

## CITY OF CHARLESTON TOURISM COMMISSION

March 1, 2022

A meeting of the Tourism Commission was held this date at **5:00 p.m.**, via Zoom Webinar.

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

### PRESENT

James Saboe, Chair, Yvonne Broaddus, Alphonso Brown, Lorraine Evans, Barry Kalinsky, Kaylan Koszsla, Mayor's Designee, Ernest Long, Brumby McLeod, Victoria Moore, Roy H. Owen, Darryl Wade, and Dr. Louis Weinstein. **STAFF:** Lee B. Burbage, Tourism Commission Manager, Tim Domin, Esq, Clawson and Staubes, LLC, Dan Ricco, Director, City of Charleston Department of Livability and Tourism, and Amy Southerland, Tourism and Special Events Manager, City of Charleston Department of Livability and Tourism, Matt Alltop, Superintendent, Environmental Services.

Chair Saboe called for a moment of silence for Mrs. Elizabeth Alston, a former member of the Tourism Commission for many years, who passed away February 19, 2022.

### Approval of Tourism Commission December 8, 2021 minutes

Mr. Long moved for approval.

Dr. Weinstein seconded the motion.

The minutes were passed unanimously.

### Public Input

There was no public input.

**Items for Discussion** - Matt Alltop, Superintendent, Environmental Services and Street and Sidewalks, Department of Public Services

Chair Saboe moved Mr. Alltop to the top of the agenda as Mr. Alltop had an impending engagement elsewhere.

He noted that many of the subcommittees, particularly the Quality of Life Subcommittee, was dealing with questions regarding garbage can placement, the challenges Mr. Alltop and his teams faced, and they were trying to respond to some of the neighborhood associations.

Mr. Alltop noted the following:

- His concerns were potholes, sidewalks, garbage, trash litter, and street sweeping in the Central Business District (CBD)
- Collection was Monday through Thursday. Garbage was collected daily
- Bulk, items, yard debris and trash was picked up by a separate trash crew
- Four trucks ran routes on the peninsula daily
- Two commercial trucks run on King Street, City Market and some of the harder to reach areas that either doesn't allow dumpster services or can't fit a dumpster service
- Challenges:
  - Heavy traffic and on-street parking
  - Sometimes cans are blocked from view, cans need to be near the street to be visible
  - Yard debris and bulk items needs to have 3 feet clearance away from vehicles, mail boxes, trees and power lines for the collection vehicle

During a subcommittee meeting, mention was made about specific trash cans around the French Quarter and tourist areas. Chair Saboe knew the City moved to more efficient models that could be compacted versus the open top wire litter baskets. He asked Mr. Alltop to address that issue.

Mr. Alltop said the City moved to Bigbelly litter baskets in the majority of the areas downtown. There were approximately 108 baskets spread throughout the City. Most of them are located on Meeting, King and Market Streets. Some were in the French Quarter and there are a few West Ashley.

These litter baskets were high compaction units. They could hold 10 times more than the open tops. The open tops allowed for wind-blown litter, rats and other animals to get in and create issues. The Bigbelly litter cans were all enclosed. They could be locked for specific events per CBD request to avoid anything other than litter being placed in them.

They worked with Bigbelly to plan out placement of the cans to maximize the coverage. They were notified when the cans were 80% full or 100% full by email. They tried get to them cleaned up before they reached 100%. It helped reduce the labor cost. Before they were collecting 6 to 7 times per day. With the Bigbelly cans, they now only collected once or twice a week.

Mr. Brown recalled this issue and other issues Dr. Weinstein mentioned were brought up in a subcommittee meeting some time ago. They concluded it was left up to City Council in another committee meeting. He questioned whether the issue about the trash cans was a tourism issue or a sanitation department issue.

Mr. Owen said this was a tourism Quality of Life issue and it had nothing to do with picking up household garbage and leaf litter. Along the tourism corridors there was a perception that they have a lot of tourism generated litter in the Market area, heading up north of Market Street, along Anson Street down into the French Quarter. They were particularly concerned about litter that was generated by tourists.

It appeared they had fewer baskets now with the introduction of the Bigbelly baskets than they did before when they had wire baskets scattered around. So by the default, the sidewalks and the streets were catching the litter that used to go into the baskets or should be going into baskets. Litter was also going onto window sills in the downtown area and into flower boxes. He asked Mr. Alltop if they had information on the number of baskets prior to the introduction of Bigbelly and afterwards currently. Was there a reduction in the number of baskets?

Mr. Alltop said there was a reduction of the number of baskets but it was spread throughout the City, not just downtown. They reduced the number by 38. 38 sounds like a lot but that was West Ashley and some of the parks as well. They got new baskets. In this area there might have been 5 to 10 that were removed.

