



Travel Information Council
1500 Liberty St. SE, Suite 150
Salem, OR 97302

MINUTES

Council Meeting

Monday, March 13, 2023
Salem, OR & Virtual Meeting

Members Participating: Bob Garcia, Chair (in-person); Eliza Canty-Jones (virtual); Matt Preston (virtual); Rich Riggs (in-person); David Warren (virtual); Ed Washington(in-person).

Excused: Mike Card, Vice-chair; Valerie Wilson

TIC Staff Participating: Elizabeth Boxall; Diane Cheyne; Beth Dehn; Heather Peck; Michelle Roth; Heather Swanson; Jessica Carbone.

Call to Order/Introductions: The quarterly public meeting of the Travel Information Council was called to order by Chair Garcia at 9:33 a.m. Introductions were made for the record.

Approval of the Agenda and Order of Business:

Riggs made a motion to approve the agenda and order of business as presented. Washington seconded. Vote 6-0.

Business Meeting:

Public Comment: None.

Approval of the December 12, 2022, Council Meeting Minutes:

Carbone proposed one correction to the December 12, 2022 minutes, the removal of Steve Duvall from the staff participating. Duvall did not attend the meeting. Washington made a motion to approve the December 12, 2022 minutes as amended. Riggs seconded. Vote 5-0. Canty-Jones abstained as she was not present for the December 2022 meeting.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee: Councilor Canty-Jones said the Finance Committee is currently focused on the 2023-25 biennial budget and a potential Sign Fee increase, which the Council will be discussing later in the meeting. Canty-Jones also celebrated that the Finance team is now fully staffed. The finance team have been doing a lot of work on catching up and developing the draft 2023-25 biennial budget. Canty-Jones said the agency's finances remain strong and well managed, although there are concerns over future pricing and inflation affecting our capital project planning and funding.

Heritage Trees Committee: Councilor Washington said that the committee met on January 20, 2023, and began an in-depth discussion on how to identify trees that tell a more diverse story of Oregon's history. The committee awarded Gregg Everhart of Portland a 2023 Heritage Tree Hero Award. Everhart is a long-time member of the Portland Heritage Tree program and has been instrumental in 70 tree nominations to their program and is regarded highly for her commitment to raising community awareness around trees in low-income areas. Washington said that the annual Heritage Tree dedication will be taking place on April 21, 2023, at the Yakona Nature Preserve near Newport. The committee will be holding a spring clean-up day in May at the Grove of the States

Historical Markers Committee: Garcia said the Historical Marker Committee met on February 7, 2023. There were five new marker nominations to consider at that time. It was also at this meeting that the committee voted to accept a new advisory member, Robert Olguin, who is the National Register of Historic Places Coordinator at the State Historic Preservation Office. Garcia informed the committee that an appreciation luncheon will be held for the Salemtowne volunteers in May. Garcia said the committee is forever grateful for the work done by the Salemtowne volunteers to build, repair and maintain. The committee also understands that a contingency plan is needed in case the Salemtowne volunteers become unavailable to continue this work. Dehn continues to build relationships with the Klamath Tribes and is in communication with Tribal Chair Dumont, to be connected with a tribal liaison.

Rest Area Committee: Card was unavailable to attend this meeting.

Chair's Report: Chair Garcia spoke to the Council about the events happening around the Oregon Liquor Control Commission. He encouraged the Council to stay diligent and thanked staff for the great shape the agency is in currently.

Staff Reports

Agency Update: Boxall said the main focuses of the agency have been 2023-25 budget drafting and development, tracking a large number of bills in the current legislative session, and transitioning the agency from its former payroll system to DAS Payroll and the Workday system. Boxall discussed the payroll transition impacts to TIC and statewide, noting that working through the issues has required a larger than anticipated amount of time and work. Overall recruitment has stabilized since the beginning of the year, with some of the new employees still getting aquatinted with their roles. A federal grant for \$715,000 to conduct a feasibility study to determine the potential relocation of the Government Camp rest area was recently approved. Moving forward, staff are working on actionable items related to the strategic plan, continuing budget conversations, and counselor recruitment.

Finance: Roth said that it has been a very busy quarter. Roth said that TICs outside accountant, Moss Adams, issued TIC's agreed-upon procedures report with no findings. The finance staff has been working on year-end payroll and 1099 reporting, continuing to work on the transition to the Workday payroll system, completing the risk management annual report, and drafting the 2023-25 budget. Roth said that while completing these tasks they have also been training new staff members. Roth explained that the primary focus of the finance department going forward is getting all financial reporting up to date, continuing to support the payroll transition and training new staff.

