

Utah Office of Tourism
Board Meeting Minutes
Friday, October 14, 2022
Courtyard Cedar City, Cedar City, Utah

Board Members Present	Kym Buttschardt, Commissioner Brent Chamberlain, Lesha Coltharp, Nathan Rafferty, Jordan Smith, Lance Syrett, Sara Toliver, Jennifer Wesselhoff, Shayne Wittwer
Board Members Excused	Jared Berrett, Brian Merrill, Greg Miller, Glen Overton, Mike Taylor
UOT Staff	Julia Barnhouse, Rachel Bremer, Lorraine Daly, Denise Jordan, Becky Keeney, Celina Sinclair, Erin Smith, Flint Timmins, Vicki Varela, David Williams, Liz Wilson
Public	Brittini Costello, Kamron Dalton, Sydnie Furton, Megan Griffin, Kelli Harman, Max Houtkooper, Nick Larsen, Tom Love, Becky McRae, Dallas Miller, Julie Padilla, Anna Saunders, Hannah Saunders, Jen Shakespeare, Jonathan Smithgall, Maria Twitchell

1. WELCOME and INTRODUCTIONS

Board chair, **Lance Syrett**, welcomed everyone to the meeting, thanked **Maria Twitchell**-director of Visit Cedar City-for hosting a board member dinner the night before, and asked the board members and audience to introduce themselves.

Maria Twitchell welcomed everyone to Cedar City and shared local tourism updates that there will be personnel changes with the Shakespeare Festival, additional mountain bike trails are going in, a new hotel will be coming to downtown, and Brian Head will hopefully open soon.

2. APPROVAL of MINUTES

MOTION: COMMISSIONER BRENT CHAMBERLAIN MOTIONED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER 28, 2022, MEETING THAT WAS HELD IN VERNAL. KYM BUTTSCHARDT SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. MANAGING DIRECTOR REPORT

Vicki Varela, Managing Director of the Utah Office of Tourism (UOT), reported on the following:

- Vicki thanked Maria Twitchell for hosting the board at today’s meeting and recognized her recent induction into the 2022 Tourism Hall of Fame. Noted were additional Tourism Hall of Fame inductees present at this meeting -- Dave Williams and Sara Toliver.
- Today is Julia Barnhouse’s last day with the office as she accepted an opportunity with the University of Utah. She was thanked her for her remarkable work with the office over the last six years. Bianca Lyon and Rosie Serago also recently left UOT and accepted positions with the University of Utah.
- A highly productive search has been underway for the new marketing director and UOT is hoping to announce the hire next week.

- Rachel Bremer organized a tree planting event in Torrey for German tour operators with Tree Utah, with a good amount of local media coverage and volunteers. This was a great opportunity in building on UOT's brand Forever Mighty and giving back to visitors.
- UOT's "Let's Talk Utah, Season 2" recently won Travel Weekly's 2022 Magellan Award Gold for the Destination Marketing – Campaign Social Media category. Recognized were UOT staff members Sandra Salvas and Melissa Kinney, and social media agency Sparkloft.
- Anna Loughridge recently attended the annual NYC Ski Utah Mission and reported it was a very successful media event.
- Vicki traveled to Slovenia in a partnership with Visit Salt Lake to participate in a discussion session on Transformational Travel, prompting possibilities that tie to UOT's brand to strengthen partnerships with adventure and sports groups to help individuals achieve critical goals.
- Commissioner Chamberlain and Kane County Office of Tourism director Camille Taylor are going to great efforts to organize a Kane County fam tour associated with the November board meeting in Kanab, with more information reported at the end of this meeting.

