



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

MINUTES
Council Meeting

Monday, March 11, 2024
Salem, OR Virtual & In-Person Meeting

Members Participating: Mike Card, Chair (in-person); Rich Riggs, Secretary (in-person); Jeff Baker (virtual); Bob Garcia (virtual); Matt Preston (in-person); Ed Washington (in-person); Valerie Wilson (in-person).

Excused: Eliza Canty-Jones, Vice-Chair; David Warren

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

Call to Order/Introductions: The quarterly public meeting of the Travel Information Council was called to order by Chair Card at 9:29 a.m. Introductions were made for the record.

Approval of the Agenda and Order of Business: The Council had no comment on the agenda and order of business. Card said he would continue with the agenda as presented.

Business Meeting:

Approval of the December 11, 2023, and February 6, 2024 Council Meeting Minutes: Chair Card reviewed the minutes of the December 11, 2023 meeting with the Council.

Riggs made a motion to approve the December 11, 2023, minutes as amended with the correction of some grammatical errors and the February 6, 2024 minutes as presented. Washington seconded. 6-0 Vote. Baker abstained.

Public Comment: None.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee: Roth said the Finance Committee met once since the last Council meeting. She said the committee discussed sign fee as required annually. Roth then presented the consolidated October financial reports presented in the meeting packet. TIC investments continue to show strong earnings. Roth said the committee and staff are working to take advantage of the higher interest rates by investing in CDs. Year-to-date most expenses are running under budget in October, except for payroll. Payroll was over budget by \$8,500. This was caused by the one-time payment to all employees

which totaled approx. \$85,000. This additional expenditure was offset by cost savings in other areas such as health and dental insurance. Roth gave a brief update on the November financials. November financials continue to show strong interest earnings. Roth also said that there was a .8% decrease in the pension obligation bond and health and dental insurance costs are lower than budgeted.

Heritage Trees Committee: Washington said the Heritage Tree Committee met on March 1st and awarded four individuals heritage tree awards, which recognize the exceptional efforts of Oregon citizens for promoting the appreciation of trees and educating the public about the value of heritage trees. The Maynard Drawson Lifetime Achievement Award was awarded to Phyllis Reynolds. Washington said Phyllis Reynold, now in her 90s, has been a lifelong advocate for trees. She was a founding member of Portland's Heritage Tree Committee, has authored two books about trees, served as an urban forestry commissioner for the City of Portland, and has been a close friend of Hoyt Arboretum. Three Heritage Tree Hero Awards were awarded for engaging communities through project-level work. The three recipients were Giana Bernardini, Nancy Broshot, and Mike Oxendine.

Historical Markers Committee: Garica said the Historical Marker Committee met on February 6th and continues to work on a full slate of projects. At that meeting, the committee reviewed the 2023 Salemtowne Maintenance Report. The report included information gathered during the five maintenance trips the volunteers took last year, visiting 36 markers. Of the 36, four markers were in poor condition, two of which the committee is already actively working on replacing. Garcia informed the Council that the committee accepted two new marker applications that meet the committee's value of expanding the type of history told on the state's markers. The Oregon Nisei Veterans marker project is the first marker in the program about Asian-American history. Oregon Nisei Veterans were second-generation Japanese American men who chose to join segregated forces and fight for the United States at a time Japanese American citizens were being interned in the US. The proposed location of this marker is overlooking Hood River Valley, where a large population of people of Japanese descent settled in Oregon, and where veterans faced racism when they returned from the war. The Salem Began Here project will revise an old interpretive sign about the city to include the Santiam Village of Tchmikiti. The City of Salem was encouraged by their tribal round table to work with the Historical Marker Program on this signage because of our program's reputation for fair and balanced interpretation. The proposed location is in River Front Park, which will be more accessible to the public.

Rest Area Committee: Card informed the Council that a new Chairperson had been elected, Valerie Wilson. Card said Wilson will provide committee reports at future Council meetings. Card said that the Rest Area Committee met on February 9th. The committee discussed current available funding. As of October 2023, there was \$8.7 million in capital funding. This level of funding does not meet the current need for capital projects. Card shared his belief in the importance of a discussion focused on reevaluating the TIC's project priorities. Card then shared with the Council the different project updates that were given during the committee meeting and the work being done on a rest area facilities booklet. The committee voted to recommend approval of the Peter Skene Ogden project partnership with Oregon State Parks and Recreation to the Council.