Roth spoke to the Council about the current uncertainty in the banking sector. She explained to the

Council that TIC participates in the public fund's collateralization program through the Oregon State Treasury. TIC only uses banks on the Treasury's list of qualified depositories. Garcia explained the requirements for a bank to become a qualified depository. Roth informed the Council that two of the agency's CD's matured, earning about \$72,000 to be reinvested into rest area capital projects. Roth said that a cash flow analysis had been completed to ensure there would be enough funds on hand for The Maples project before that money was reinvested back in CDs. There is another \$5 million CD maturing at the end of April that is earning interest at 4.25%. Roth is very interested to see what kind of CD rates we will be offered.

Heritage Programs: Dehn said the Oregon Trail Kiosk Advisory Committee is going to be meeting with the design team. Dehn explained that the advisory committee is a board of cultural heritage experts who formed back in 2018 when the project kicked off and their role is to oversee and make sure that the project continues to meet its goals. Dehn said with the help of Councilor Canty-Jones TIC was approached by Senator Merkley's office to submit a request for congressionally directed funding for the OTK project. Dehn, Peck, and Boxall met with the staffer, who said they are looking for community-initiated projects that bring diverse stories to light. Dehn said that the Heritage Tree program was approached by ODOT to collaborate on a culturally modified tree video. When a tree is culturally modified it becomes an archaeological site. Many culturally modified trees were discovered and/or affected by the 2020 forest fires. ODOT and FEMA used mitigation dollars from the fires to create a video to train people how to identify culturally modified trees and what to do if one is found. The Heritage Tree committee was asked to speak about modified trees from a non-tribal perspective. The video is now posted on our website. Garcia said that Dehn and the Historical Marker committee have made good progress building relationships with different tribes and then asked Dehn if there had been any further process in the outreach to The Burns Paiute. Dehn said she is still trying to make contact. The Council then discussed the challenges facing the Burns Paiute and how that makes contacting them a lengthier process.

Sign Program: Cheyne said that the performance measures have been recorded since 2015. There have been 1,247 new customers installed. Three-quarters or 841 of all new installations have been done by the TIC sign crew. Recently, four capital projects that enlarged mainline boards have been completed. Enlarging those boards made it possible to remove customers from the waitlist. Cheyne said that the rest of the capital funds were used to replace signs whose materials had met or exceeded their lifespan. The new customer survey currently rates customer service satisfaction at 1.4. A perfect score is a 1. The program has lost 93 customers since 2020. Cheyne expressed uncertainty about the trend of the program. Roth asked if there is a certain segment of signs where the program is seeing the most customer loss. Cheyne said lodging and restaurants are going out of business, and several wineries are closing, either due to retirement or being bought out by California wineries. The Council then discussed the changes in different customer needs and how those changes, such as moving to appointments instead of being open six days a week, can affect sign qualifications.

Cheyne updated the Council, that after three years of trying to find a business interested in replacing the Multnomah Falls information kiosk, staff will be meeting with ROMTECH soon to discuss the remodel. ROMTECH has submitted a preliminary design and at the meeting, the discussion will center around the kiosk's new visuals. Cheyne said it took a very long time to find someone who wanted to do such a small project and staff is pleased to be making progress.

Rest Area Program: Peck said that the Santiam Remodel is completed, and the restrooms are open. The portable toilets have been removed. The Mapels project started two weeks ago and will be under construction until the end of May, and Peck is looking for efficiencies and working with the contractor to see if the timeline can be shortened. Peck said she has had the opportunity to visit four rest areas and is planning to schedule more visits in the upcoming weeks once the weather improves. During that time, Peck said she has been catching up over the last month on projects, and their budgets, and getting acquainted with activities within the program. Peck said she is looking forward to working with the staff in the field and it's been a pleasure getting to know everybody and looking forward to the future.

Action/Voting Items:

- **2023-25 Budget:** Boxall said that the 2023-25 budget and sign fee discussions are interrelated and suggested not taking a vote until both items had been discussed. Boxall said that the staff has been working on drafting the budget for the last couple of months. It has been a challenging budget season, there is a lot of unpredictability in trying to figure out what the future looks like. The Sign Program has remained flat. There is a proposed fee increase for this year and there is one budgeted for the second year, but that would still require a discussion next year on whether or not that happens. Boxall said that more funding needs to be secured to accomplish the original capital projects that were planned. Rest Area operational funded will be accessing reserves a in the next biennium.