Mr. Owen asked if there had been any consideration of the tourism corridors in terms of decisions of where to place baskets.

Mr. Alltop said yes. They did a study with Bigbelly before they put them in. They looked at where the current baskets were and where the major tourism thoroughfares were. They did a study with Bigbelly and placed them where they thought the needs were. They have looked at adding more but the cans do cost some money so they weren't approved in this year's budget. They planned to ask again for next year.

Mr. Brown was still trying to figure out what this had to do with tourism. He said perhaps Mr. Domin could tell them if there was another committee on City Council that would handle this matter. He felt they would get better results if it went through another department than tourism.

Mr. Domin said they have had several discussions regarding what the scope of this committee was. They have an understanding that it only related to tourism and yet there were many things in the city that impact on tourists and how tourists impact on the city.

He noted they talked about homelessness and there was some relationship there. There was some discussion at the last Quality of Life Committee meeting about the homeless approaching certain people in the tourist areas. They couldn't, as a committee, solve all of the homelessness issues but they

heard from someone who was with City staff so they could address those things that were specific to tourism.

He didn't think there was going to be an absolute black and white line saying, "This what we can talk about" and "This is what we can't talk about." He thought what they should address were those issues related to tourism. Then this group has to decide to what extent could they legitimately talk about those issues and make recommendations to City Council. He thought that for many of these things there were dedicated departments but that doesn't stop them from at least talking a little bit about how those departments interact with tourism issues.

In response to Mr. Brown's comment, Chair Saboe said since it came up in the subcommittee and it originated from several of the neighborhood associations that related to tourism, his goal was just to show the Commission what efforts were being made by the City, not to the point where they would make a decision one way or the other, but simply to know what the bigger picture was and how they were addressing that at the City level. They have had more conversations in subcommittee and in the Commission. This particular conversation came up and they had it elevated up to the Commission just so they could at least get some facts together.

To Mr. Brown's point, Mr. Wade said he was one of the ones who first started talking about it in relation to tourism because he had a business in the tourist district right on Church Street. When the trash cans were taken away for the new ones, he started noticing there were no trash cans on Church Street from the Market to Broad Street, except if a private business had something or a parking garage, then those would be tucked in. This was a very high tourist area so trash was being put on the streets, on the business window sills and in the bushes a little bit more than ever. He thought if they weren't taking care of our city for the tourism that would hurt the economics of the city a great deal, not only his business, as they knew that tourism is a big part of the City.

As for how many trash cans were taken away, there was only one trash can on four blocks of Church Street before they were taken away so in his view there weren't enough trash cans already. He didn't think it was unreasonable to ask. It seemed that the simplest solution that they could come up to recommend was to have more wire basket trash cans to fill in until the City budget could afford the bigger trash cans. He wanted to know what Mr. Alltop thought about that.

Mr. Alltop said he just pulled up the locations of the Bigbelly. Currently there two on Church and Market, one on North Market and another on South Market. There was one on Queen and Church, and one on the corner Church and Broad.

Mr. Wade said Mr. Alltop might want to walk out and check them because they weren't on Church Street. They were off the street down about a quarter of a block each direction.

Mr. Alltop said they could look into that. The reason they went to these cans was they could get a higher amount of litter in them and they were enclosed so litter wouldn't be blown around. It was going to reduce rats and rodents. It notified them because manpower was another issue. They only had so many people. If they were out collecting the litter baskets 7 or 8 times a day, that took someone away from other things.

They did have ground custodians who worked Market, part of Meeting and up and down King Street. They have a pressure washer that would be starting again in the next month that works third shift cleaning the sidewalks from King Street, the Market and some of the Meeting Street area. There were things being done to clean up but manpower was hard to find.

Mr. Wade said no one was arguing against the big containers. It was fantastic that they did better and kept the rats away. But if there was only trash and no container at all, the rats were going to be there. So having the Bigbelly trash cans was a great idea if you could afford to have them. But he was referring to places where there weren't trash cans. He noted perhaps this was just his own opinion so maybe he hadn't been out at the right time, but since the pandemic he haven't seen the people coming around sweeping up very much. He said they did a great job and were always great but he haven't been seeing them anymore. He thought maybe they were coming late at night.

Mr. Riccio said they were doing residential operation neighborhoods going into communities. They were stressing adopt your block to assist. Where there were areas of concern, maybe you could assist the city and adopt your block. He suggested maybe this could be a program they could do in the Market, in the French Quarter and other areas to where they could have more open trash cans placed and maybe volunteers to remove the trash and leave it for collection for the City to pick up.

