

Minutes

TOURISM BOARD

Regular meeting

5:30 p.m. February 5, 2024

Board Meeting Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.



Present: Meaghun Darab, Vice Chair Victoria Pace, Rainbow Cabbage, Barney Caton, Barry Hupp, Megan Kimball, Smita Patel and Scott Czechlewski

Absent: Eryk Pruitt

Staff: Planning and Economic Development Manager Shannan Campbell

1. Call to order

Vice Chair Victoria Pace called the meeting to order at 5:33p.m.

2. Agenda changes and approval

Pace proposed adding "Election of chair and vice chair" as item 4.A to the agenda.

Motion: Board member Megan Kimball moved to approve the agenda as amended. Board member Barney Caton seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on December 4, 2023

Motion: Board member Barry Hupp moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Board member Scott Czechlewski seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

4. Action items

A. Election of Chair and Vice-Chair

Pace asked if Commissioner Meaghun Darab should be chair. Campbell said not necessarily that the Board can select the chair, but if she wants to then she could.

Motion: Board member Rainbow Cabbage moved to appoint Pace as Chair. Pace accepted the nomination. Czechlewski seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

Motion: Cabbage moved to appoint Kimball as Vice-Chair. Kimball accepted. Czechlewski seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

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B. Grant Scoring Guide for FY25

Cabbage said the guide should be weighted to reflect priorities stated in the grant's strategic plan to favor events that are held on Sundays, weekday afternoons, or early business hours; serve a diversity of tourists; promote agritourism or wedding venues; or are held in different neighborhoods or commercial areas. She suggested creating a new category and adjusting the weights for Tourism Impact, Sustainability and Marketing, and Proposed Budget. Several members proposed different titles for the new criterion. Czechlewski suggested the board and/or Campbell could wordsmith the document later. Campbell said she could send it out before grants opened the end of the month.

Motion: Cabbage moved to add a new criterion for grant strategic objectives achievement. Hupp seconded.

Vote: 8-0

There was a brief discussion of how to weight the new category and adjust the weight of existing categories. Kimball said the new category was really a subset of Tourism Impact, and it seemed fitting that the two categories be weighted 65% together, reflecting the board's priorities. Caton said he didn't think the Sustainability category should be weighted any less than 25%

Motion: Darab moved to weight the new category as 25%, keep General Information at 5%, and adjust Tourism Impact to 40%, Sustainability to 25%, and Proposed Budget to 5%. Caton seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

There was a brief discussion of what range of scores to give the new category. Members asked Campbell to draft text for the scoring categories to share with the board.

The discussion turned to ways to include West Hillsborough in Tourism Board-funded events, such as the holiday parade and Solstice Lantern Walk. Czechlewski said he considered West Hillsborough part of downtown. He shared that parade organizers had discussed the route in the planning stage and determined it wasn't feasible to route the parade through West Hillsborough due to length. Cabbage suggested the Lantern Walk could be extended into West Hillsborough by closing street access on one block. Campbell said the neighborhood lacks a central gathering place like the courthouse or Riverwalk to end the event, but Eno River Brewing or the Arts Mill might fit that niche. Pace shared that at the last Tourism Development Authority meeting, organizers of Flushfest, held in West Hillsborough, would expand the festival from a Saturday to a full weekend this year. She added that the board could discuss extending the Lantern Walk route with the Arts Council when it gives its next quarterly report.

C. Draft grant timelines/deadlines for FY25

Campbell went over the planned timeline. Czechlewski proposed revising the language surrounding discussion and review of the applications. Kimball asked how long the grant cycle is open and how the grant opportunities are advertised.

Campbell said the town advertises the grants on social media platforms, posts information on the Visit Hillsborough website with a link to the application, and shares information with board members, town commissioners, and the local radio station WHUP to disseminate. Cabbage asked if the Arts Council publicizes the grants. Campbell agreed to inform all contract partners about the grants. Kimball suggested reaching out to local groups like the local NAACP chapter who are not typical applicants.

Cabbage brought up the budget, saying it was unwise to spend all the board's budget and cautioned against dipping into the contingency fund again, as it did last year to fund a special project request from the museum to market its Collecto-Con. Pace noted that even though the board overspent generally, there is a designated pot of money for grants each year. Campbell explained once applications are received, the board will score the applications, decide what to fund, and designate an amount for the grants, which will be a part of the budget adopted in June. She said the board generally allots \$20,000 to \$30,000 to the grant fund, which usually funds two to three grants. She added the board will have to balance money allotted to grants with requests from contract partners. Pace summarized the proposed changes: revise the verbiage around discussing grants and make sure the grants are advertised widely. The board discussed the times allowed for scoring grants and for receiving applications. Caton suggested reducing the time for scoring to one week to allow more time for broader marketing.

Motion: Czechlewski moved to reduce the time allotted for scoring applications from two weeks to one week and extending the window for receiving submissions to six weeks. Cabbage seconded.

Vote: 8-0

Motion: Kimball moved to approve schedule with modification discussed. Board member Smita Patel seconded.

Vote: 8-0

5. Discussion Items

A. Tourism Board Contract Scopes for FY25

Campbell explained the contract scopes are largely unchanged from last year. She said last year the board contracted with the Arts Council to pay \$5,000 for additional staff and miscellaneous expenses for running the gallery and gift shop. The board could choose either to include this item in the council's contract scope or wait for the council to request it again. She also noted last year the board extended a contract to the Chamber of Commerce to organize the holiday parade and tree lighting. Hupp and Patel suggested the board should wait to see if the arts council requests the additional funding again.