Roth said that the budget was created based on the assumptions approved at the last meeting. There were a couple of modifications made based on feedback from the Finance Committee. The inflationary rate for janitorial and landscaping contract services was reduced from 8.8% to 6%. Garcia said capital construction projects inflation was kept at 8.8%. Roth said that the only other change made was removing merit increases for those employees who have already topped out of their pay scale and are no longer eligible for a merit increases. Roth then provided a couple of note-worthy assumptions, medical, dental, vision, and life insurance were planned with a 6.2% inflation factor, and the employer portion of Paid Leave Oregon that is new was budgeted for. Roth said that based on previous discussion at the September meeting the Sign program capital budget was increased to \$410,000 for the first year of the biennium and \$400,000 for the second and 3% sign fee increases for each year. Roth then spoke to the Council about the financial impact of adopting a new electronic payment system. Currently, any customer that uses the US Bank payment service pays a 3% processing fee. If TIC decides to use a new payment service TIC explores the possibility of absorbing the 3% fee. Roth estimates that if 90% of sign program customers use the service the potential yearly fees could be as much as \$60,000-70,000 dollars. A sign fee increase of 3% in the first year would be offset by these increased fees.

Overall, there is positive retention for the agency, except for negative retention in rest area operating funds. In the first year, \$787,000 would come from reserves, and in the second year \$1.2 million. Roth said that if everything stays on track for the rest of the current fiscal year there should be about \$1 million left in reserves at the end of the next biennium. The Council then discussed the current outlook of higher-than-average COLA increases by different state and public unions.

- **Sign Fee Discussion:** Garcia spoke to the Council about the issues the Finance Committee

discussed when they considered recommending the potential 3% sign fee to Council. Canty-Jones said there was a very strong discussion of a way to balance rising program costs without an adverse effect to customer retention. Canty-Jones said that some customers will see savings from the change to the new electronic invoicing system because TIC may be absorbing that cost, while other customers will benefit from the convenience of electronic service but won't see the savings because they would rather pay through the mail than pay the additional fee. Canty-Jones asked Cheyne if customers would see an increase in overall fees as well as an increase due to traffic counts increasing. Cheyne said she did see a trend for increased traffic counts year over year, but it would take a significant amount of time for a customer to increase from tier to tier, and the increases do not happen at the same time. Garcia said that he believed TIC signs are the best value that our customers can get for their advertising dollars.

Riggs shared that he had concerns about spending down rest area operating reserves in the proposed budget, but he understands why it is being done. Washington shared the same concern. Garcia shared the history of how the funding estimates for HB 2017 were created without a clear idea of the needs of the rest areas that TIC would be taking over. He said he believes TIC is in a place to have a good, factual based ask when we go back to the legislature for additional funding. Canty-Jones asked if there was any way to predict if the fact that some of the rest areas are turning 50 and requiring historical review could affect the program and/or their costs. Warren said in his experience designated historical buildings make maintenance very complicated and expensive.

Canty-Jones made a motion to approve the 3% sign fee increase for the 2023-24 fiscal year for public comment. Riggs seconded. 6-0 Vote.

Canty-Jones made a motion to approve the 2023-25 budget that includes a 3% increase in sign program fees for each year for public comment. Riggs seconded. 6-0 Vote.

Preston left the meeting at 11:29 a.m.

New Business

- **2023-28 Strategic Action Plan:** Boxall said that staff owners and workgroup participants have been assigned to the four key initiatives of the current strategic plan. Boxall asked the Council who would volunteer to take on the "Champion" roles for each. Champions are counselors who may lead periodic check-ins with the staff team charged with executing the initiative, reviewing progress, and discussing successes, obstacles, and measures to mitigate obstacles. Boxall said that even though Mike Card was unable to attend the meeting he volunteered to champion initiative #3: Reliable Funding Strategy. The Council discussed the initiatives and what championing those initiatives would entail. Riggs volunteered to champion initiative #1: Organizational Development. Washington volunteered to champion initiative #4: Policies, Procedures, and Best Practices. Canty-Jones volunteered to champion initiative #2: Technology. Chair Garcia volunteered to work on initiative #1 as well. Washington asked how long the appointments are for. Boxall said she envisioned using the quarterly council meetings as check points. Warren volunteered to work on initiative #1 as well.

- **Other Announcements:**

- The Council discussed possible locations for a destination meeting. Council decided to schedule the September meeting in Bend.

Adjourn: 10:46 a.m.

Next Meetings:
June 12, 2023
