

Utah Board of Tourism Development
Meeting Minutes
Friday, January 19, 2024

Board Members Present Kym Buttschardt, Nathan Rafferty, Jared Berrett, Lesha Coltharp, Kaitlin Eskelson, Victor Iverson, Jason Murray, Graydon Pearson, Natalie Randall, Melva Sine, Jordan Smith, Kevin Smith, CJ Wade, Jennifer Wesselhoff, Shayne Wittwer

UOT Staff Tera Atwood, Rachel Bremer, Ben Cook, Rachel Creer, Sorell Grow, Kim Heys, Camille Johnson, Becky Keeney, Anna Loughridge, Arianna Rees, Sydney Sappenfield, Todd Tanner, Vicki Varela, David Williams, Heather Zang, Stacey Zoller

Public Des Barker, Stacie Boney, Julie Comstock, Brittney Costello, Ralene Davis, Megan DeAngelis, Annie Franci, Sydnie Furton, Terra Girvin, Colin Greenberg, Megan Griffin, Joanie Hammer, Susan Hayward, Todd Jenson, Ethan Koeller, Nick Larson, Marissa Mallory, Becky Mumford, Claire Petty, Val Rasmussen, Rosie Serago, Jen Shakespeare, Maria Twitchell, Christie Whipple

WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS

Chair **Kym Buttschardt** called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone and asked for board member introductions.

MINUTES

MOTION: Jennifer Wesselhoff motioned to approve the December 8, 2023, board meeting minutes. Shayne Wittwer seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

MANAGING DIRECTOR REPORT

Vicki Varela, Managing Director, Utah Office of Tourism

- Noted that she and Natalie Randall, incoming Managing Director who starts on Feb. 5, are meeting and planning on a regular basis.
- Announced that Global Market Director Rachel Bremer was on a sales mission to India as it continues to be an emerging market.
- Announced that Utah Film Commissioner Virginia Pearce was named one of Utah Business Leaders of the Year. Also she and her team produced an amazing 100 Year of Film & Television press event, reception and opened an exhibit on the fourth floor of the Capitol. It will be open to the public for the entire year.
- Camille Johnson and the CAPR team completed another round of EDA grants - a complex process to work with the federal government to get money to our partners. There are 14 implementation or product development grants that have been distributed.
- Legislative session started and it is a high adventure year. The legislative fiscal analyst proposed a \$14.5M cut to the TMPF. After that is presented, the Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity will respond with our budget requests and reaction. This is the biggest assault on the TMPF since

it was established. It is a 63-64% cut that would devastate rural Utah. The analyst believes that we do not need summer marketing, as visitors will come anyway.

- This is just the beginning of the 45 day process. Very proud of the work that has been done so far to clarify how erroneous this strategy would be.
- Natalie Randall organized a meeting at the Rural Caucus this morning and we have had individual communications with legislators who have expressed their support for our efforts.
- It genuinely is a very tight budget year. We know that all of us need to be conservative in our approaches but cutting something that is working very well is not making intuitive sense.
- We have great support from Ryan Starks who understands our business. He will make the presentation to the funding committee.
- Senator Harper has a bill that changes the Scenic Byway Committee. We are concerned about this and are engaging with him to get the bill in a position where we have support of both UDOT and UOT. We still have many questions about this.
- Also UTIA is leading on the recreation management issues during the session as well.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE COMMISSION REPORT

Jason Curry, Director, Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation

- Recently unveiled the OAC new plan and said the team is excited to get to work on it after two years of planning.
- The plan itself is very thin, concise and gives great direction on how to execute on outdoor recreation infrastructure going into the future.
- There were a lot of data pieces that went into creating the plan. Additional research, including an asset database, a funding analysis, a statewide needs survey, some future projections based on demand, a comparative analysis across Western States for outdoor recreation, and also the findings and outcomes from workshops conducted.
- The workshops were attended by 380 people and productive feedback, knowledge and participation was captured.
- Asset database captured all of Utah's recreational opportunities. New to the State as hasn't been captured before.
- Four cardinal directions to guide the future of Utah's outdoor recreation: 1) Build and support collaborative processes; 2) Improve awareness and education about safe and responsible recreations; 3) Increase access to outdoor recreation while protecting natural and scenic landscapes; 4) Increase the economic and health benefits of outdoor recreation.
- Objectives under each cardinal direction will help guide the vision of the Outdoor Adventure Commission to prepare for the Outdoor Recreation future in Utah.
- Establish clear language in state code regarding how outdoor recreation is supported.
- The OAC was initially a temporary commission but the value of the commission's work has been clear and now it is going to be a long-term group.
- The outdoor recreation coordinated investment initiative (RCII) is an initiative that passed in the 2023 general session. It is a multi-agency coordinated effort on outdoor recreation efforts. Funding resulted from another bill where 1% sales tax was carved out in a restricted account for the OAC to allocate funds toward these projects that must be multi-agency coordinated.
- Reviewed submissions that requested funds through this RCII and they will be presented to the legislature this session. The submissions/requests include recreation improvements, maintenance and additions.
- Responsible recreation campaign education campaigns will be key. We have seen diminishing access, efforts to put our lands into a conservation status, rules and restrictions on wilderness and monuments. More important than ever to educate on responsible recreation.