4. BOARD UPDATES FROM AREAS

- **Lance Syrett**, representing the Lodging Industry
 - Lance compared seasonal tourism to a farming in one trend, as peak season (six months) can't be made up for in the off season, or you can't make up for those tourism dollars in winter.
 - The Garfield County tourism office did a study to see if local businesses would stay open in the off-season if Garfield promoted the area during November-February. The overwhelming response was that they need to spend more money in their core market instead. Overall, it's a mixed bag around the state.
- **Nathan Rafferty**, representing the Ski Industry
 - From the ski industry perspective, things are going very well with a lot of visitation over the last few years. Ski is one of the few industries that benefited from COVID in many ways. As successful as it was, it was equally difficult to operate. The number one challenge is participation in sports/visitation to Utah goes up and down very rapidly and that changes quicker than the infrastructure to support.
 - A lot of money is going into capital improvements with the tram at Snowbird, lifts at Deer Valley, and Sundance and Brian Head.
 - This may be the biggest snow year!
- **Shayne Wittwer**, representing Washington, Iron, Beaver, Sanpete, Sevier, Millard counties
 - Sevier, Sanpete, Millard, and Beaver counties have done okay this year and held their own with a different mix of traveler.
 - Washington County struggled through the summer months with September being one of its worst months in a long time but visitation is picking up now.
 - Moab had a rough summer, but October visitation has been very busy at the parks and in town. Iron County been steady.
 - Maria commented that it's not busy during the weekends and has been an odd year.
- **Jordan Smith**, representing Outdoor Recreation
 - The Division of Outdoor Recreation now houses all the State's grant programs for outdoor recreation and each year they hold workshops and just announced the schedule on their website.
 - Pitt Grewe, Division of Recreation director, is leaving the office next week and India Neilsen will be the interim representative.

- **Commissioner Brent Chamberlain**, representing Utah Association of Counties
 - Kanab TRT revenue was down in July and August substantially, but the east side of the park stayed about average, compared to last year. TRT numbers for Kane County are trending above 2021, which was a record year. September and October have been extremely busy. October looks to have been the busiest month in Kane County this year.
 - Mid-October used to end the season, but it's lasting longer now. Tourism drives 42-44% of Kane County's total economy.
 - The Rocky Mountain Pro Rodeo Association finals competition will take place November 11-12 in Kanab. The association came to Kane County last year looking for an open venue to host their finals during COVID and entered into a five-year contract.
 - Commissioner Chamberlain is finishing up his term as commissioner this year and will not run again.
- **Kym Buttschardt**, representing Davis, Weber, Box Elder, Cache, Rich counties
 - Davis County ADR is good, attraction visitation is down, as they are most places in the region, but doing okay and others are very optimistic. Davis and Weber counties have a lot of business with the new Hill Air Force Base Sentinel project that is bringing a lot of business travel. The Legacy Center by Farmington Station with a myriad of different things are taking bookings through June 2023 and has an ambitious plan for a \$60-70 million facility for sports, film, and more that will bring long-term impact.
 - Weber County and Ogden Valley TRT numbers and restaurant tax are up, with meetings and conventions are starting to come back. Sara has been able to fill in business with new sports/leisure/business during COVID that have come back with occupancy levels being high, but there is an inventory challenge with that. Short term rentals are coming on which helps with numbers.
 - Sara reported on the newly created 501c3 called the Weber Sustainability Fund to give back to the areas utilized for outdoor recreation events. The entities will be encouraged to provide a donation to the Weber Sustainability Fund and Visit Ogden will provide a PR effort. Dollars will provide things like maintenance, revitalization, and cleanup for use by residents and future visitors.
 - Some of Box Elder County's visitor attractions are down but they industry partners are optimistic and other numbers are holding and increasing.
 - Cache County is growing their event cycle, numbers are holding steady and growing.
 - Rich County received a large co-op grant this last summer and are now getting on the radar.
- **Jennifer Wesselhoff**, representing Utah, Summit, Juab, and Wasatch counties
 - Jennifer showed stats for the Park City economy, sales taxes, transient room and restaurant taxes are typical with seasonal tours, and local sales tax revenue has been increasing since 2017. Local taxes for Summit County as trending for other counties nearby.
 - Occupancy levels are down for September-December this year, with a significant increase in January with Sundance. Rates on the other hand are skyrocketing with winter rates up 20% compared to last year.
 - Park City area averages are under performing when compared with other competitive destinations such as Aspen, Breckenridge, Snowmass, and ten other destinations on a monthly basis. That's going to be their job to figure out why that is happening.
 - Wasatch County is experiencing some massive growth and potential development around Jordanelle and the Mayflower area with up to 7 additional hotels coming to

the area. It may be interesting to bring someone in to discuss the area development and infrastructure.

