousseau
Katie Rouse
Kristen Goller
Linda Lyons

The minutes from February 10, 2020 were approved as circulated.

The board would like to recognize Kathleen McLain for her years of service on the Tourism Advisory Board. The suggestion was made to visit her to present a plaque of appreciation.

Mrs. Goller led a discussion regarding the Tourism Reception. She noted that the reception, typically held in May, would be combined with the Chamber of Commerce awards banquet tentatively scheduled in July. The Chamber event is well-attended and tourism would become a sponsor of this event. Recommendations were made for Tourism Person of the Year (Betty Gardner award), Partner and Hospitality. Any suggestions are requested to be sent to Mr. Miller or Mrs. Goller.

Ms. Rouse presented several updates for the Civic Center. The HVAC system in Danang is nearly complete. The sound /speaker system is complete and they are currently working on putting emergency messaging in place. The marquee is complete and bids have been received for the Arena ceiling project. Midway improvements to the stage and curtains are complete. The exterior security project is in progress but the execution is on hold for now due to pending State and local budget cuts. Civic Center staff are doing other projects such as touch up painting, locker room improvements and assisting the health department and emergency services with COVID-19 related needs.

Plans are being made for reopening of the Civic Center. It is anticipated that reopening will be gradual and would start with small meetings, dinners and gatherings. Staff are waiting for further direction from the Governor's office and local elected and health officials.

Mrs. Goller was cautiously optimistic about the USSSA Softball Tournament taking place in July. She is hopeful the tournament could be held with the understanding that the plus-up activities, such as opening ceremony, would need to be changed. It is anticipated that the event would be much smaller and include mostly mid-Atlantic teams. On a positive note, live streaming is available on all fields at HSPAC so this could be a great way to manage crowds.

In terms of hotels, many Wicomico County properties have closed and may operate at 50% capacity when opened. Concern exists that this could push hotel rooms to other jurisdictions. An uptick in first week cancellations was noted. The question was raised if money could be pulled from the reserve to allocate to advertising or offset any budget deficit. Mrs. Goller noted that the State DMO's are looking to the state to adjust the advertising guidelines to include local market drive travel. The State advertising grant ranges from \$40,000-\$80,000.

Mr. Miller led a discussion on Department planning efforts related to COVID-19. He reported 3 ongoing efforts, among others, that the Department is pursuing:

1. The County is heavily involved with 3 state Recreation & Parks associations which recently submitted reopening recommendations to the Governor's office. As an offshoot of that effort, 3 County staff members were asked to participate on a State Task Force for Youth and Amateur Sports through Maryland Sports. This task force will help develop guidelines regarding return-to-play for youth sports.
2. The Department formed a local Task Force for COVID-19 to provide reopening recommendations to local elected and health officials. The Task Force, in consultation with the local Health Officer, consisted of key county staff, representatives from Salisbury Area Chamber of Commerce, City of Salisbury, Wicomico Sheriff Department, YMCA, Falcons Youth Sports, Little League District 8, Crown Sports Center, Salvation Army, County Council, and Emergency Services. The report/recommendations will be completed by May 22 and will be vetted through the Health Department, Emergency Services and County Administration for approval.
3. The staff is conducting extensive research on what other venues and destinations are doing in the region and our own state. Mrs. Goller noted there was cautious optimism to prepare for opening. Realizing group sports might be the last to resume, the County may further explore what to do to reach the leisure "driving" traveler. Ms. Rouse stated that she has been involved in weekly Venue Coalition calls. Event safety is being highlighted. She noted that many arena shows are pushing their shows to 2021 while many are looking at 2022. Drive up events, such as drive-in movies, are becoming more common. New price points to cover smaller gatherings as well as extensive cleaning guidelines will be addressed.

The question was raised about the financial feasibility of hosting events with capacity limits of 30% to 50% to 75%. Most venues, including the Civic Center, cannot be profitable for expensive entertainment acts with limited capacities. The industry as a whole may have to readjust deal structures in the COVID-19 environment. Acts and other travel-related events may gravitate to areas of the region/country with more flexible guidelines so staff will continue to monitor these trends and try to maximize events under existing law.

In conversations with various State officials, staff is advocating for a common-sense approach that would not look at all spaces as equal and include flexibility for venues that can divide space and meet social distancing requirements as needed.

Open discussion included a voiced concern of liability protection for venues related to hosting events during COVID-19. Many legal experts are exploring this issue and staff will consult with County Attorneys to get further direction.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 12:10 pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for June 15, 2020. This meeting will be via Webinar.

Minutes Respectfully Submitted by,
Linda Lyons