Chair's Report: Card directed staff to continue working on the objectives set in the strategic plan. He said that TIC's great team gives him high hopes that the strategic action plans will be fulfilled with success.

Staff Reports

Agency Update: Boxall said the agency continued to work on the Governor's list of agency expectations. Currently, the agency is meeting all required expectations. Since that last reporting period, staff has begun quarterly performance check-ins, the agency's time to fill positions average less than 30 days, a draft succession plan has been submitted, and the agency's IT strategic plan has been approved. Baker asked Elizabeth about the Governor's expectation of measuring employee and the status is not required. Boxall said that the Council has discussed an employee survey as part of the strategic plan initiative related to organizational development. Baker shared his support of employee satisfaction surveys, particularly when facing recruiting and staffing challenges.

Garica left the meeting at 10:04 a.m.

Boxall gave a legislative update. She said that the legislative session related to TIC was short and there were no bills passed that had a significant impact to TIC.

Garica returned to the meeting at 10:07 a.m.

Boxall then shared and highlighted the Strategic Action Plan Tracker, which showed the accomplishments from 2023 and the first part of 2024. Card asked if Boxall knew the employee turnover ratio of the agency. Boxall said would need to reach out to our HR consultant for that data.

Next, Boxall shared a memo to highlight and update the Council on the work being accomplished to support funding strategies. This included the creation of a framework for a funding plan and stakeholder identification. Discussions with potential lobbyists recommended TIC attempt to be included in a 2025 transportation package. Boxall and Chair Card met with the Oregon Transportation Commission Chair Julie Brown and created a "one-pager" explaining TIC's needs which was shared with the OTC. The Governor's policy advisor, who agreed that the transportation package was the best place for TIC to seek additional funding, gave TIC the "green light" to pursue this avenue. Card asked Boxall to share with the Council the assumptions outlined in the memo and used to create TIC's estimated needs. Boxall said the next steps include proceeding with the procurement of a lobbyist and beginning outreach activities.

The Council took a break at 10:28 a.m.

The Council returned at 10:38 a.m.

Card shared slides from the recent Rest Area Committee meeting and shared his ideas of what an informational rest area asset booklet could look like.

Heritage Programs: Dehn said that there has been good public engagement resulting in public comment at the last several Historical Marker meetings. It highlights why the committee created its value statements and how those are used to support the committee's process. The focus of both committees going forth is outreach. Staff is focusing on the 10 counties that currently are without any Heritage Trees, promoting the program reaching out to potential partners at the Governor's Tourism Conference, and getting on the agenda of several heritage groups to explain the program to the people who can benefit from it. Dehn gave an update on the Oregon Trail Kiosk Project. The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian reservation signed off on the project. She then informed the Council that

staff was notified that the \$220,000 in congressionally directed spending that was earmarked for the project by Senator Merkley was part of a bill that has been passed by both the House and the Senate and is now just waiting for the President's signature. There are two other potential funding opportunities available. Dehn is hoping to have design drafts to share with the Council at the next meeting.

Sign Program: Cheyne said the sign program continues to perform well. The TIC sign crew is averaging 72 days from receipt of the application to installation. The Council discussed what locations the TIC sign crew installs at and what support and qualifications they would need to take over installations in the Portland Metro area. Staff continues to make progress on the wait list due to sign enlargement projects and customer turnover. Cheyne said that last quarter, there were 20 new customers installed and 16 removed. It is the first time since the start of the pandemic that this has happened. Also, in that last quarter, all seven customers who returned the survey scored their overall experience as a 1, which is the highest score. Baker asked how the program is promoted. Cheyne said that staff attends the Governor's Conference on Tourism, speak to different tourism groups that work with small businesses, attend the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association conference, and the signs themselves promote the program. Boxall said that staff have been having discussions about outreach, with the goal of creating an outreach plan, especially for more remote locations.

Cheyne informed the Council that The Federal Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices has been updated. TIC's administrative rules are written around this manual. Cheyne has been invited by the ODOT traffic section to sit on a committee to review the new manual and compare current sign program administrative rules for Oregon (OARs). After the review is complete, within the next year the Council will need to convene a new sign rules committee to change the current OARs to reflect these updates. The Council then discussed the addition of Electric Vehicles as a category.

