

# Montgomery Regional Tourism Development Council

## Meeting Minutes

May 28, 2020

Meeting held via Zoom

### I. Call to Order

Jason Dowdy called to order the regular meeting of the **MTDC** at **9:00 a.m.** via Zoom due to COVID-19 restrictions.

#### **Present**

Jason Dowdy (v)	Chair- Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Milestone Development Partner
Sam Bishop (v)	Vice Chair- Christiansburg Town Council- Primary
Tom Norman (v)	Courtyard by Marriott, General Manager
Randy Wingfield	Town of Christiansburg, Town Manager
Luke Brugh (v)	Brugh Coffee Company, Owner
April DeMotts (v)	Montgomery County Board of Supervisor
Lauren Colliver (v)	Blacksburg Town Council
Craig Meadows	Montgomery County, County Administrator
Connie Hale (v)	Buffalo & More, Owner
Tom Cupo	The Inn at Virginia Tech and Skelton Conference Center
Lisa Bleakley	Montgomery County Regional Tourism, Executive Director
Irene Kilmer	Montgomery County Regional Tourism, Visitor Relations Manager

#### **Absent**

Heather Browning	Town of Blacksburg, Community Relations Manager
Marc Verniel	Town of Blacksburg, Town Manager
Lea Wall (v)	Christiansburg, Blacksburg, NRV Mall Holiday Inn, Director of Sales
Melissa Powell	Town of Christiansburg, Public Relations Director
Diane Akers	The Blacksburg Partnership, Director
Vacant	Montgomery County Planning Commission Liaison
Jennifer Harris	Montgomery County, Public Information Director

### II. Consensus of Agenda

- a. Jason Dowdy calls for a motion to approve the consent agenda.
  - i. Sam Bishop makes the motion to approve the agenda with the amendment to combine the directors report with the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual tourism summit line items. Tom Norman seconds the motion. All say aye. The agenda is approved.

### III. Approval of Minutes: February 27, 2020

- a. Jason Dowdy calls for a motion to approve the February 27, 2020 minutes.
  - i. Randy Wingfield makes a motion to approve the minutes from February 27, 2020. Sam Bishop seconds the motion. All say aye. Minutes approved.

#### IV. Updates

##### a. **COVID-19 Impacts**

- i. Lisa presents the current destination STR reports. Lisa will share most recent state-wide and regional STR reports along with travel sentiment and economic impact reports from VTC via a shared Google folder.

##### b. **Director's Report**

- i. The strategic plan for the tourism office has been finalized. It has been distributed to the town councils and the tourism board. Lisa will share the plan with the MTDC via email.
- ii. Vince Magnini will share highlights from the new strategic plan during the third annual tourism summit on June 19<sup>th</sup> at 10am. "Save the Date" emails have gone out. The access link for the summit will be sent soon.
- iii. The Blacksburg and Christiansburg visitor centers remain closed. We are targeting June 15<sup>th</sup> to reopen.
- iv. The New River Valley DMO's are working together to build a regional website and social media presence. There is a new Facebook page accessed with the @VisitNRV handle.
- v. Working on a PR strategy with BCF to have some pitches for writers by the end of June to get ready for Fall travel. Aiming for leisure travel via local and regional drive travel. Lisa will share information as it becomes available.
- vi. The ACC Network featured Blacksburg as their first episode in a new series called *3 Day Weekend* as they highlight towns of the ACC. You can stream it now online.
- vii. We worked with Bowling Creative Media to create a video for VTC's "We'll Be Waiting" campaign.

##### c. **Group Updates**

- i. **Tom Cupo** → Pending an official designation from Virginia Tech, Tom will become the University representative on the MTDC. The Inn at Virginia Tech had a strong August book, but have had many cancellations related to impact from the recent pandemic. Groups are generally re-booking rather than cancelling. VT is doing everything possible to make sure students are on campus on the Fall. Football is still an unknown. If it occurs, capacity is likely to be impacted. An example of this can be found in Iowa State going forward with football but at 50% capacity. President Sands is expected to make an announcement regarding fall activities during the week of June 8.
  1. Jason ask about if 4 people to a dorm would go back to two. Will this impact the hotels? So far, they have been told students will not be staying in hotels.
  2. April DeMotts mentions that VT has been working with the apartment council to work on housing for students.
  3. Might have to have a potential place to quarantine just in case there might be an outbreak. Looking at all options.
- ii. **Sam Bishop** → No updates at this time.
- iii. **Irene Kilmer** → Alden Morikawa was hired part-time position for the office just prior to the COVID. She will work in the Christiansburg location and is currently being trained on procedures while updating lists and information.

