

CITY of CASCADE LOCKS — Tourism Committee Meeting Minutes

TOURISM COMMITTEE MEETING, Monday, February 6, 2023, 6:00 PM, Council Chambers

1. Call Meeting to Order & Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Chair Matt Kelly at 6:02 PM. Attending: Vice Chair Debbie Fine, TM Val Stepanchuk and TM Harry Troeger. Also present, CA Jordon Bennett, and Tourism Support Staff, Annie Van Domelen.

2. Amendments to the Agenda

3. Comments from General Public

Ben DeJardin is in the advanced stages of starting a bike rental business in Cascade Locks, which is scheduled to open this spring. He's currently sub-leasing a space from Otter & Osprey. Ben has a background in media and journalism. His interest in e-bikes was discovered during a trip to Scotland. Ben's business will fill a gap, since there are no existing bike rentals in Cascade Locks. E-bike rentals will also draw familiarity to local trails. He'll use his journalism skills to write about other tourism and recreational news in Cascade Locks and the surrounding area, and he hopes to help people discover more car-free options.

Norm Bourque passes on some information about the Restaurant Association. He also states that history has proven beautification is not part of tourism. He thinks some confusion is due to the committee still being called the Tourism and Beautification Committee. Norm asks Staff about the definition of allowed usage of TLT dollars, which states the money is used basically for tourism promotion for the following activities: advertising, publicizing or distributing information for the purpose of welcoming and attracting tourists, conducting strategic planning and research necessary, to stimulate future tourism development, operating tourism promotion agencies, and marketing special events and festivals designed to attract tourists.

CA Bennett adds it can also be spent on tourism related facilities, which he interprets as a sticky point. He states, if the economy is based on tourism, you can almost justify anything, and questions where the definition of tourism stops.

Chair Kelly, introduces City Council member, Denise Baker, and her dog, Jackie Chan. Denise wants to go over the responsibilities and duties of the Tourism and Beautification Committee. She comments there are two sections where the tourism committee shows up in the City Council Charter. She references 35.15: Creation of the Tourism and Beautification Committee. She mentions organizational meetings and duties, under 3.17. Denise appreciates all that the committee is doing and loves the brochures and flash report. She's concerned if we get people to come to Cascade Locks, they might not come back without some beautification. She's heard of plans using flowers (as long as there's someone to maintain them). She inquires what may encourage people to come back during the off season and tosses out some ideas: maybe quilt squares, art, or a treasure hunt to find things in town. She shares some information on the survey published on the city page which states people come to Cascade Locks for its beauty, small town feeling, Eastwind Drive In and history. She wonders if we're capitalizing on Eastwind. Visitors say they need more info on what's happening in town and asks how we can let visitors know. Denise shares that City Council is looking to make a new strategic plan since the city plan is 23 years old, and City Council could use tourism's help during a joint planning session. Then she reads copy from their charter: "All committees shall give us minutes after every meeting, written or oral reports, and a joint workshop at least once a year." Denise considers the Tourism and Beautification Committee as an arts and culture committee as well — since Cascade Locks doesn't have one. She's looking at what other towns are doing and capitalizing on. She shares that the League of Oregon Cities has been a helpful resource for her but maybe the state would be a good contact for us to run ideas by to make sure it's approved. Her point is, someone knows more than we do on what we can and can't do with TRT funds. She wonders what tourism's plan is to help establishments that could use some beautification. Maybe murals, salmon, fiberglass bigfoots, artist paintings. In response to Denise's comment about tourism reports, Norm Bourque points out that CA Zimmerman, to tourism's knowledge, was the one who provided

tourism reports to City Council. Chair Kelly adds, for informational or educational purposes, there have been two historical challenges that the Tourism Committee has faced. One is little exposure to our budget for two years. We've had less than \$10,000 and not known what to do with it. And beautification is part of our name, and in name only. We've had no responsibility or authority to do any beautification in the city of Cascade Locks. If that has changed, we would love to consider putting funding into beautification. Also adding that the committee has been in communication with Heather Soderberg Greene about a possible eagle sculpture being placed in town. Beautification is something the committee has been wanting to do for a long time, so we're all in if it's a possibility.

