

THE TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND
MAYOR'S TASK FORCE FOR THE FUTURE
TOURISM SUBCOMMITTEE
MINUTES OF MEETING

Steve Birdwell, *Chairman*
Mark Baker
Marc Frey
James N. Richardson, Jr.



Minutes of the February 3, 2010 Workshop
Place: Westin Resort and Spa

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Members Present: Steve Birdwell, *Chairman*; Mark Baker, Marc Frey and James N. Richardson, Jr.

Others Present: Andrew Czarnecki, Ann-Marie Adams, Art Brown, Bonnie Lowrey, Bret Martin, Carolyn Vanagel, Cary Corbitt, David Sulak, Frank Soule, Gregg Russell, John Munro, John Salazar, Julianne Young, Ken Nason, Michael Marks, Phil Schembra, Ray Dznowski, Rick Meccariello, Robert Stenhammer, Simon Fraser, Tom Ridgway and Walt Graver

Staff Present: Steve Riley, *Town Manager*, Mike Roan, *Urban Design Administrator* and Shawn Colin, *Senior Planner, Community Development Dept.*

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Steve Birdwell called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

II. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT COMPLIANCE

Public notification of this meeting was published, posted and mailed in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and the Town of Hilton Head Island requirements.

III. NEW BUSINESS

1. Opening Comments and Introductions

Mr. Birdwell explained the purpose of the Mayor's Vision Task Force is to create the vision for the future of the island with specific strategies which should be implemented. There are 15 members on that Committee, of which three sub-committees have been created: Tourism, Business and Retirement. He introduced the Tourism Subcommittee members.

2. Brainstorming Session

Mr. Frey was the facilitator of the Workshop. A brainstorming session was held regarding the topics and questions on the agenda distributed by the Tourism Sub-Committee. (Copy attached.) The discussion during the brainstorming session is summarized on the attached notes.

3. Conclusions and Summary Comments

Mr. Frey stated the timeframe the Mayor’s Task Force has set is six months from January 2010 to come up with a vision and roadmap. Mr. Baker commented we are building on a tremendous foundation that the Town has already laid with the Comprehensive Plan, and we are taking that data and advancing it. Mr. Richardson asked that the invitees continue to stay involved and send in feedback. Mr. Birdwell thanked everyone for their time and input.

IV. ADJOURNAMENT

Mr. Birdwell adjourned the meeting at 5:05 p.m.

IF **Mayor's Vision Task Force, Tourism Workshop, Westin February 3, 2010**

1) Welcome **3:00pm**
(Rules: no wrong answers, please keep comments short)

2) What we think we know:

- In our work we distinguish between 3 economic drivers: Tourism, Retirement and business
- Tourism is the largest economic driver for the town
- Data: 10,000 jobs, 60% of all jobs, 1.5billion impact on local economy
- Everything starts with the visitor, today's guests is tomorrow's neighbor
- Tourism effects every other part of the economy including property values and not for profit organizations
- Full time and part time residents enjoy many amenities that would not be possible without tourism dollars
- Looking back 20 years tourism has been in an upward slope for 8 years and a downward slope for the last 12 years (1990: 1.6mio; 1998: 2.5mio; 2009: 1.8mio)
- The economic impact of missing visitors: 700,000 visitors x\$1,000 per visitor = \$700million
- High reliance on beach and golf
- Low occupancy rates other than in April and 10 weeks in the summer
- Relying on past glory
- Not driving one of our core strengths: golf
- HHI has not established itself as: *(Discussion)*

3) Where are we now? *(Discussion)*

4) What caused it? *(Discussion)*

5) What and who is to blame? *(Short discussion)*

6) Fast forward 25 years from now: What do you see or wish for?
(Brainstorming) **4:00pm**

7) Where do we go from here?
(Brainstorming)

3 categories seem to emerge:

1. Redevelopment
2. Expand and enhance the experience
3. Do a better job in marketing ourselves

8) Open discussion and comments, what did we miss or not discuss
(Discussion)

9) Summary and conclusions **5:00pm**

TOHH Tourism Public Workshop Meeting Notes

Date of Workshop - February 3, 2010

1. Do Island residents understand the importance of tourism to the Island economy?
 - a. Many don't truly understand the relationship
 - b. Need better education and communication
 - c. Need to evaluate and relate every decision's impact on property values

2. What amenities, facilities, activities, etc. exist on HHI due to tourism?
 - a. Beach re-nourishment
 - b. Leisure trails
 - c. Championship golf – affordable
 - d. Lodging
 - e. Shopping and dining
 - f. Arts, culture and theater
 - g. Quality infrastructure
 - h. Medical
 - i. Real estate values
 - j. Outlying development – Bluffton and Hardeeville
 - k. Events that bring in tourists in addition to existing vacationers

