

February 18th 2025 Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting

Members Present:

David Blood
Kathy McKean
Jennifer Keit
Megan Seiler
George Mulry
Navae Rodriguez
Guests: members of Wayfinding Working committee

Staff Present:

Aaron Vega, OPED, Kimberly Casiano, Head OPED Clerk

Quick recap

The Tourism Advisory Committee meeting covered updates from various local organizations and discussed ongoing projects and events. The committee addressed promotional strategies, including press releases, banners, and visitor guides, as well as potential collaborations and sponsorships. Additionally, the team explored new initiatives and proposed changes to existing projects, focusing on enhancing tourism and cultural experiences in Holyoke.

Meeting Updates:

Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting Summary

The Tourism Advisory Committee meeting of February 18, 2025, was attended by most members, including Michelle, Kathy, Bill, Megan, and George. The meeting's agenda was discussed, and the meeting notes from the January 21st meeting were reviewed. The attendees agreed to post the meeting notes on the website. Kathy provided an update on the activities of the Artery, including the booking of the splatery for the next week and the start of monthly artist spotlights. The next artist spotlight event was scheduled for March 1st, featuring artist Marmush.

Pride Fest and Rainbow Run Promotion

Aaron encouraged the promotion of the upcoming Pride Fest and the Rainbow Run, noting the expansion of the building space at the Hook Creative Arts. George from the Hall reported the successful hosting of their Morgan Classic event, which was attended by 110 kids and four NCAA Division 3 teams. They are planning to launch the public launch of their VB130, which is the 130th anniversary of volleyball. The Puerto Rican Volleyball Players exhibit will be displayed in the Hall. Megan from Steer Heard shared their busy schedule with various events, including artist sessions, a colors of grief exhibit, and the jury Women's Art show. She also mentioned their kids' art classes. Michelle from the Western Massachusetts

Convention & Visitors Bureau encouraged the attendance at the upcoming Massachusetts Governor's Conference for travel and tourism. She also reminded the team to nominate people for the Howdy awards. There was a discussion about potentially working on a visitors guide with more Holyoke businesses promoted.

Team Updates and Ongoing Projects

The team discussed various ongoing projects and updates. Aaron mentioned the upcoming TAC meeting and the possibility of utilizing former unspent mass gaming mitigation funds for admission to the Truly Experience. Michele shared updates about the sister cities, including a Holyoke contingent going to Ireland for the Truly parade and some people coming over for the Saint Patrick's parade in Holyoke. Aaron also suggested promoting the Howdy's on social media. Juan shared his involvement in the Fiesta Patronales committee. Aaron mentioned the ongoing negotiations with the Chamber and the potential for the Lighthouse School to take over the armory yard. Bill and cdeVision discussed the increase in website stats and the promotion of events, particularly for St. Patrick's Day. cdeVision also mentioned the need to include her in the parade committee and the road race, and the ongoing work on the rack card for Explore Holyoke.

Tourism Advisory Committee Press Releases

Aaron proposed the idea of having specific individuals work on press releases in the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC). This would involve drafting sentences for the committee and obtaining comments from members. Michele suggested that the TAC should be quoted in the press release, thanking the sponsors and highlighting the committee's role in the design process. The committee also discussed the placement of the banners at entryways and proposed expanding the press release to include information about the TAC's involvement. Aaron and Michele agreed to work on the current press release and explore the idea of forming a press committee for future releases.

Banner Project Progress and Grants Update

Aaron discussed the progress of the banner project, emphasizing the need for decision-making and image selection before the parade. He also talked about the maintenance and upgrade of existing banners, mentioning the involvement of Stephanie Colon in managing the banners. The discussion also covered the grants, with Aaron mentioning the potential reallocation of unspent funds and the submission of a grant application for 2026. He also highlighted the need for a procurement officer, with Jamie Morrow returning to fill the role. In addition, Aaron provided an update on the progress of the historic prison projects, with a focus on the timeline for the volleyball Puerto Rican Players project. He mentioned the need for a follow-up with the team behind the green screen studios project.

Volleyball Focus for Holyoke Stars Project

The team discussed a potential shift in the Holyoke Stars project to focus on volleyball and its connection to the 130th anniversary celebration of the game. The idea is to have a walk of fame for volleyball in downtown Holyoke, potentially keeping the volleyball Hall of Fame's presence there. They also discussed the concerns about the vetting process of nominees and the potential political implications. The team agreed to draft a letter to Christine Burns about the new direction of the project. They also supported bus shuttle money for two historic tourism tours and had a contract with Michael's for the two historic bus tours. The team also discussed the local cultural and Tac collaborations for sponsorship and the Puerto Rican Cultural Exchange. Lastly, they talked about the draft guide for the city and how it has spurred discussions on who gets to highlight certain things about the city.

Explore Western Mass Promotion Discussion

Aaron proposed incorporating a brochure into the guide for Explore Western Mass, with the possibility of a separate Holyoke section. He also suggested a palm card for easy distribution. Michele suggested using the brochure for mass distribution and cross-promotion, and proposed adding a QR code for digital engagement. Aaron agreed to consider both options. Bill proposed a simpler, graphic design-oriented rack card, and Aaron agreed to form a working group to design it. The team also discussed the possibility of using the rack card in the Explore Holyoke guide and incorporating aspects of it into the brochure. The team also discussed the need for a letter for the Stars project and a quote for a larger sponsorship banner.

Next steps

- Bill to design a simple, cool rack card for Explore Holyoke with one side in English and one side in Spanish.
- Aaron and Jennifer to draft a letter for the Stars project, shifting the focus to volleyball.
- Aaron to work with Michelle to get a quote from the Tourism Advisory Committee into the larger sponsorship banner press release.
- Jennifer to follow up with Nevaeh on ensuring the local cultural council is set for the sponsorship program.
- Aaron to add a Zoom link to the Armory Yard meeting invitation for tomorrow at 3:30.
- Aaron and Jennifer to review votes on mini banner photos and make final selections.
- Aaron to follow up with Green Screen Studios on their contract for the pilot project.
- Aaron and Jennifer to look into reallocating former Mass Gaming funds to potentially cover attendance costs for TAC members at the Governor's tourism event in Springfield.
- Aaron to form a working group to develop content for the Explore Holyoke section in the Explore Western Mass guide, due around April 1st.
- Kathy to send electronic versions of the Preservation Trust brochures to Aaron.
- Michelle to send Bill information about the "fun map" concept for potential incorporation into promotional materials.