

TOURISM ADVISORY COUNCIL
SPECIAL SESSION

JULY 29, 2015

The Tourism Advisory Council met in Special Session on Wednesday, July 29, 2015, 4:00 p.m. in the Derek D. Daniels Conference Room of the Athens Partnership Center with the following members present, to-wit:

Mike Coston
Brad Smiley
Chet Patel
Rae Priestley
Toni Clay
Virginia Reeder

Bonnie Hambrick, City Secretary
Sherri Skeeters, Tourism Coordinator

Others present: DJ Warren, Bob Miars;

Constituting a quorum at which time the following proceedings were enacted, to-wit:

ROLL CALL

Chairman Coston did a roll call of the Tourism Advisory Council members; Deanne Boswell was absent. Brad Smiley attended the meeting but was not present during the roll call.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No action was taken.

DISCUSS/CONSIDER APPLICATIONS RECEIVED FROM ORGANIZATIONS
REQUESTING HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX FUNDING FOR FY2016

- ATHENS TEENAGE BASEBALL ASSOCIATION
- HENDERSON COUNTY REGIONAL FAIR PARK COMPLEX
- EAST TEXAS ARBORETUM

Chairman Coston informed TAC members that \$30,000 has been allocated in the FY2016 budget beginning October 1. He also reminded members that the TAC would be making a recommendation with the allocated amounts for the City Council's approval. Chairman Coston reminded TAC members of each organization's request and stated that the total requested amount exceeds the \$30,000. Chairman Coston opened it up for discussion for the Athens Teenage Baseball Association's request for \$15,000 to bid for Athens to host the Dixie Youth Baseball State Tournament in the summer of 2016. After discussion, TAC members agreed that the request clearly met the two-part test for Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) expenditures.

Chairman Coston opened it up for discussion for the Henderson County Regional Fair Park Complex's request for \$12,973 to go toward the purchase of 20 new stalls. After discussion, TAC members agreed that the request met the two-part test for HOT expenditures.

Chairman Coston opened it up for discussion for the East Texas Arboretum's request for \$7,500 to be used for advertising of the Haunted Halloween and Fall Festival in October 2015. After discussion, TAC members didn't believe it clearly met the two-part test for HOT expenditures and that members were not convinced the event would bring in overnight guests. TAC members suggested the Arboretum use this year's event to gather information on where people are coming from and if they are staying overnight, in addition to being more specific on the application.

Chairman Coston made the recommendation to give the full requested amounts to the Athens Teenage Baseball Association and the Henderson County Regional Fair Park Complex. A motion was made by Rae Priestly, seconded by Toni Clay to give \$15,000 to the Athens Teenage Baseball Association and \$12,973 to the Henderson County Regional Fair Park Complex. The motion carried unanimously.

DISCUSS PROPOSED FY2016 BUDGET FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Sherri Skeeters informed TAC members that the Department of Tourism's annual budget is around \$236,000 and that in the current fiscal year, nearly half goes toward advertising. In meeting with the new city administrator Philip Rodriguez, it was suggested to pull back on advertising dollars and reinvest those funds locally to help build our tourism product; which one way the City has done this is through the \$30,000 that is being allocated, and has been recommended at today's meeting for the Athens Teenage Baseball Association and the Henderson County Regional Fair Park Complex.

Mrs. Skeeters talked about her goals for the coming year and mentioned that she wants to do a better job communicating with local hotels, attractions, restaurants, etc. about what's going on in town and also finding out information in advance, preferably three to four months in advance, so that she can do a better job with promoting those activities. Mrs. Skeeters also talked about building on the elements we already in place such as the arts, farmer's market, the wineries, and local musicians.

Mrs. Skeeters talked about the proposed Public Art Project, such as an outdoor juried Sculpture Show. Depending on the size of sculptures, Mrs. Skeeters mentioned that smaller pieces could possibly be placed downtown and larger pieces at Cain Park. She also mentioned that Palestine has a public art trail and this would give Athens an opportunity to partner with another city. Mrs. Skeeters mentioned she is proposing to add membership with the Texas Hotel & Lodging Association.

Mrs. Skeeters also talked about the Texan Theater and that the current owner, Mike Head, is in the process of donating it to the City of Athens. Mrs. Skeeters shared the ideas that had been discussed for the open-air venue and wanted input from the TAC members as to what they envision for the facility and the amenities it should include. TAC members suggested keeping the iconic front of the Texan with the Texan sign, it was also mentioned that they like the idea of using it as a venue versus a pocket park that doesn't get utilized. Some of the other suggestions were to have a screen or misters during the hot summer months and during the heat of the day, a stage for music and dramas, a bulletin board to post upcoming events in Athens, to paint a mural on one wall and adding a serving bar area with small kitchen. TAC members loved the idea of using a portion of the building as a Visitor Center and adding restrooms. They also asked if the back of the building would remain open and how much access the public would have to the building when not in use and that the City may need the ability to secure some areas. It was also mentioned that signage/wayfinding is needed in downtown so that people will know where things are located such as Ginger's Park and the Texan Theater. Also mentioned in general, that signage is needed around the loop directing people to downtown and other places in the City.

OPPORTUNITY FOR CITIZENS TO EXPRESS ITEMS OF CONCERN

There was no discussion.

A motion was made by Chet Patel, seconded by Brad Smiley to adjourn.

PASSED AND APPROVED THIS THE 1ST DAY OF SEPTEMBER, 2015.

RATIFIED AND APPROVED THIS THE 3RD DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2015.

Mike Coston, Chairman

ATTEST:

Bonnie Hambrick, City Secretary