Mr. Wade said that was a great idea but why would they have to do that. Didn't they have the budget resources to have trash cans?

Mr. Riccio said yes they do have a budget. He thought at this point it was probably wise to discuss that offline for more personal concerns. He was trying to engage cooperation with the public and the City to help them to do the job and create the common goal they wanted, which was to have a clean city. He said maybe they could get some further discussion in the future.

Mr. Owen asked Mr. Alltop in reference to cost, if the hospitality tax revenues could apply at all to litter pickup.

Mr. Alltop said he believed the Bigbellies were purchased or leased through the tourism fund. In response to a question by Mr. Owen regarding the cost of the Bigbelly trash can, he said they cost between \$5500 to \$6000. The Bigbellies were leased through a smart lease with the company. They weren't City property.

In reference to a question by Mr. Owen regarding the cost of the lease for the Bigbelly cans, Mr. Riccio suggested staff could their concerns and questions about the budget and things after the meeting if Mr. Owen could give them questions they could give some specifics to. He didn't feel comfortable with guessing. It would give him factual data for the essence of time for all of the Commission members.

Mr. Alltop said the cost was \$15,578 per month for all 108 cans in the City.

Mr. Long said at one time the Charlestown Neighborhood Association used to put out wire baskets downtown at their cost. He said maybe they could look into the neighborhood association supplementing or helping in some fashion.

Mr. Riccio said Mr. Long was correct. They did do that and the baskets are still there.

Mrs. Broaddus had a question about the food trucks she had been seeing in the area of King and Broad Streets. She asked if there were any food trucks were creating issues adding to the problem.

Mr. Alltop said with the exception of Booze Pops and freeze pops trucks, they haven't noticed a huge issue with that. What they did run into were pizza boxes and slice pizza boxes up and down King Street from some of the restaurants on King Street.

Mrs. Broaddus said that was where the small baskets could come into handy in front of some of the stores but King Street was very narrow, making it difficult to put out too many baskets because people would accidentally run into them as most of them weren't paying attention when they were tourists.

Mr. Alltop said that was one of the driving factors of moving to Bigbelly because they were able to reduce the number of sidewalk obstructions on King Street and in the Market as some of the areas were tight. They were able to increase the value of litter that they could collect with those baskets and reduce the number of them on the street.

In response to a question by Mrs. Broaddus regarding the size of the Bigbelly cans, Mr. Alltop said they were about the size of a post office box or smaller.

Mr. Wade reiterated no one was arguing against Bigbellies. They were arguing for where they have no trash cans.

Chair Saboe concurred saying like a temporary solution until they could fund some. He thought that was a good recommendation. He said they would leave it at the staff level where Mr. Riccio and Mr. Burbage could address it, especially since they did hear from the French Quarter association with the same exact comment. It might be something they look into and make a recommendation to the City. To Mr. Domin's point, the theory was the scope wasn't 100% in the Commission's territory but the fact was

everything impacted tourism. That was an eyesore they could do without if they could solve the Commission's part of the problem.

Mr. Brown asked if they could do an artistic design on the basket. He noticed they painted the electrical boxes. In Charlotte, the benches for the buses were done by artists. He wondered if they could look into that.

Mr. Alltop said the Bigbellies had a graffiti wrap on them that had a cityscape and it went from a dark green to a light green. It might be part of the reason why no one notices them because they're wrapped and they don't look like a litter basket. It was the same wrap that was on the City's garbage trucks.

### **Subcommittee Report**

*Routes, Parking and Tourism Rules* – Brumby McLeod, Chair

The subcommittee met earlier today to review applications for new vehicles that would be brought before the Commission tonight.

*Quality of Life* – Barry Kalinsky, Chair

Chair Saboe noted Mr. Kalinsky was absent from his last meeting. He told Mr. Kalinsky he could make the report or Mr. Burbage would do it.

Mr. Kalinsky said he had a last minute conflict that he couldn't avoid. He said he would appreciate it if Mr. Burbage gave the report.

Mr. Burbage said they discussed a number of issues:

- Emily Beck, Community Liaison and Homelessness Coordinator for the City of Charleston, spoke on a number of issues regarding homelessness; some of the things discussed were
  - The new help center where they're working on securing a building on the upper peninsula
  - She was getting some information for them on the number of services for residents and business owners who would like to share with those who were in unfortunate circumstances, were unhoused and was looking for assistance
- Litter and sanitation, especially in the higher tourist traffic areas, whether it was in the Market, King Street and some of the surrounding neighborhoods
- Through a number of the Quality Of Life Committee meetings where the members discussed a number of topics like Booze pops, sanitation, parking enforcement, they decided they would like to draft a white paper report; if they voted on it and passed it, it would go to the Commission with a number of recommendations for City Council or other appropriate bodies for potential changes for those things the Committee and Commission felt needed addressing or things the Commission might be in favor of

Chair Saboe said Mr. Owen agreed to put the report in a draft form to present to Mr. Kalinsky for his review. They had a discussion about how to elevate that up to the Commission level so they could summarize some of the things that came out of the minutes.