3. Marketing and promotion comments
 - a. Need to attract new visitors in addition to repeat business
 - b. HHI misses the mark on this
 - c. HHI does a good job marketing to regional, drive-to visitors from NC, SC & GA, etc. – “we market to who we have”
 - d. Need to aggressively reach out to affluent customers in the North East - i.e., NY, PA, CT, NJ, etc.
 - e. Need to promote HHI internationally
 - f. Need to do a better job promoting conventions and meetings - perhaps separate from chamber's other marketing and promotion activities
 - g. Recognize that tourism is both leisure travel and group travel and that both are essential to Island economy
 - h. Market to nature based recreation visitors
 - i. Need to vastly increase budgets for marketing and promotion – “it's a comma short”, “we are vastly underfunded”
 - j. Raise sales tax to fund marketing and promotion to levels comparable to similar communities that HHI competes with
 - k. There is a high reliance on beach and golf
 - l. Summer season is growing shorter and shorter – 10 weeks is no longer a given
 - m. Demand is dropping off earlier and starting later
 - n. Need marketing strategies to strengthen off-season activity and lengthen the shoulder seasons
 - o. Off-season represents a big opportunity to capture affluent visitors
 - p. Need to begin marketing and promotion now to lay the foundation for 5 and 10 years out

- q. Need to better market to younger generations which represent a big opportunity – retirees are ageing and moving on – need to attract new visitors
 - r. Need to strengthen brand message and tie it to the Sea Island, Lowcountry, green qualities
 - s. More research to determine what our target visitors want
 - t. Identify good successful community models and find out what they are doing
 - u. Market to young crowd
4. What is HHI not doing and what have we missed?
- a. Compete as a year-round destination
 - b. Strengthen arts and culture
 - c. Offer year-round programs
 - d. Protect the HHI name and brand
 - e. Better local press with a positive outlook and attitude
 - f. Partnership between businesses, TOHH and the Chamber
5. What programs do we need?
- a. Sports programs and facilities for youth tournaments – our facilities are not adequate
 - b. Opportunities for visitors to have unique experiences
 - c. Island-wide partnerships with events like Concours, Heritage, Gullah Celebration and others
 - d. Workforce and resident education and training on Island ecology, environment, history and culture so they can inform visitors
 - e. Opportunities for intellectual experiences such as nature based and adventure activities
6. Redevelopment
- a. Facilities on the island are old and tired – Island is run down
 - b. Competing destinations have new facilities
 - c. Must determine what we want to be when redevelopment occurs
 - d. Balance residents desires with need to redevelop
 - e. Redevelopment should be nature blending, but not over restrictive
 - f. Need to clean up visual sequence entering and driving through town
 - g. Can't compete with old product
 - h. Need to educate residents regarding how this impacts property values and need to change Town policies and codes
 - i. TOHH to partner with private sector to leverage redevelopment – Invest in community infrastructure and set the stage for redevelopment
 - j. ROI must make sense
7. TOHH LMO
- a. Does not encourage redevelopment
 - b. Town policies prevent and obstruct investment, renovations and improvements – this must change or businesses will not invest
 - c. Town has to relax codes and policies or redevelopment will not occur
 - d. HHI is the toughest place to develop and restricts to point that not financially feasible

- e. Even small improvements are very difficult to accomplish
 - f. TOHH should be a positive force in redevelopment vs. an obstacle
 - g. Businesses need to know there is a clear outcome or they will not invest
 - h. Need new facilities and investment now
 - i. Town has an anti-business attitude
8. What does HHI need?
- a. The right product when people come here – HHI is ageing, tired and frayed
 - b. The community businesses, residents and Town Government need to work together to turn Island around
 - c. Strategically planned events to strengthen off-season traffic and bring new visitors to the Island
 - d. Need to identify what the economic drivers going forward will be - the time share boom drove the market over the last decade
 - Will it be strategically planned special events?
 - Will it be investment in infrastructure?
 - Will it be redevelopment?
 - b. Myrtle Beach is not the model
 - c. To better engage visitors in historic and natural resources
 - d. An improved transportation system
 - Better access to and from Island – better arrival and departure experience
 - A sustainable Airport with lengthened runway
 - A fun and dynamic public transportation system for visitors and residents serving entire Island
 - More bike paths
 - Better connectivity and alternative roads on Island
 - e. Eco-friendly development
 - f. Nature based recreation facilities and products to appeal to soft adventure sports crowd
 - g. Activities for the entire family include more with youth orientation
 - h. Health, fitness and recreation facilities
 - i. Island-wide Wi-Fi technology
 - j. To re-craft who we are to appeal to younger generations
 - k. Relaxed beach rules
 - Chair rental program is controlled by Town and too expensive
 - Allow alcohol on the beach
 - Allow events on the beach
 - Change signage – first thing a visitor sees in “NO”
 - Generally needs more flexibility
 - l. Work-force housing and employment opportunities so kids can return to Island and new young people (25 to 30 yr old) can live here
9. What will HHI look like in 25 years and what will be on the Island?
- a. Be as beautiful as it is now with emphasis on natural resources and natural beauty

- b. A ferry to allow visitors to experience the Sea Island environment and offer a unique transportation alternative for access to Bluffton, Dafuskie, Beaufort and Savannah
- c. Land use policies that are flexible enough to respond to changing market conditions
- d. Clean, fresh and new product
- e. World class golf
- f. The Heritage golf tournament
- g. A business friendly Town Government
- h. A year-round destination with 70% occupancy rates
- i. An internationally recognized tourism destination with premier golf and easy access
- j. Clean and energy efficient, non-carbon based transportation system
- k. Luxury shopping destinations
- l. Unique local retail shopping experiences
- m. Attracting caring visitors to become future residents
- n. "The place to go"!