

TOURISM TAX ADVISORY BOARD
APPROVED MEETING MINUTES APRIL 24, 2025

Commissioner Victor Iverson called the meeting of the Tourism Tax Advisory Board of Washington County to order at 9:30 AM on Thursday, April 24, 2025, in Conference Room #182 of the Washington County Administration Building, 111 East Tabernacle, St. George, UT. Those in attendance included the Tourism Tax Advisory Board: David Moody, Kevin Smith, Nate Wells, Zac Nixon, Dorothy Heers, and Ken Neilson. Other attendees included Deputy County Attorney Steven Scott, Commissioner Victor Iverson, Tourism Director Brittany McMichael, and Tourism staff members Matthew Watson, Hailen Jackson, Joyce Kelly, Trista Nielson, Heath Hansen, Ed Aurrecoechea, and Jamie Allen.

WELCOME

Commissioner Victor Iverson welcomed all attendees and confirmed that a quorum existed for voting on action items.

CONSIDERATION OF FEBRUARY 20, 2025, MINUTES

MOTION: **Motion by Ken Neilson to approve the February 20, 2025, Minutes.**
 Motion seconded by Nate Wells and carried by a unanimous vote.

ST. GEORGE REGIONAL AIRPORT UPDATE

Dustin Warren was scheduled to provide an update on the proposed airport expansion and upcoming projects, but was unable to attend.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Brittany McMichael, Greater Zion Director, reported on current tourism statistics. TRT through February is up 7% over 2024. Hotel occupancy through February is up 1% over 2024, RevPar is down 2% from 2024 and ADR is down 1% from 2024. Zion National Park visitation through March is up 8% over 2024 and up 27% over 2023. St. George Regional Airport visitation is up 40% over 2024 and up 53% over 2023.

TOURISM UPDATES

Brittany McMichael, Greater Zion Director, reported that Washington County issued a proclamation declaring May as “Women in Golf Month.” She noted that Washington County is the only destination hosting three major women’s golf tournaments in a single month: the Black Desert LPGA Championship (May 1 – 4, 2025), the Epson Tour Copper Rock Championship (May 15 – 17, 2025), and the LPGA Legends Championship (May 22 – 24, 2025).

She also highlighted that the final IRONMAN 70.3 North American Championship St. George Race will take place on Saturday, May 10, 2025. Ms. McMichael stated that this race will be the final opportunity for athletes to compete in this event in Greater Zion. The race has sold out, with

approximately 2,700 athletes registered, including 115 professional athletes. A volunteer appreciation event will follow the race, with special recognition planned for volunteer captains.

She noted that the team has been focused on completing the updated Visitor Guide, which has now been finalized, sent to the printer, and uploaded to the website.

Brittany also provided a follow-up on HB 456, which was discussed at the previous meeting. Key points include an increase in the transient room tax from the state and an option for counties to adopt an additional transient room tax (TRT) increase, updates to the allowable uses of TRT funds, enhanced collaboration between counties and municipalities, the creation of the Outdoor Recreation Mitigation Grant, and changes to tourism reporting requirements.

MARKETING UPDATE:

Ed Aurrecoechea, Greater Zion Marketing Manager, introduced himself to the Board and provided a general overview of this year's general marketing strategy. He emphasized that engagement drives conversion and shared recent insights from the Zion Visitor International and Domestic Surveys, which supported the team's current direction. The marketing team is focused on creating authentic content, expanding platform reach, and updating the website.

WEBSITE UPDATE:

Hailen Jackson, Webmaster and Content Specialist for Greater Zion, provided an update on recent website projects. He highlighted the recent relaunch of ZionNationalPark.com, which included updating over 80 pages with SEO optimized writing. He introduced new web pages, including a Meetings and Conventions hub, a new industry page, and a revamped event calendar system, to enhance user experience and access to event information.

Looking ahead, key focus areas include developing specialized landing pages, enhancing site interactivity with features such as build-your-own itinerary tools, improving the overall user experience, and aligning with current visual trends. The team also plans to update the media library to provide usable assets for tourism partners.

COMMUNITY & PARTNER RELATIONS UPDATE:

Matthew Watson, Greater Zion Community and Partner Relations Manager, introduced Greater Zion's new partnership with Tourism Economics. He explained that the partnership will provide the team and stakeholders with better data about visitors, including where they are traveling from, the areas they visit while in Greater Zion, and whether people who view the website book room nights. This tool will help the team guide future marketing efforts. He also shared that, as part of National Travel and Tourism Week, Greater Zion will launch the Hospitality Tourism Hero Awards to recognize front-line staff who play a key role in creating great visitor experiences.

INTERNATIONAL & FILM UPDATE:

Joyce Kelly, Greater Zion Sales Manager, provided an overview of the international travel market following her recent sales mission to Italy. The three-day event included scheduled appointments with international tour operators. She reported on insights gathered during these meetings and discussed efforts to increase international interest in the Greater Zion region. Joyce stated she is in discussions with Great Western Classic regarding a tournament planned for the last week in July. Additionally, she noted that her team is focusing on promoting the winter market to Australian visitors, introducing a ski/park itinerary. Joyce also provided an update on the local film industry, reporting progress on *Horizon*, *An American Saga*, and *The Promised Land* projects. She also stated that two film markers were placed by the state of Utah, acknowledging significant film locations in Washington County, and a film trail is being developed to highlight local filming locations.

ZION NATIONAL PARK UPDATE:

Heath Hansen, Greater Zion Regional Tourism Regulatory Affairs Director, provided an update on Zion National Park operations. He reported that there are currently 75 unfilled staffing positions, and although there have been no shutdowns, staffing shortages have led to operational challenges. Despite this, the park continues to operate as normal. Heath also gave an update on infrastructure projects. The first phase of the sewer line construction between the Visitor Center and the Grotto is currently out for bid. The design and environmental compliance analysis for phases two and three of the sewer line is expected to be completed by the end of the year. Heath also shared results from the Zion Visitor Survey, which included both domestic and international data. He provided a summary of key findings, which helped clarify current visitor trends and provided the team with much-needed data.

OPEN MEETINGS TRAINING:

Steven Scott, Washington County Deputy County Attorney, conducted a brief training session on the Utah Open and Public Meetings Act.

STAFF UPDATES AND OTHER BUSINESS:

Kevin Smith provided an update on Tuacahn Amphitheatre. He shared that the upcoming season would open with *The Little Mermaid* and gave additional updates on other scheduled performances and operations at Tuacahn.

The next meeting will be held on June 26, 2025.

MOTION: Motion by Dorothy Heers to adjourn the meeting
Motion seconded by Kevin Smith and carried by unanimous vote.

Minutes prepared by Trista Nielson
Adjourned at 11:39 AM