Chair Kelly introduces Travis Preece from Gorges Beer Co. who is present via zoom. Travis has extensive experience as a marketing strategist in how to approach issues, identifying a goal, who's the goal, how to get to your goal and how to align. There are a lot of people coming to the Gorge to hike, go to the falls or Hood River and they bypass Cascade Locks. Cascade Locks is something Travis wants people to know about. He's talked to a lot of people in town about tourism; some people and businesses want more tourists and others feel the opposite. Which leads to questioning how to elevate tourism without bringing in the negative aspects that can come with it. He's been looking at what the city's goals are as well as business goals. Travis came up with the idea to have four restaurants in town use one hashtag for social media posts. He mentions the possibility of Cascade Locks creating a business association. A lot of the ideas are theoretical at this moment but it seemed like a good time to approach the Tourism Committee since the conversation is being talked about throughout town — and how great it would be if the City, Tourism, businesses and Port all worked together.

4. Discussion/Declaration of Potential Conflicts of Interest

5. Approval of Minutes Presented: January 9, 2023

At 6:29 PM, Vice Chair Fine motions to approve the minutes. TM Troeger seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion passed.

6. Approval of Financials

A. Budget Report by CA Bennett

CA Bennett presents copies of a detailed ledger of the Tourism Support section of the budget. Chair Kelly asks CA Bennett how this information takes into account any transient room taxes projected for this year. CA Bennett said they did get final numbers of Q4 from the state of \$120,000. Vice Chair Fine clarifies that TLT is split 30% City and 70% Tourism. CA Bennett confirms.

7. Approval of Bills

8. Staff Report

Staff reached out to Jess Zerfing with Always Catchin about possibly supplying fishing information for a Fishing page on the tourism website, but hasn't heard back. Staff suggests finalizing registration for the Oregon Governor's Conference and submitting approved grants to the Financial Director. Staff is in contact with Lizzie Keenan, Regional Coordinator for Tourism Development for Mt. Hood and the CRGRTA, and has been advised that Travel Oregon's Competitive Grants Programs should be reopening this spring. They also offer grant writing support. Staff has been gathering events from businesses, the Port, museum and online resources to submit to two annual visitor guides to place in their event listings.

9. Port Report

10. Old Business

A. Contractor Updates :: TM Troeger / TM Stepanchuk

Updates are given in the capacity of contractors, as follows:

TM Troeger has been in contact with Dave Cunningham, who performs hosting services for the tourism website. Dave's been asked to update the Wordpress theme that is being used on the tourism website. And once the theme is updated, to also update PHP. Since this still hasn't been done, after about 6 months of waiting and multiple requests, TM Troeger is no longer updating or working on the website due to concerns of the site breaking. TM Troeger asks if it's possible to get Dave to attend a tourism meeting. Chair Kelly requests an update at the next meeting and TM Troeger will send communications between Dave and him to CA Bennett.

No new updates from TM Stepanchuk.

B. OSU Tourism Update :: Chair Kelly

OSU has a sustainable tourism lab where they look at small communities who are growing into a new phase of tourism and how to keep that sustainable for the local population with responsible growth and income equality. The professor leading the lab would like to speak with the committee. He wants to know where Cascade Locks is in its economic history and tourism industry. The information will go into a broader database and return with a report. There's no obligation, he'd like to talk to us and then if we want to move forward, he'll share his methodology and ask some questions either in the meeting or beforehand. There's no cost, but they will use the data in a broader database collection. The committee is interested so Chair Kelly will see if he'd like to attend our next meeting.

C. Update :: Multnomah Falls Kiosk Panel

Staff talked to CA Bennett about changing out the kiosk panel in February and CA Bennett said it's not necessary, so we'll wait to replace the panel until April when the annual updates and ad renewals are due.

