



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF VERNON

MINUTES OF THE TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING HELD SEPTEMBER 6, 2023 AT 8:00 AM OKANAGAN LAKE ROOM (COUNCIL CHAMBER) CITY HALL

PRESENT: VOTING:

Claus Larsen, Accommodation Provider, Chair
Mike Van Horne, Golf
Dauna Kennedy, Arts & Culture
Gale Woodhouse, Arts & Culture
Kris Fuller, Vernon Winter Carnival
Peter Kaz, Downtown Vernon Association
Mayor Cumming
Clara Snedden, Accommodation Provider
Ben Suranko, Biking
Cassandra Zerebeski, Ski
Bradley Calihoo, Okanagan Indian Band
Janine Collard, Attractions
Gerran Thorhaug, Restaurant

NON-VOTING:

Ian Jenkins

GUESTS:

Josh Welter, SCSNO

ABSENT: Richard Rolke, Chamber of Commerce
Bobby Bissessar, Accommodation Provider
Kat Boloten, Accommodation Provider
Councillor Durning, Council Appointed

STAFF: John Perrott, Manager, Economic Development & Tourism
Jennifer Pounder, Committee Clerk
Torrie Silverthorn, Manager, Tourism
Hilary Irvine, Tourism Marketing Coordinator
Karen Savill, Visitor Services Coordinator
Cocine Wattie, Administrative Assistant

ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m.

**LAND
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

As Chair of the City of Vernon's Tourism Commission, and in the spirit of this gathering, I recognize the City of Vernon is located in the traditional territory of the Syilx people of the Okanagan Nation.

**ADOPTION OF THE
AGENDA**

Moved by G. Woodhouse, seconded by M. Van Horne:

THAT the agenda of the September 6, 2023 Tourism Commission meeting be adopted.

CARRIED

**ADOPTION OF THE
MINUTES**

Moved by K. Fuller, seconded by D. Kennedy:

THAT the minutes of the July 19, 2023 Tourism Commission meeting be adopted.

CARRIED

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There was no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS:

**SEPTEMBER
MEETING**

The Chair announced that the Tourism Commission meeting scheduled for September 20, 2023 is cancelled.

The Chair welcomed Cassandra Zerebeski and Ben Suranko and thanked Richard Rolke and Troy Hudson for their service to the Tourism Commission.

C. Snedden entered the meeting at 8:05 a.m.

T. Silverthorn, Manager, Tourism, provided the following updates:

Mayor Cumming entered the meeting at 8:08 a.m.

- This Commission does not typically meet in August, however, at the July meeting we entered into budget discussion on the priorities for 2024 and the Chair felt it was necessary to continue this conversation in August. Due to the wildfire situation to the South of us, that meeting was postponed until today.
- With the help of C. Larsen, we have been doing some advocacy work with Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA) and the Ministry. Need for hotel rooms for evacuees was not fully realized and our hotels are sitting empty as a result of travel restrictions.
- C. Larsen commented that he had a roundtable with Minister Popham. Discussion was on the impact from the wildfires. A lot of

businesses are fully staffed again since the Covid-19 pandemic and now without guests are having to let employees go again.

- T. Silverthorn reassured the Commission that the message has been shared with regional and provincial tourism officials
- C. Zerebeski encouraged everyone to share estimated revenue losses with TOTA; they require the numbers to build the case and find some supports at provincial level.
- T. Silverthorn welcomed B. Suranko and C. Zerebeski to the Commission.

2024 BUDGET DISCUSSION

T. Silverthorn provided a presentation to aid the Budget Discussion (Attached to these minutes as Attachment 1). Seeking feedback on prioritizing the following:

- Travel media
 - Travel trade
 - Sport tourism
 - Corporate travel, meetings and conferences
- The floor was opened for discussion/questions:
 - In response to a question, properties confirmed capacity and size of conference spaces
 - ~ Predator Ridge – 150
 - ~ Sparkling Hill – 250
 - ~ Prestige Hotel - 500.
 - K. Fuller is fully supportive of Travel Media and would love to see it take a leading role in 2024.
 - C. Larsen stated the desire for travel media for Predator Ridge and this sector has helped get them on the map. He agrees that we need to get back to travel media and get to the next level. He also agrees that sports and events has been successful and needs to get to the next level.
 - B. Suranko – Has come across several videos created by travel media, bloggers and influencers in the mountain biking sector online. His network is amazed by our scenery and trails.
 - C. Zerebeski fully agrees with prioritizing travel media and sport tourism. Also sees need for more aggressive approach to corporate travel, conferences and business events Long term the investment will pay off. Penticton has its conference center and Kelowna has an employee in Toronto as well as one in Kelowna.
 - P. Kaz commented that Vernon has hotel rooms and no facilities. We need a high capacity venue. Regarding travel trade, we convinced bus trades in Vancouver to stop here on way to Banff. We need a reason for people to stop here.
 - T Silverthorn commented that sports do not need to be inside. Large scale events can happen outside.

- Planet bee confirmed their tour bus/travel trade business is 30% of what it was pre-Covid-19.
- I. Jenkins agrees. Make sure the support for travel trade does not get lost. As for meetings/conferences: attract events that work for the facilities and spaces we already have.
- Mayor Cumming commented that indoor event facilities are a significant loss leader for other communities. Cautious about the cost of indoor facilities that are under-utilized.
- T. Silverthorn shared that Victoria has private sector funding to support and a partner in the Empress hotel to fill and pay for conference facility. This is not an option at this point in time for Vernon.
- C. Snedden confirmed their occupancy is not even close to 2019 numbers. Filling conference space is a challenge.
- Mayor Cumming would like to see targeting conferences in a stronger role than just a support role.
- T. Silverthorn confirmed this is why we need to prioritize. We have a tiny team of staff; all four sectors have tremendous value, but attracting these sectors takes significant time, effort and capacity
- I. Jenkins – Success will be from team Vernon – industry needs to support Tourism Vernon in going after these sectors.
- G. Thorhaug – The Tourism Board in Terrace, BC, trained sales people. The Board and businesses worked together and were able to offer packages which helped attract visitors.
- T. Silverthorn asked what size of group event is ideal for local industry
- J. Welter – Whatever size of group it is, we need staff.
- J. Collard – Events make money. Significant impact for Predator and every hotel in area. One visitor coming for lunch do not make money. Groups and events are important.
- T. Silverthorn confirmed staff would explore options for pursuing all four sectors, in particular meetings and events. Listening to the group today, Tourism Vernon is currently not doing enough here.
- T. Silverthorn thanked the Commission for their feedback. She will bring forward a plan for this group to view and discuss at a future meeting.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting for the Tourism Commission is set for **October 18, 2023 at 8:00 a.m.**

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting of the Tourism Commission adjourned at 8:55 a.m. by call of the Chair.

CERTIFIED CORRECT:


_____ Chair