City of Sandy Springs, Georgia
Hospitality Board Minutes

Regular Meeting
Thursday, December 5, 2024
8:00 A.M.

Barfield Room (City Hall) 2nd Floor

Member(s) Present: Mayor Rusty Paul, Chairman
Tom Mahaffey, Vice Chairman
Pam Rosenthal, Secretary/Treasurer
John Visconti, Board Member
Eugene Jordan, Board Member
Jason Sheetz, Board Member
Ann Delmas, Board Member
Amanda Singer, Board Member

Staff Present: Jennifer Cruce, Executive Director-Visit Sandy Springs
Samantha Marks, Director of Marketing & Communications-Visit Sandy Springs
Ericka Goggins, Office Manager-Visit Sandy Springs
Myriam Hysa, Director of Sales-Visit Sandy Springs
Craig Hurlbut, Sales and Marketing Coordinator-Visit Sandy Springs
Toni Carlisle, CFO, City of Sandy Springs
Chris Burnett-Director of Economic Development, City of Sandy Springs

Others Present: Prentis VanDuvall- Director of Sales-Homewood Suites

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 A.M. by Mayor Paul.

Mayor Paul asked for a motion to approve the December 5, 2024, Hospitality Board meeting agenda. A motion to approve the agenda was made by Ms. Delmas and seconded by Mr. Jordan. The meeting agenda was unanimously approved by Board members present.

Mayor Paul asked for a motion to approve the September 26, 2024, Hospitality Board meeting minutes. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Mr. Mahaffey and seconded by Ms. Pam Rosenthal. The meeting minutes were unanimously approved by Board members present.

I. **Finance**
Toni Carlisle

Financials were presented for September 2024 and October 2024 in the board packets. Ms. Carlise provided an overview of the September and October financials, highlighting a strong balance sheet and aligned assets compared to the previous year. Ms. Carlise noted the fund balance is about $20,000 better than last year. In addition, salaries and benefits are aligned with the budget, and operating expenses are slightly over budget but still manageable. Mrs. Carlise introduced a budget amendment to increase dues and fees by $12,700, furniture and fixtures by $7,500, program supplies by $15,000, and building lease by $5,000. It was noted expenditures were 24.67% of the budget, with some items over budget by 26.5% due to the office moving to a larger suite. Ms. Cruce explained the need for increased program supplies due to consumer promotions and social media campaigns including campaigns with Access Atlanta for which we purchase and provide prizes.

Mayor Paul called for a motion to approve the proposed FY25 amended budget for $40,200. The motion was made by Mr. Mahaffey and seconded by Mr. Jordan. The board voted unanimously to approve the amended FY25 budget.

Mayor Paul called for a motion to approve the resolution to amend the minutes of the Hospitality Board Meeting on May 23, 2024. A motion to approve the amended minutes was made by Ms. Delmas and seconded by Jason Sheetz. The amended meeting minutes were unanimously approved by Board members present.

II. **Sandy Springs Hospitality & Tourism Reports** **Jennifer Cruce**

Marketing and Public Relations
Samantha Marks

Ms. Marks presented digital ad campaign reports for September 2024 and October 2024 with Ravenel Consulting across Meta, Instagram, Facebook and Google highlighting success in exceeding goals for awareness and site visits.

- The overall impressions exceeded our top goal by 38% for Meta and Google. The overall site visit goal was exceeded by 108% for Meta and Google.

- The Google brand focused campaigns, our impressions were down 24% versus the previous year, but the clicks campaigns for hotels, weddings, meetings, events were up by 173% versus the previous year. Marks noted that this shows that Visit Sandy Springs is serving the ads to the correct audiences on Google and optimizing to target the right people who have an intention to focus on Sandy Springs.

Instagram and Facebook examples of creative content and demographic data were shared. For Meta, September and October, our impressions were up by 46% versus the previous year, and our visits were up 73%. Creative examples of the ads were shown in meeting.

- Facebook impressions reflected that the female 45 to 54 age group was the top for impressions, like, and reach.

- Visit Sandy Springs' Instagram top target markets are Georgia, North Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, and South Carolina.
- Google and Meta top markets are Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Florida, Alabama and South Carolina.

Marks noted that a 6-month Access Atlanta campaign ran from July 2024 to conclude December 2024 focused on a range of things, from outdoor activities to restaurant giveaways. In addition, TikTok and Instagram videos and stories were featured on Access Atlanta's platform. In addition, restaurant and other gift cards, as well as a hotel stay to attend the Sandy Springs Wine Festival was awarded during this campaign with Access Atlanta.

Ms. Cruce noted that a new PR campaign called Restaurant Row will be presented and discussed at the next board meeting.

Ms. Marks commented that Visit Sandy Springs is continuing their TKPR initiatives, with resulting articles in July and August in Good Grit Magazine, Travel and Leisure magazine, and a 24hr article in Urbanize. In September and October Sandys Springs was featured in articles in Town Magazine, Town Carolina Magazine, Travel & Leisure magazine about the best 8 places to retire and in Southwest Travel magazine.