D. Share Ideas for Blog Posts and 4-5 Interview Questions

The committee has been talking about highlighting citizens of the Gorge that have interesting stories or ties back to the community, and standardizing a few questions so the questions are repeated. The committee has thrown around some local names who they thought would be interesting to interview. The interviews would go on social media and website blog. Travis Preece recommends evaluating who your target audience is prior to beginning the project.

11. New Business

A. Review Designs for Advertising

Staff provides committee members with copies of current ads.

B. Vote :: Skamania Lodge Magazine Ad

Norm Bourque says the vote is on hold until next meeting.

12. Upcoming events:

A. Zwickelmania, Saturday, February 25, 2023, Gorges Beer Co. & Thunder Island Brewing Co.

Travis Preece shares information about Zwickelmania. Most brewery vessels have a little spout on the bottom. When you open it, you can test the beer to see if it has the qualities you're looking for. Gorges Beer and Thunder Island decided to cross promote this year's event. Brewery tours will be offered at Thunder Island and then folks come over to Gorges to do barrel tasting. It's a cool event because it's not just about tasting, it's educational — learning about beer and how it's made.

B. FISH Food Bank, Wednesday, February 22, 1:30-3:30pm, City Hall Gym

13. Tourism Committee Member Reports

A. Matt Kelly

City Council would like for tourism to present at the February 27th meeting. Matt thought it would be good for us to agree upon what we're covering. He suggests doing the report on the 27th and schedule another time with City Council for the work session. Denise says our report is to advise the committee on the budget we spend and what we spend it on and why, since we're an arm under City Council. Denise points out it is not illegal for tourism to focus on beautification; it's a duty in city ordinances that "you shall promote tourism and beautification." She presumes what CA Zimmerman meant was using transient tourism tax money "may not" be used for beautification. Regardless it's still tourism's duty, and we are more than a transient tax committee. We are a tourism and beautification committee, according to the ordinance. Denise suggests we apply for grants to be used for beautification rather than using TLT. She also suggests we plan events without money and get the city involved. Chair Kelly tells Denise that we were actually told we couldn't. Denise claims it was a mistake. Chair Kelly explains committee members were told we could do beautification as a private citizen but not as a member of the tourism board. Vice Chair Fine asks Denise if what she's saying is, if we give a grant to the community who wants to take care of beautification, we could grant that? Denise responds that beautification is a giant term that is subjective to all of us. It can mean murals or making sidewalks more beautiful. Denise will continue to stand that it is not illegal for us to do beautification... it's our duty.

B. Debbie Fine

Vice Chair Fine was thinking of the rules and how uninformed we've been. We need some guidance in what the rules and laws are. Cooperation between businesses and tourism have been difficult. Many businesses don't have time to talk because they're too busy. Tourism has offered programs to educate employees in the past, and no one has taken us up on it. Businesses have to be part of tourism. And when you ask a business to have some training for some of their employees who don't know how to speak to tourists, and they don't cooperate, then what do you do? We've invited them to meetings. Vice Chair Fine is not saying this about current businesses because there are some that are very cooperative. They want us to spend their TRT taxes but they don't want to provide input. We need their cooperation. Travis Preece lets the committee know that his door is open to us. He welcomes tourism to start with him and he'll do anything he can to help.

Ben DeJardin has a specific ask for tourism's help. The Historic Highway State Trail has been closed since May between Cascade Locks and Eagle Creek due to a landslide, and it's not a priority for ODOT to fix it. He asks that we call ODOT. Denise suggests cross marketing and Chair Kelly ask Travis to work with the committee on that.

C. Harry Troeger

D. Val Stepanchuk

We did talk a lot about beautification in past meetings and there have been a few community organized clean ups because of it. So, it's totally doable. If committee members set something up, residents do tend to respond and join in.

14. Next Meeting Date & Time: February 27, 2023

15. Adjournment: Chair Kelly adjourns the meeting at 7:24 PM

The meeting location is accessible to persons with disabilities. A request for an interpreter for the hearing impaired, or for other accommodations for person with disabilities, should be made at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting by contacting the City of Cascade Locks office at 541-374-8484.