### **Update from Department of Livability and Tourism**

Mr. Burbage reported they recently hired 3 new tourism officers. They would like to have some of them attend the next meeting to introduce them to the Commission. They were doing a lot of training. They short staffed for two to three months but now they were close to being fully staffed with tourism officers.

### **Items for Discussion (Action may or may not be taken on any of the below items):**

- a. Review Certificate of Appropriateness applications for Adventure Sightseeing of Carolina dba Adventure Sightseeing – Beth Scribner, representative

Adventure Sightseeing retired three of their older vehicles. They wanted to transfer those Certificates of Appropriateness to the three new vehicles:

- Mercedes sprinter van – 14 passenger, diesel
- 25 passenger bus, diesel
- 24 passenger, gasoline

Chair Saboe noted the subcommittee voted unanimously for approval.

Dr. Weinstein asked if these came in either electrical or hybrid. Diesel wasn't the cleanest of fuels. Since they idle and go slow a lot, he worried about the climate change in the UN report yesterday. He said we weren't helping anything by adding more diesel.

Ms. Scribner said she had been actively seeking electric options for the business. There wasn't anything available in the market place right now. Hybrid was also not an option. The size limit of the vehicles in ordinance, no more than 25 feet, was a very niche market so there wasn't a lot of forward tech development. The individual they bought the busses from said he had seen some prototypes and heard some rebuilders talk about it but it's just not available yet in the marketplace.

Mr. Domin asked if the size limit had changed, what was the market like in the different size limits.

Ms. Scribner said what she had seen a 32 foot that looked like a mini version of the electric vehicles running on the streets downtown, like a transit bus look, was the smallest she had seen. Pro Terra is the company that builds them. They used to be in South Carolina but are now in California.

Mr. Brown said Adventure Sightseeing and Grey Line were the two oldest motor vehicle touring companies at the Bus Shed. He trusted the report that was given. They knew more about what's acceptable or what's not acceptable. He moved for approval.

Mrs. Evans seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

b. Review Certificate of Appropriateness applications for Old South Carriage Company

Old South Carriage had several new carriages they wanted to add to their fleet:

- The first is a vis-à-vis, one of the smaller, private like carriage. It is white with a six passenger capacity.
- The second is another vis-à-vis similar to the first carriage in length, height, weight, capacity and the same manufacturer with the exception it is black.
- The next three carriages were purchased from one of the other carriage companies that was no longer in business. The only thing they have done with these was paint and added their logo on them.

In response to a question by Mr. Brown as to whether the applicant was replacing or adding to their fleet, Mr. Burbage said the company was only adding to their fleet. It won't alter the number of carriages allowed giving tours on the street. It allows them to have more versatility and more carriages available to use.

Mrs. Broaddus commented she hated to say the carriages looked old and a little rickety but perhaps the tourists wanted carriages with a nostalgic look that seated 17 people and the carriages might be sturdier than they looked. She asked if the carriages would be rotated within the existing fleet and how often would they be maintained.

Mr. Burbage said the carriages were constantly being maintained. The Tourism staff would do periodic checks when they come up to the gates. They will alert the company if they suspected something and do an inspection at the gate to check it. These carriages were older but he wasn't sure of the exact year they were built.

Mrs. Broaddus said that was the question. Were they 100 years old or 50 years old?

Mr. Burbage said he would guess they were approximately 10 to 15 years old at the most and probably less than that.

Mrs. Broaddus asked if the wheels on the carriage did well on cobblestones.

Mr. Burbage noted carriages were prohibited from traveling on cobblestone or Belgian block streets in the ordinance.

Mr. Brown asked if the wheels had rubber on them. The wheels on the carriage in the photos looked like metal.

Mr. Burbage said they will have rubber on the wheels, which was required, before they go out on the street.

Mr. Brown moved for approval.

Mr. Long seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business** – There was no old business.

**New Business** - There was no new business.

Chair Saboe thanked Mr. Alltop for attending the meeting to answer their questions, and Mr. Burbage, Mrs. Southerland and Mr. Riccio for inviting Mr. Alltop to the Commission meeting.

The next Tourism Commission meeting will be held Wednesday, April 20.

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 5:53 p.m.

Marcia L. Grant  
Administrative Assistant II