Social Media
Mitchell Gunn

As Mr. Gunn was on vacation, Ms. Marks and Ms. Cruce presented the social media reports. Ms. Marks reported that our reach is slightly down from last year on our Instagram, but our profile visits and engagement rate remain strong. Visit Sandy Springs has 12,000 followers. It was noted women are our highest demographic, as well as ages 25 to 44 on Facebook. Increased was reported to indicate that our content is resonating more with our audiences, and we have over 21,000 followers on Facebook with demographics very similar to Instagram.

It was stated that Gunn attended a few social events highlighting Sandy Springs businesses. Gunn's Blog content was highlighted, and we use User Generated Content for the social media content posts.

Ms. Cruce stated Simpleview provides our SEO (search engine optimization) for which Visit Sandy Springs receives monthly/quarterly reports on how to improve our pages. We use our marketing and social media to attract people to blogs to increase the engagement. In addition, a monthly newsletter is produced by Gunn to deliver to hotels and a monthly consumer newsletter as well, both of which have a high click rate.

Ms. Cruce highlighted the Zartico (data provider) report that shows the average spend and the markets that come to Sandy Springs. She noted that Atlanta remains top of the market at 11% spending, Birmingham, Alabama is second. Cruce wants to highlight Sandy Springs is advertising to the correct target markets. Cruce also reported September and October in-state visitor points of interest are Northside Hospital, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta and Emory St. Joseph's Hospital and that this is why Visit Sandy Springs is going to target Medical Tourism for Sandy Springs. The top 3 points of interest for out-of-state visitors are Truist Park, Mercedes Benz stadium, and the other Centennial Olympic Park area attractions. In response to a

question from Mr. Mahaffey, Cruce explained that the information is derived from cell phone and credit card data.

In response to a question from the mayor, there was a discussion between the mayor, Ms. Cruce, Mr. Visconti and Ms. Hysa about supply and demand with the increased numbers of hotels in Atlanta. In response to a question from Mr. Jordan, Myriam explained how the sales team attends specific shows to secure the business that is appropriate for our hotel portfolio. Mr. Visconti began a discussion about securing group base. Ms. Singer asked Mr. Visconti about the return of corporate travel and Mr. Visconti discussed the experience they have seen at the Westin.

Sales
Myriam Hysa

Ms. Hysa reported that she and Mr. Hurlbut attended Small Market Meetings conference and had appointments with corporate and independent planners that are looking to bring business to the South, and that show resulted in 6 to 7 leads. She also reported having participated in local networking events, FAM (familiarization) tours and tradeshows which resulted in several leads and connections. She then reported on the number of sales calls made, leads generated and year-to-date bookings.

Mr. Visconti noted the importance of joint sales presentations with hotels to showcase Sandy Springs' amenities. Mr. Mahaffey asked about engagement with hotels other than the Westin. Ms. Hysa highlighted the need for more hotel engagement from hotels to close more business. A discussion followed between Mr. Visconti, Ms. Cruce and Ms. Hysa of the ways in which we can attract more business to all our hotels, including using incentives.
Ms. Hysa also discussed ACVB Citywide the Convention Calendar activities for September October and what's expected in the new year. In response to a question from Mr. Visconti about what the DMO needs to help close business, there was a discussion between Visconti, Cruce and Hysa concerning the high staff turnover in hotels and the need for consistent engagement with hotel staff.

Smith Travel Report
Jennifer Cruce

Ms. Cruce reported on Smith Travel Report monthly metrics for May and June 2024, including occupancy, ADR, and RevPar. She noted in the segmentation for group, transient, and total occupancy, group occupancy is the lowest.

Meetings, Projects, and Communications
Jennifer Cruce

Ms. Cruce outlined key meetings and projects, including regular meetings with Ravenel, TKPR, and Simple View, Zartico and participation in various industry events including GACVB Board meetings. Ms. Cruce mentioned the planning for the 2025 campaign and the exploration of a new local dining pass program. Ms. Cruce highlighted the successful completion of the Wheel the World accessibility audit.

III. **Discussion**

In talking about Ms. Cruce's expected retirement at the end of December 2024, Mayor Paul thanked her for her contribution to the DMO over the past 10 years and noted that it had been a pleasure to work with her in the City of Sandy Springs. Ms. Cruce expressed her joy and sense of privilege in having been able to work closely with the city and the community at large for so many years.

Mayor Paul asked for a Motion to adjourn the Board Meeting. Mr. Sheetz made the motion to adjourn the meeting, and the motion was seconded by Mr. Jordan. The motion was passed unanimously. Mayor Paul adjourned the Board Meeting at 9:15 A.M.

Next Meeting: January 23, 2025

Faithfully submitted:

Mayor Russell K. Paul

ATTEST:

Jennifer Cruce, Executive Director-Visit Sandy Springs