



**Tourism Development Council Meeting
Wednesday August 14th, 2024 2:02 – 2:55pm**

Minutes Approved 9/11/24

Virtual via Zoom - [Recording Link](#)

Members Present: Luke Spencer, Katen Patel, Tessa Koch

Staff Present: Samara Phelps, Sarah Eckman, Janice Nilson, Jim Austin, Casey Knopik, Danae Burke Jones, Aaron Liersemann, Lizzie Keenan **Others Present:** Nancy Dunis, Thelma Haggenmiller

2:02-2:06pm Welcome/Call to Order/Introductions & Declaration of Conflicts - Luke Spencer, Chair

Discussion

2:06-2:21pm Executive Director Transition – Samara Phelps, Executive Director

Samara has accepted the position of President and CEO of Travel Lane County, and her last day as executive director of Clackamas County Tourism will be September 12th. Under County Administrator Gary Schmidt’s leadership a plan has been put into place to appoint Sarah Eckman as interim director of Oregon’s Mt. Hood Territory. Sarah will work directly with Administrator Schmidt along with the Tourism Development Council and department staff.

Regional Coordinator Lizzie Keenan will be temporarily elevated to a management position and take over program leadership during the interim to make sure the team has the support they need and that programs continue with strong tourism leadership. Lizzie will manage staff and will be directly supervised by Sarah. With this plan both Sarah & Lizzie will be temporarily stepping into roles that are added to their current responsibilities.

The County will recruit & hire a replacement executive director, with the recruitment process likely starting in September. TDC and staff will have a voice in the recruitment process once it is narrowed down to finalists and ultimately the county administrator makes the hire. Structurally the department will stay the same as it is currently structured with the executive director reporting to the county administrator.

Samara provided a chance for Sarah to introduce herself. Sarah has been with Clackamas County since 2005 and has worked in a few different county departments and currently is the assistant director of the Department of Transportation & Development. Through her work with the DTD & the Economic Development Council Sarah has had several opportunities to work directly with Mt. Hood Territory staff on a few projects including alternative floats and increasing overnight camping in The County.

Lizzie has been on the Mt. Hood Territory team for eight years and knows the staff well. She shared that she is excited and honored for the opportunity, feeling good about the transition plan and looking forward to taking on new roles & working with Sarah.

Luke welcomed Sarah and shared appreciation for her coming on board to help in the interim position and thanked Lizzie for stepping into management and bringing specialized tourism experience.

2:21 – 2:38pm Annual Report Draft Content - Samara Phelps

Draft of the 22/23 Annual Report was emailed to TDC members. The annual report is a capture of the work of the year, an archive to reference in the future about what happened over the past year and a way to share about the work being done with the commissioners and partners. The report will follow the same structure as last year with data pages on the front and some narrative surrounding strategic outcomes. All the usual data and information will be included, along with two additional pages of marketing specific data that helps represent the ongoing efforts of what the department is doing in way that was missing previously. Also included will be data about the quantity and diversity of partner engagements over the past year. The department has done great work around engaging partners in trainings and providing scholarships to partners to participate in trainings so that work will also be represented in the additional program data.

The report will be built out and shared at the September TDC meeting for the board to review prior to being released publicly. Samara opened the floor to any initial thoughts, contributions or things members would like to see in the annual report. Feedback is welcomed and should be sent to Samara this week.

2:38 – 2:48pm Strategic Investment Program Timeline - Jim Austin

Continuing to work with Rural Prosperity Partners to launch the next cycle of the Strategic Investment Program. With TDC direction, funding priorities for the next cycle will remain the same as the last cycle and those are; Support tourism asset recovery & resiliency, Enhance tourism assets and visitor experience, Improve accessibility, Promote alternate modes of travel and Expand visitation to new & underserved audiences.

Application questions were updated to increase emphasis on visitor experience and the ability of projects to be visitation drivers along with revising the scoring rubric to add weight to visitor experience.

Application portal for the program is scheduled to go live on September 9th and will be open until October 9th. Three informational webinars for interested parties have been scheduled on August 29th, September 5th and October 1st. The review team training will be held October 20th. After completing the review process the committee will send their recommendations to the TDC on December 3rd, giving the board a week to review prior to funding decisions being made at the December 11th TDC meeting. Notifications to awardees will go out on December 12th. New this year is a January 7th awardee informational seminar where recipients can learn more about the process and next steps. All the information can be found on the Mt. Hood Territory Partners webpage. The program will be promoted in the B2B newsletter, county newsletter, media releases and community partners.

A question was asked about the total amount of funding that is available for the program. Jim responded that available funding this cycle is \$580,000 which includes the \$500,000 regularly budgeted amount, plus a \$80,000 carry over from unused funds last cycle.

2:48 – 2:52pm Program Updates – Staff

National Forest Foundation, the nonprofit arm of the National Forest Service was awarded a \$147,000 grant from Mt. Hood Territory last year to do work to reopen the Rainbow campground and rebuild the Riverside Trail which were devastated by the 2020 Riverside Fire. The campground should be open within the next few weeks. Some staff members along with members of the National Forest Foundation, US Forest Service, Estacada officials and a contracted PR firm recently completed a site visit at the new Rainbow Campground and the Riverside Trail.

A question was asked if there was anything specific that Aaron noticed that that is being done differently on this campground build compared to previous campsites. Aaron responded that most revolved around the accessibility pieces. They also have put a lot of effort into interpretative signage and better trails to connect campsites to the river and to campgrounds to each other. Based on public feedback they found that trail connectivity is important.

Jim shared that this was a very good project, and we had also previously given the National Forest Foundation a grant to improve the boardwalk at Trillium Lake and that The National Forest Service has entered into an agreement with the National Forest Foundation to re-design and rebuild other campsites in Upper Clackamas. This may provide other opportunities for Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory to provide additional support for those new projects.

Janice shared that September is Color Blind Awareness Month and Mt. Hood Territory has teamed up with Swan Island Dahlias to provide loaner color correcting glasses to color blind visitors at their annual Dahlia Festival. Swan Island has been a great partner to work with on this project and adult and youth sized glasses will be available at Swan Island Dahlia Farm starting on September 1st.

2:52 – 2:55pm TDC Updates - TDC Members

Tessa – Mt. Hood Territory has been promoting a video for TMK Creamery & Distillery this month and they have seen a little boost in foot traffic on the weekends. Happy the weather is cooler

Katen – Summer has been great, happy that we haven't had much smoke from fires.

Thelma – Booked a tour for August 2025.

Luke – Is on the new Economic Development Committee in Estacada. They recently had their first meeting and Luke is looking forward to seeing results of that.

2:55 p.m. Adjourn Meeting Public Meeting