- **Leesha Coltharp**, representing Carbon, Emery, Grand, Duchesne, Daggett and Uintah counties
 - Daggett County is concerned about dropping water levels - water is being sent south to Lake Powell and California, so hope to have a great winter, as tourism makes up 97% economy. They experienced extreme, unmanageable growth in 2020-2021, which is slightly down this year, and more manageable.
 - Carbon County received a film grant to have locations photographed and shot on video; their new content creator for digital marketing has been a great asset. A ribbon cutting event took place for the Bookcliff Mural, the longest mural in Utah, on Main Street in Price.
 - Grand County wrapped up the Arches National Park timed-entry system and will now gather data to see how they will move forward. The park was down in numbers during the summer, but trending higher now without the system in place. The filming of the movie Horizon helps with occupancy levels but there are struggles with producing a film that large with the Utah Motion Picture Incentive Program in place.
 - Emery County will launch a resident sentiment survey. During the Republican convention there was a backlash on tourism. This survey will help to figure out the next step to keep the community happy while also growing their economy with tourism.
 - Uintah County trails are in development in and out of town for biking, hiking, and OHV with better signage, maps and markings. The hotels are busy with gas industry bookings, so there is a need to balance enough rooms for tourism. Snow Hill now has two ski lifts and is getting ready for winter and Lesha is excited about the Vernal Oilers hockey team.
 - Duchesne County's biggest outdoor recreation asset is Starvation State Park who had a killer year.
- **Sara Toliver**, representing Utah Tourism Industry Association
 - UTIA has formulated a stakeholder engagement committee to make sure we're talking with residents and other stakeholders vested in the tourism industry and its impact. They meet monthly and received a grant to create an engagement toolkit to communicate the importance of visitor economy with items to share assets and tell stories in a more robust way.
 - UTIA is working with Love Communications to produce a quarterly industry survey starting in January. They ask that everyone contributes to the survey to reference all industry sectors and communities.
 - Legislative focus items include the desire for increased flexibility surrounding transient room tax usage, possible help for communities to enforce and regulate short term rentals, and not much to report on alcohol at this point but Des Barker is working to navigate industry priorities around portability and other issues. More to come as we get closer to the session.

5. UPDATE STRATEGIC PLAN

Jordan Smith, Ph.D. Director, Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism, Utah State University
Jordan reported on the of the development of the strategic plan of the Outdoor Recreation Commission (*Please note: This presentation was inaudible on the recording, due to audio difficulties, so apologies to Jordan and the Board*)

6. MARKETING COMMITTEE REPORT

Dave Williams, associate managing director, Utah Office of Tourism, reported UOT has a lot going on, is in the middle of the fall campaign which is going well, is finalizing the winter campaign which will be reported on at next month's meeting, and thanked staff and partners for their help on the campaigns. He then turned the time over for the following presentation covering current trends and the economy overall.

Johnathan Smithgall, Vice President, Digital Marketing and Media, Love Communications, provided a presentation on Travel Trends (available on the Public Notice Website):

- **Current State of Travel:** air travel statistics reveal activity is close to pre-pandemic numbers, Arrivalist daily travel index shows slower summer months, and higher gasoline prices in the West (as compared with the East) could be a travel factor.
- **Reasons for Concern:** include hesitations for upcoming travel, canceling trips due to inflation and staying closer to home, and the impact on travel due to high gasoline prices.
- **Reasons to be Optimistic:** travelers are waiting closer to the holidays to make plans instead of canceling trips, a high number of planned trips in the near future (more domestically), prioritization shown amongst age groups, preference of active vacations is strong, plans for experiencing new places, road trips continue as the type of travel preferred, and there is great flexibility in options.
- **Natural Disasters:** include the types of hazards impacting travel, disaster planning can lead to postponed trips but not canceled trips, a low amount of people think of disasters when planning trips, and awareness of wildfires shown along with the types of natural disasters causing impacts.

7. UTIA UPDATE

Sara Toliver thanked everyone that attended the Utah Tourism Conference, Leesha Coltharp for hosting an amazing conference, the UOT team, conference committee for their efforts, and all that were able to come and participate.

8. ANNOUNCEMENTS / UPCOMING EVENTS

- **Commissioner Brent Chamberlain** reminded everyone of the November board meeting in Kanab which includes a fam tour in Kane County. He asked for a head count by the end of this month. The schedule included dinner Thursday and Friday night, outdoor recreational experiences of hikes, ATV riding, and family friendly activities. Information will be sent out to sign-up.
- **Shayne Wittwer** invited everyone to the October 28-29 World Championship Ironman in St. George and there is a need for volunteers.

9. MEETING ADJOURNED

The next board meeting is scheduled for Friday, November 18, at the Kanab Center, Kanab.

Red Emeral Strategic Plan Imperatives:

1. Prioritize quality visitation, not simply quantity of visitors
2. Distribute visitation
3. Continue powerful branding
4. Enable community-led visitor readiness
5. Improve organizational effectiveness