- The OAC came through the process of creating the strategic plan with policy and program recommendations that will help them meet the cardinal directions and objectives.
- Off highway vehicle (OHV) use has really increased in the outdoor recreation space throughout the state.

Jordan Smith, board member

- Two key items that came out of the plan and are relevant to the Tourism Board. First is Tourism has the strongest and most meaningful messaging that educates visitors on responsible visitation and is most impactful. Great opportunity for the Community and Partner Relations team to get this messaging into the hands of recreation providers - State and Federal – because they do it so well.
- Second is the recognition to increase and diversify the need for search and rescue support. It was very clear that we cannot look at county transient room tax (TRT) as the sole source of funding. There needs to be an increase in more diversified ways to fund search and rescue programs.

MARKETING UPDATES

Ben Cook, Director of Marketing & Communications, Utah Office of Tourism

- Reminded that Utah Office of Tourism marketing plays in the inspirational space of awareness and consideration.
- Strategic priorities for marketing for the year, focused on powerful branding, increase the average length of stay and spend per trip; and, educate visitors on responsible and prepared travel practices.
- Wrapping up the winter part of *The Mighty 5®* campaign and spring portion starts up in mid-February. The ski campaign is up and running currently, and currently for the northern campaign, Love Communications is working on the creative.

Syndie Furton, Group Account Director, Love Communications

- Reporting on Ski+ campaign that began in October and runs through the end of March.
- Focus audience includes skiers and snowboarders; families, Epic and Ikon pass holders and repeat visitors.
- The Denver market is reporting the highest rate of booking. Denver is often in the list of market cities but unique for it to be at the top especially as Colorado is having a good snow year. Good to see San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and New York on the list as visitors from these states that are further away tend to stay longer and spend more.
- Creative is performing well in the post impression rate category. Value you this over click through rate as it shows who has actively engaged with our ad and then continued to visitutah.com.
- The pre-roll ski video is also performing well. Pre-roll is the video ad that you watch before a selected Youtube video.

Anna Loughridge, Public Relations Manager, Utah Office of Tourism

- In the public relations space, our job is to increase the year round national and local media exposure. Showcase Utah's tourism product and shift perceptions to see Utah as a top-tier destination with unrivaled dark skies, state parks, dining, arts and culture.
- UOT has worked with J/PR for five years and following the July RFP process we signed on for five more. J/PR continues to demonstrate excellence, expert knowledge of the Utah product and consistent work to keep us ahead of the curve.

Mariissa Mallory, Senior Vice President, J/PR

Terra Girvin, Senior Account Director, J/PR

- Media landscape has been very dynamic over the past 5+ years.
- Had a very strong 2023 in the earned media space. PR efforts resulted in 4.1B media impressions. Increase from 2022. This is across print, digital, social and broadcast impressions.
- 139 earned media placements and averaged an 89 Barcelona Principles score.
- Hosted eight media missions and FAMs and 30 journalist visits in Utah.

- Strategy for 2024 includes a well thought out editorial calendar, planned media FAMs and individual journalist experiences, and media missions, conferences and events.

UTIA UPDATE

Natalie Randall, Board Member/UTIA Executive Director

- The legislative session has begun and it is always hard. The support from partners throughout the state, engagement from the industry and consistent messaging is very helpful.
- Noted Senator McKell in the BEDL Appropriations Subcommittee meeting that this is a “normal” year. There is not new money flowing because we are following the years of America Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.
- UTIA priority heading into the session was navigating the narrative of distinguishing visitors from residents that are recreating. The visitor dollars are so important because they go beyond recreating. The business of tourism is targeting that high-value visitor.
- Through industry partner outreach, we are hearing legislators are supportive of the industry, the investment and the industry’s role in Utah’s economy. However, there is feedback about the recreation piece - trails, state parks and ski slopes are full so maybe doing “too good” of a job.
- Continue messaging that it is an investment into attracting the high value visitor.
- Transient room tax (TRT) has been contributing to a piece of recreation management. It is the services - EMS, search and rescue, and waste management. But there have not been other investments from others into those specific services.
- Have seen investments into recreation assets like trail and park development but not the services. TRT cannot be the only investment into services. Two bills introduced by Rep. Stenquist addressing this - HB232 and HB236.
- Alcohol policy continues to be an industry priority and positive talk about hotel portability. Based on the alcohol study the legislature funded that reviewed the census numbers we should see an increased number of licenses.
- TOUR caucus is being co-chaired by Senator Vickers and three events throughout the session.
- Tourism Day on the Hill is Friday, February 9.
- The UTIA board of directors is still actively searching for an executive director.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Kym reminded the board that the next meeting is in person in Salt Lake.
- Kaitlin Eskelson announced that Visit Salt Lake is hosting a winter round up festival including Skijoring on Saturday, Feb. 10, 1-4 pm on West Temple in Salt Lake City.

MEETING ADJOURNED

The next board meeting will be held in Salt Lake City on Thursday, Feb. 8.