Motion: Hupp moved not to include the requested increase in the contract for the Arts Council and to wait until the council asks. Cabbage seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

Campbell pointed out that this wasn't the only increase requested, just the only one that resulted in a new line item, as opposed to an increase in an existing line item.

The discussion moved to the holiday parade. Kimball asked if the tree lighting and the parade could be held on separate dates and if the parade could be held earlier in the day, made more of a pedestrian event, or extended to West Hillsborough. Cabbage said unfortunately there were issues with shutting down nearby roads in West Hillsborough. Czechlewski said he thought the parade went well last year but not the tree lighting, saying noise from a generator made it difficult to hear the music and there wasn't much on the program. He said he was open to holding it as a separate event. Kimball suggested holding it earlier in the day might provide more tourism opportunities. Czechlewski said the parade has been held on Sunday afternoons, and holding it earlier in the day would interfere with church traffic. Asked by Kimball about holding the parade on Saturday, Czechlewski said downtown merchants don't want the interruption, noting it takes hours to line up participants. Czechlewski said the elf race could be scheduled earlier. When Cabbage suggested holding the race on another day along with the tree lighting, Czechlewski said that would require shutting down roads twice during holiday season. Caton suggested the board extend the contract and work out details

later. Pace asked for opinions about extending the contract with the chamber. Czechlewski summarized the expenses for planning, organizing, and advertising the parade. Caton said he thought, based on economic impact, the parade was probably the best \$10,000 the board spent. Pace asked about registration fee for participants. Czechlewski said the chamber charges \$50 for members and \$100 for nonmembers but reimburses that fee for schools and school-associated groups. Pace agreed with Caton that the parade was a good value for the board's money. She concluded that the board had agreed not to include the Art Council's request in its scope and to extend its contract with the Chamber of Commerce for the tree lighting and holiday parade. There was no vote on the latter.

Campbell asked for feedback on the contractor scopes in general. Kimball asked again about separating the holiday parade and the tree lighting. Patel suggested inviting local businesses to hold a holiday market on the day of the tree lighting. Czechlewski said it would be a challenge to find space for a market with so many other activities going on and that it might divert visitors from patronizing local shops. Patel said there should be more of an event than just a tree lighting. Czechlewski agreed, adding there should be choral groups and maybe a band. Cabbage suggested adding a charity event. Campbell suggested having a Santa doing photos. Kimball noted there was a dearth of Santas last season, and the alliance is already planning to have more Santas around town next year.

Campbell asked again for any general comments about the scopes for contract partners. Cabbage suggested adding some component to the solstice walk to include West Hillsborough. Patel asked about the route. Campbell said it was partly determined by the arts market held in River Park. Pace suggested the Arts Council advertise a good place in West Hillsborough to view the lantern, like the pedestrian bridge near Calvin St. Campbell said a lantern-making workshop could be held in the district. Asked by Kimball about how businesses on Nash St. are affected by events held downtown, Cabbage said those events either don't affect business or take business away. Asked by Patel about special events in the district, Cabbage said Eno Arts Mill had started holding its own first Friday events. Pace said the board had provided feedback, but noted none of it will affect the contract scopes.

Cabbage brought up the future of the building housing the Visitor's Center. Campbell said she didn't anticipate the town losing the building but that the County would be asking for more rent to offset the costs of maintenance. Cabbage suggested incorporating the Visitors Center into the Burwell School or the Arts Council to save money. Campbell said there had been multiple discussions about combining partners in the past, but that they all have separate boards and it's been difficult to merge operations. She said the conversation has been not about moving the Visitors Center, because it's a historic site, but pulling the museum out of its building and combining it with the Burwell School or the Visitors Center. Kimball and Caton said the school is located too far from major sites to serve as a visitors center. Kimball noted the school is also exploring state ownership. Asked by Czechlewski about the building, Campbell said the county would probably give it to the town or tourism board. Cabbage said the Arts Council had said it acts like a visitors' center. Campbell said the Burwell school and museum do as well. She said that all contract partners are supposed to provide visitor services and have maps and be able to answer questions about where to eat, stay, shop, etc. Cabbage suggested the \$200,000 a year spent on the Visitors Center might be spent on things with more value. Kimball said that money goes not just to the physical building but to marketing and programming as well. She said many services provided by the alliance through the Visitors Center support the contract partners' sites and their missions. She said this coordination has made Hillsborough a unique place and that other tourism boards come here and want to duplicate what the town is doing. Campbell said the board would talk more about contracts and their specific dollar amounts at upcoming meetings and during budget development.

6. Monthly reports and comments

A. Food & Beverage Tax Report:

Campbell said the town is seeing steady restaurant growth across the board, which could be due to people eating out more or to price increases. She noted there's also been an uptick with third party businesses like delivery services. Caton pointed out that its estimated budget for FY23 was \$400,000 and revenues were \$500,000. Cabbage asked how much the board actually spent in FY23, noting it had to pull money from its contingency fund. Caton said the board knew at the time that revenue would be higher than expected. Campbell reported the board spent \$481,399 last fiscal year. Pace noted that while the board overspent its budget, revenues brought in an additional \$21,000, which was added to the fund balance. Campbell said the town budgets very conservatively, so the next budget she'll present will be less than the anticipated tax revenues, on the off chance that revenues don't grow at all.

B. Board comments and updates

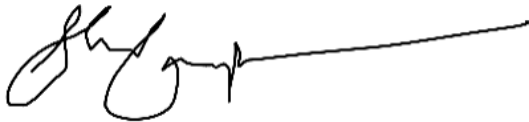
There were none.

7. Adjournment

Motion: Pace moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:06 p.m. Caton seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannan Campbell', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Shannan Campbell
Planning and Economic Development Manager
Staff support to the Hillsborough Tourism Board

Approved: March 4, 2024