- iv. **Cody Thompson** → Trying to do more outdoor seating downtown. It is a challenging process from a health department and ABC standpoint. Lines of responsibility are blurred when common space is used. It can't be a shared space if alcohol is involved and so it's been hard to figure out who is responsible for cleaning, etc. Hoping for more of a warning for phase two to prepare for opening.
- v. **Luke Brugh** → Interesting time to figure out what the regulations are. Regulations and guidelines change, sometimes during the phase, making it hard to prepare and plan. It's happening fast and it's hard to stay up to date. Many in Christiansburg are staying on the cautious side and sticking with curbside. Hoping for more guidance from the health department. Push local purchases as they make the biggest impact on the local economy.
  - 1. Wing drone delivery is working but lots to learn. Weather hampers delivery, but still very cool. First place in the US to have drone delivery. Potential expansion to Gran Rodeo?
- vi. **Craig Meadows** → Experiencing same frustrations for the state from receiving executive orders and then figuring out how to adapt. Expressed appreciation for the help of the tourism program in the development of the business reopening plan.
  - 1. Localities received money through the Cares act. The restrictions are tight on what we can spend the money on.
  - 2. Jason echoes the great partnership that tourism and the chamber for how they've been working together.
- vii. **Randy Wingfield** → Health Task Force group has been doing a great job to keep everyone safe.
  - 1. Crab Creek and Golden Corral and IHOP has announced closures.
  - 2. Revenues are down in restaurants and hotels. Taxes generated from these sales represent a large portion of both town budgets.
  - 3. Marketplace is still moving along. Chipotle and Mission BBQ open in August.
  - 4. Wyngate in Christiansburg set to open in July with 108 rooms.
  - 5. Received a site plan for an 82 room TRU By Hilton on Hampton Blvd. Two others have been mentioned. Ways to work with the town in zoning, etc. Working towards a 70% occupancy level and until then shouldn't have new developments.
    - a. Jason brings up 3-5 years until we get back to 2019 STR numbers. Asks consideration for oversaturation challenges as decisions are made about new development.
  - 6. Mockingbird, Brugh Coffee, and El Gran Rodeo now participating with Wing. Here to help the community. Lots of potential here to become the new normal for delivery.
  - 7. The Farmers Market open today, 5/28. Can call ahead or social distance walkthrough. Open through October. Still planning on July 4<sup>th</sup> across from the Truman Wilson property for fireworks. Not sure if going to plan a downtown July 4<sup>th</sup> festival. Playing it by ear on event through summer and through the fall. (Blacksburg plans to do it as well)
- viii. **April DeMotts** → No updates at this time.
- ix. **Connie Hale** → Everyday is new. Seeing travelers coming through from many places including GA and WVA. Hard to explain things to them and the precautions because their states are at different phases. Staying cautious. Challenge to make it safe. Buffalo and More is doing curbside and carryout and limited outside dining by RSVP. Farm is doing great – two new baby buffalos. Meat sales have done well as people have seen meat shortages at local grocers.

- x. **Tom Norman** → The 200 rooms coming back into the market (previously used for VT Freshmen) need to be considered when reviewing the 2019 occupancy, ADR, and Revpar figures. These 200 rooms added to a likely 300 rooms means 500 additional rooms in the market which is significantly impacted by COVID and Virginia Tech plans for summer and fall. The new hotels including Home2 behind the Kroger will make the already low occupancy and other metrics continue to decrease without normal business resuming and the prospect of new business. The losses are tremendous. Losing July orientations was huge. The limited guests we do have staying with us are enjoying themselves. Asking about positive tests and still enjoying the outdoors and downtown.
  - 1. Lisa asks about the possibility of a little visitation during orientation. Even though it is online might they do a self-guided trip to check out campus?
  - 2. Gabe sent out an email to hotels to offer them self-guided tours, etc.! Get This!
- xi. **Lauren Colliver** → Universities are encouraging online visits. All summer events are cancelled. Graduates names painted on downtown windows. Town Council has been meeting twice a month along with email communication.
- xii. **Jason Dowdy** → Help from locality to extend the deadlines. PPP helped keep staff but once it runs out it will be back to staffing at needed capacity. Milestone qualified for EIDL but by the time of approval the loan amount changed from \$2 mil to \$150,000. Milestone hotels are doing better than some, but still struggling. Jason described the current situation for local hoteliers. They need help from the localities because options are running out. There has been no communicated plan for afterwards from banks on interest rates, etc.
  - 1. Precautionary measures include taking employee temperatures when checking in on their shift.
- xiii. New mask regulation – how do we handle requiring someone to wear? Health Department is supposed to be enforcing it. They don't have the personnel to monitor and enforce. Know about the exemptions. Gov said "soft enforcement".
  - 1. Opportunity to create branded signs as a customer service tactic?
  - 2. Lauren Colliver – What can be learned about wearing masks inside buildings from the period when smoking inside of buildings was prohibited? Signage at the entryway? Free PDF from NRV Engraving.

**V. Adjournment**

Jason Dowdy calls for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Craig Meadows makes the motion to adjourn. Lauren Colliver seconds. The regular meeting of the Montgomery County Regional Tourism Development Council adjourns at the meeting at 10:03 a.m.

Minutes submitted by: Lisa Bleakley

Minutes approved by: