

Greetings,

On Monday October 8th, Tom Noonan, Julie Chase and Steve Genovesi of Visit Austin presented the FY19 Visit Austin budget and marketing plan to the Tourism Commission. Many commissioners had questions, however, no action was ultimately taken by the commission related to this item.

In general, the lines of questioning by the commissioners were as follows. Noted questions are not exhaustive, are paraphrased and are not in order.

Commissioner Joslove -

- Congratulated Visit Austin for their recent national recognition as a premier Destination Marketing Organization
- Noted the legal implications of some commissioners' voiced objectives.
- Noted that an expectation of ROI should be applied to other recipients of HOT if the intention of the commissioners is to assess the marketing spend, and resultant ROI, of Visit Austin in such detail.

Commissioner Riedie -

- Requested more information regarding Film and Music Marketing and whether more could be allocated, from the Convention Center Capital Improvement Fund (ACCD CIP fund), for 'Cultural Tourism Promotion and Marketing'.
- Requested explanation and information about specific expenditures and how they related to their marketing objectives and ROI on specific sales activity.

Commissioner Bunch -

- Requested legal clarification regarding cultural tourism and marketing, heritage marketing and whether it is part of the legal cap based on state law.
- Requested further detailed information regarding percentage of realized HOT revenue related to Convention Center clients and marketing expenditures related to Convention Center clients.
- Requested further detailed information regarding other municipalities that have a cap of more than 15% for the Arts.
- Accused Visit Austin of purposefully withholding information

Commissioner Searle -

- Requested more detailed information regarding percentage of realized HOT revenue from Convention Center sales and details re: percentage of budget allocated for Convention Sales
- Requested information about fiscal audits
- Requested more information regarding the transfers out of ACCD CIP fund.
- Requested more detailed information regarding the number of attendees of convention center events, excluding SXSW.
- Requested 2017 (most recent) form 990 (related to IRS filings as a non-profit) from Visit Austin
- Echoed the possibility of allocating funding from Convention Center reserves (CIP) for (additional) marketing of Arts and Music.
- Requested information about Visit Austin's membership in various organizations

Commissioner Bailey -

- Requested more detailed information about the marketing plan, and the long-term and 'big picture' strategy of Visit Austin.
- Noted the complexities of tourism marketing and the interrelated nature of variables involved in marketing and the tourist economy.
- Requested more information about competitive markets, their strategies and market positioning.

Commissioner Cannatti -

- Noted a need for objective setting and spending some time on assessing the problems we are trying to address
- Noted a need for a conversation regarding Short Term Rentals.
- Requested information on how the reduction in budget has affected Visit Austin, their strategy and staffing.

Commissioner Fuentes -

- Noted a lack of perspective regarding these issues for commissioners that have not been as engaged in the conversation of tourism / HOT in Austin.
- Requested further industry background, and Visitor Impact Task Force briefing

Commissioner Magee -

- Noted the large number of workers who are engaged with convention center events and the value of such events for those in her Union and otherwise engaged in hospitality and live event service.
- Inquired as to the points of difficulty in selling conventions
- Noted that touring hospitality and event staff have commented on the small size and capacity of the convention center.
- Noted the value of balanced perspective in these conversations and the impact our decisions and actions have on the broader hospitality and live-event service community.

City Staff and Visit Austin will be providing additional information in response to the Commissioners' questions and requests for information. This may include future briefings to the tourism commission.

No Action was Taken by the Commission related to Visit Austin's FY19 budget or marketing plan.

Sincerely,
Catlin Whittington
Chairman - Austin Tourism Commission

Timothy Whittington
Boards and Commissions