

VIRGINIA CITY TOURISM COMMISSION (VCTC)
September 10, 2020 10:00 am
Virtual Meeting via Zoom
MEETING MINUTES

Notice: Items on the agenda may be taken out of order; two or more agenda items may be combined for consideration; and items may be removed from the agenda or discussion relating thereto delayed at any time. This is the tentative schedule for the meeting. The Commission reserves the right to take items in a different order to accomplish business in the most efficient manner.

The following minutes are a summarized explanation of the topics discussed. A taped recording of these proceedings will be kept for review.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson A. Perry called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

Pledge of Allegiance

1. ROLL CALL

Leah Kruse called roll.

Chairperson: A. Perry
Vice Chair: Jay Carmona
Treasurer: Vanessa Stephens
Board Members: Angelo Petrini
Ron Gallagher
Corrado DeGasperis

L. Kruse noted there was a quorum present.

Others: Deny Dotson, Director
Katie Demuth, Tourism & Marketing Manager
Leah Kruse, Administrative Specialist

2. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

A. 10 September 2020

This is the tentative schedule for the meeting. The Commission reserves the right to take items in a different order to accomplish business in the most efficient manner. The Commission may combine two or more items for consideration and may remove an item from the agenda or delay discussion relating to an item on the agenda at any time.

R. Gallagher made the motion to approve the agenda.

Second – A. Petrini

Approved – Unanimously

3. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

A. 13 August 2020

C. DeGasperis made the motion to approve the minutes.

Second – R. Gallagher

Approved – Unanimously

A. Perry acknowledge the loss of TJ and Gary Lord and Bill Henderson. D. Dotson shared that Bill Henderson was the General Manager of Carson Valley Inn and was an ambassador of tourism all throughout Northern Nevada for over forty years. A. Perry asked for a moment of silence for these three individuals.

4. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDIZED ITEMS

Discussion may be limited to three minutes per person at the discretion of the Chairman. No action may be taken on a matter raised under this portion of the agenda until the matter itself has been specifically included on an agenda as an item upon which action may be taken.

Austin Osborne, Storey County Manager, gave an update on the CARES Business Grant Program and stated that the application process will be open until October 6th, 2020. A. Osborne stated that a third-party group will then go through the applications and process them according to applications that meet benchmark criteria. A. Osborne shared that the payouts are \$1,500 for businesses with 1 – 4 employees and \$3000 for businesses with 5 – 9 employees to help with COVID-19 expenses. A. Perry asked if non-profits were eligible for this grant. A Osborne said no, it is specifically a small business grant.

5. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: COMMUNITY DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

D. Dotson read a post that was shared on Storey County's social media regarding racism, diversity, and inclusion. D. Dotson said that the Visitor Center is the focal point of Virginia City which means that comments regarding discrimination, merchandise in stores that made people feel uncomfortable, etc. are mostly all filtered through the Visitor Center. D. Dotson stated that, while he does not believe anyone in Virginia City is a true racist, he feels it is important to discuss the complaints that have been received. D. Dotson also shared that the role of the Visitor Center is not to tell people what to wear or what to sell, but to act as a conduit regarding the comments that have been received.

C. DeGasperis commented that social media is stepping in and saying that hate and lies cannot be promoted so we do have some responsibility to monitor the town and social media that is divisive in terms of racism and hatefulness.

Nicole Barde, Storey County resident, said that a comment on social media was shared over 145 times and that it did not paint a good picture of Virginia City. N. Barde shared that she felt the county's comment was disappointing because there was no context and no suggestion of what could be changed. N. Barde asked D. Dotson what was going to change because of the statement. D. Dotson said that he felt that it was the correct time and the correct message to post on social media. N. Barde asked if someone went to all the merchants and discussed the issue with them. D. Dotson answered that he did go to the merchants who were mentioned in specific comments. D. Dotson shared that the VCTC is looking at everything that is being done to market the town with the recent comments/complaints in mind. N. Barde stated that based on Facebook comments and comments on Trip Advisor, the complaints seem to point to the fact that the issues in Virginia City appear to be chronic and ongoing.

C. DeGasperis shared that he shared Storey County's post with his entire company and he immediately received two responses from employees asking what prompted the post. C. DeGasperis agreed with D. Dotson that it should not be rehashed, but he also agrees with N. Barde that the issue should not be ignored either. C. DeGasperis asked that the VCTC continue to be as transparent and engaging as possible.

A. Perry shared that there have been numerous behind the scenes conversations. A. Perry stated that since the issues have been forced to the forefront of business, she is pleased with the steps that are being taken and feels that the conversations need to continue. A. Perry stated that we do not know what it feels like to be in another person's shoes and if we are confronted with something that is hurtful, we need to be good humans and do the right thing.

6. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: FINANCIAL UPDATE

- A. *Tourism Tax Report*
- B. *Transient Lodging Tax Report*

D. Dotson shared that the Tourism Tax Report number for June of 2020 was \$192,100.21, which is way above last year's number of \$43,329.02. D. Dotson stated that the number may be a mistake and that the Comptroller is doing some research. D. Dotson stated that there is a lot of activity going on in the TRI area and that may explain some of the increase. C. DeGasperis asked how long it may take to find out if it is a mistake. D. Dotson stated that one year ago, there was another major increase that has never been explained. A. Osborne shared that he does not have any specifics as to why there was such an increase, but there may be some abatements coming that may change the number.

D. Dotson stated that the Lodging Tax numbers were still good (\$30,800.59) even without special events. D. Dotson stated that we all need to remain cautious of fall and winter numbers.

7. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: MARKETING UPDATES

Amy Demuth, RAD Strategies, shared the August 2020 marketing report and highlights of which include marketing that pushes overnight stays, regional and digital radio campaigns, new digital billboards, a 10 Things to Safely Do in Virginia City press release, and a new focus on stories in Instagram.

8. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: SPECIAL EVENT UPDATES

Neil Horning and Jess Horning, Liquid Blue Events shared information about the Cemetery Gin's Hunt for Spirits. J. Horning stated that it will be an educational scavenger hunt that will allow people to experience Virginia City. J. Horning said that people will collect clues while sampling different cocktails around town (all showcasing Cemetery Gin). J. Horning shared that, to adhere with COVID-19 guidelines, there will be limited tickets in order not to overwhelm businesses. N. Horning shared the budget with the board.

R. Gallagher made the motion to approve the budget for the Cemetery Gin's Hunt for the Spirits event in the amount of \$3600.00.

Second – C. DeGasperis

Approved – Unanimously

Clayton Mitchell, Storey County Resident, asked why this event is scheduled on a day that will already be busy in town as opposed to a less busy day. N. Horning answered that because this event is a bit more involved than a typical saloon crawl, they wanted to give participants the opportunity to experience more things to do in town.

D. Dotson shared that the Christmas event this year will be very similar to the events of last year and includes a train event, a shopping element, a Christmas light contest, a cruise down C Street, and fireworks to be done over two weekends. J. Horning stated that the plan is to expand the event in terms of participating merchants.

D. Dotson reminded the board that the Veteran's Day parade is now a cruise and that there is, tentatively, a flyover scheduled to coincide with the start of the cruise.

9. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: GROUPS, FAMS, TRADE SHOWS, AND VISITOR CENTER UPDATE

K. Demuth shared that the Everyone Is a Local campaign is still ongoing and seems to be going well. K. Demuth stated that the NDOT traffic report that was received recently shows that cars coming through town are only down 500 compared to last year. K. Demuth said that she is registered to do a virtual conference in November that will hopefully help her bring some groups into town. K. Demuth shared that several people have won room nights in town while participating in the Everyone Is a Local campaign, and the response has been great. K. Demuth said that the giveaway is gaining new contacts and return visitors.

10. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: PIPER'S OPERA HOUSE UPDATE

Whitney Brunson, Piper's Opera House, shared that all the recent events at Piper's have been very well received and well attended. W. Brunson said that upcoming events include A Comstock Christmas Carol, BINGO, country dancing, Spirits with the Spirits, a Joe Curtis lecture, Fright Night (a film festival), and Bats in the Belfry ghost investigations. W. Brunson stated that several weddings have been postponed due to COVID-19, but she is confident most will reschedule for 2021. W. Brunson stated that self-guided tours are still being offered.

11. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: STAFF REPORTS & CORRESPONDENCE & FUTURE MEETINGS

D. Dotson shared that the next meeting will be in a location, in-person, in which a strategic plan for the next year can be discussed. D. Dotson stated that he will update everyone on the location soon. L. Kruse stated that the next VCTC Board Meeting will occur at 10:00 am Thursday, October 8, 2020.

12. CHAIRPERSON A. PERRY BROUGHT THE NEXT ITEM TO THE COMMISSION'S ATTENTION: ADJOURNMENT OF COMMISSION BOARD MEETING

Chairperson A. Perry adjourned the meeting at 11:30 am.