
Minutes of Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC) Meeting

Dated April 26, 2022

Members

Present: Shawn Walker – LTAC Member, Lodging
Debbie Copple – LTAC Member, Tourism
Adrienne Hall – LTAC Member, Tourism
(All present through Zoom conferencing)

Absent: Council Member Stephanie Wright – LTAC Member, Chair
Georgia Borg-Leon – LTAC Member, Lodging

Staff: Neepaporn Bounjaktha – Executive Office, Sr. Executive Management Analyst
Trudy Soriano – Executive Office, Tourism Promotion Fund Coordinator

Documents:

- Meeting agenda
- Draft Minutes from 10/8/21 and 1/27/22
- DVA Marketing 2021 Recap Slides

Opening:

Meeting called to order at 1:05 p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

No public comments made.

ACTION ITEMS:

Adrienne Hall made motion, Shawn Walker seconded, to approve meeting minutes for October 2021 and January 2022.

Shawn Walker made motion, Debbie Copple seconded, to approve an additional \$60,000 from the Lodging Tax Large Fund to go toward the Strategic Tourism Plan (STP) update, bringing the total amount designated to the STP update to \$120,000. The current STP is set to expire at the end of 2022. Snohomish County plans to hire a contractor in the fall of 2022, to assist with the STP update. This work is anticipated to continue into early 2023. A question was asked about whether the plan included a completely new scope, or if the plan built upon work done in the past. Staff clarified that the updated STP would rely heavily upon previous work done to create the 2018-2022 Strategic Tourism Plan.

Staff clarified the relationship between the STP and the County Destination Marketing & Management Organization (DMO). In the past, the STP and the SCTB were separate. Now, the two items are much more connected. The STP is a long-term, county-wide tourism plan, which the DMO uses to guide their work. Committee members requested a one-page document that laid out the relationship between the tourism programs.

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Snohomish County Executive's Office
3000 Rockefeller Ave, Everett, WA 98201

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

Snohomish County DMO Microsite and Marketing Campaign Updates

Staff gave a brief update on the Snohomish County city microsite project. Committee members requested links to all the live microsites that have been launched so far. Navigation from the main Seattle NorthCountry site to the microsites continues to be a focus of this project.

Staff provided a brief Quarter 1 marketing campaign recap for 2022. Overall site traffic and clicks to book were both strong year over year in Q1. The DMO recently invested in a new booking widget on the website. Clicks to stakeholder websites also increased year over year. Flight market traffic to Snohomish County, except for Los Angeles, has continued to increase throughout the quarter. Staff continue to work on new written and visual content to keep people on the site longer. The top pages visited on the Seattle NorthCountry website match up with paid social ads launched in Q1. The DVA Advertising & PR team will be at the July 2022 LTAC meeting to give a Q1-Q2 update on the marketing campaign. Travel trends and sentiments will be more apparent over a six month period.

Committee members requested that the DMO investigate virtual itineraries that could be available through kiosks and other avenues.

Staff provided a quarter 1 lodging update. Year over year, March 2022 saw a 13 percent increase in occupancy. The County is starting to see a return to 2019, pre-pandemic lodging numbers. Weekday vs. weekend occupancy rates were similar, due to the business marketing in Snohomish County. Occupancy rates over the weekend are continuing to see a slight bump, which shows a return of the leisure market. Short-term rentals have seen greater returns year over year. Staff believed that this was due to post-pandemic travel trends around safety and increased travel to the rural areas within the county.

Grow Snohomish County RFP

There has been recent media coverage around recovery in the county, including a King 5 interview with Bill Corson from Outdoor Adventures in Index, WA. Staff shared the interview link with committee members.

The Snohomish County Tourism Department received \$2.1 million in American Rescue Plan Assistance (ARPA) dollars. Earlier in the year, the County released a request for proposals (RFP), which closed last week. The next steps in the process include scoring of the RFPs, candidate selection, and then contract negotiation.

SeaTac Kiosk Highlights

Seattle NorthCountry is currently highlighted at Concourse A at SeaTac Airport. Similarly, Seattle NorthCountry now has video ads playing at our local Paine Field at Propeller Airport in Everett, WA. Committee members requested that DMO Staff investigate adding QR codes to both airport ads.

Indoor Sporting Facility RFI Update

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LTAC members gave an update on the indoor sporting facility process. The Snohomish County Sports Commission recently applied to the Tourism Promotion Area (TPA) fund for assistance on an RFI to investigate potential funding and locations for an indoor sporting facility within Snohomish County. The contractor selected for the RFI was JLL. JLL is also involved with the Lynnwood Convention Center expansion plan.

2023 HOTEL MOTEL SMALL FUND GRANT:

The 2023 Hotel-Motel Small Fund Grant round is anticipated to open in mid-June 2022, and close late-August to early-September 2022. The Q3 LTAC meeting is scheduled to land in the middle of the grant round, in late July, and the Q4 LTAC meeting will be scheduled mid-September. LTAC members will be reviewing 2023 grant applications at the Q4 meeting.

Staff announced that the annual Grant Workshop would be taking place virtually in July. All potential applicants will be invited to attend this workshop, in which staff will review grant application requirements, application grading criteria, and grant recipient next steps.

Following the Q2 meeting, County staff will be sending LTAC members the draft 2023 Hotel-Motel Grant Application and the draft application grading criteria. Staff requested that LTAC members review both documents and provide feedback prior to the grant round opening in mid-June.

LTAC members discussed changing the requirement that Hotel-Motel grant projects align with the Strategic Tourism Plan. Members also discussed how to support all applicants, regardless of recipient status, including but not limited to event planning, budgeting, and capacity building workshops. Committee members discussed the need for applicants to show resiliency and long-term sustainability.

Committee members discussed the option of opening two grant rounds per year instead of just one. This topic was moved to further discussion at a future meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 2:57 p.m.