Cheyne shared her research into the 2023 version of the all-states sign fee review. Cheyne reported information on how other states manage their highway sign program and their fees. Since 2016, TIC increased its fees by 11.63%. TIC's program is difficult to compare with the other states because each varies significantly. Members of the Council asked to be provided with a profit-and-loss statement for the sign program just above the allocation line for visibility of its contribution.

Rest Area Program: Swanson presented the rest area performance measures report. The rest area program is 100% compliant with DEQ monitoring and testing, and water quality monitoring and testing. The operating supply cost per visitor across 25 locations ranges from \$0.038 to \$0.097, with an average of \$0.052. Traveler Opiniator Average scores for 2023 with ratings of 5: very good 4: Good 3: Average 2: Poor 1: very poor:

- 3.3 - Cleanliness of the restroom
- 3.6 - Availability of supplies
- 4.2 - Safety conditions
- 4.1 - Condition of the grounds
- 3.6 - Overall condition and working order
- 3.8 - Courtesy of our staff

These scores are lower than in 2022 in four areas but anticipate an increase improvement through the updated inspection process. The goal is to maintain an above-average score in all areas. Preston asked

how visitor counts compared to pre-pandemic numbers. Swanson said that numbers continued to rise but seem to be leveling out at pre-pandemic numbers. The Council then discussed how travelers are counted in the rest areas and the federal grant on parking information systems.

Peck said that the bid for the paving project at Memaloose opens tomorrow. The bid for building construction, which includes all ADA is under review at the DOJ. The Sunset paving project is also under review by the DOJ. The engineer is working to complete Baker Valley's final design for and then will begin finalizing Charles Reynolds' design.

Action/Voting Items:

- **Peter Skene RA Project Cooperative Agreement with OPRD:** Peck said in 2023, the Oregon Parks and Recreation (OPRD) received budget approval for a \$1.6 million rest area infrastructure improvements and renovation project at Peter Skene Ogden Rest Area. This legislative approval came with funding for one-half of the project, \$800,000. OPRD has requested that TIC fund one-half of the rest area infrastructure improvements and renovation project at Peter Skene Ogden rest area. OPRD has a longstanding relationship with TIC for the properties for which TIC operates and maintains on their behalf. OPRD started work on this project in late 2023 and hired an internal project manager and architectural and engineering consultant to provide specific site plans and specifications for this project. TIC has been involved in monthly project meetings as a stakeholder. In January 2024, OPRD submitted a formal request to TIC for monetary partnership and stakeholder support for this project. OPRD is anticipating the timeline of this project to have substantial completion by the 4th quarter of 2024. With rest area committee recommendation, staff requested approval of the project partnership with OPRD for the Peter Skene Ogden rest area infrastructure improvements and renovation project and approval of transfer expenditures of not to exceed \$800,000. As part of the agreement, TIC will be transferring the funds owed at substantial completion.

Riggs made a motion to approve the project partnership with the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department for the Peter Skene Ogden rest area infrastructure improvements and renovation project and approval of transfer expenditures not to exceed \$800,000. Wilson seconded. 6-0 Vote. (Garica was unresponsive from his virtual connection and unable to vote.)

- **Sign Fees:** Cheyne reminded the Council of rules governing the sign program and how the program's fee structure was developed. Since it was developed in 2012, there has been a total 11% increase. The charges associated with purchasing an online invoicing process have been delayed due to capacity issues being faced by the finance department. As of June 30th, 2023, the net position fund balance for other funds was \$3.6 million. Traffic counts did increase from the year before, but not significantly, a possible indicator that traffic counts are going to level out. Staff and the finance committee recommended no sign fee increase for the fiscal year 2024-25.

The Council discussed the factors that the finance committee used to make their recommendation and different possible funding options. Staff recommended that possible next steps would include having the Council talk about the fund balance management and establish a reserve policy to establish policy about what TIC should be doing with those funds. The Council asked for more detailed financial information about the program along with more information

about adjusting the fee rates to only certain bands of the fee chart. Card recommended postponing the decision on the potential fee increase until more information can be provided about possible uses of funds, possible adjustments to the fee bands based on traffic counts.

No decision was made on sign fees the Council will address this topic at the next meeting.

- **Legislative Advocacy Contract:** Boxall presented information about three different potential legislative advocacy companies that she researched and interviewed. Out of the three, The Victory Group stood out based on their representation of other entities like AAA, past successful representation of TIC, their demonstrated eagerness to work with TIC again, and reasonable costs. Boxall made a recommendation to the Council to approve a not-to-exceed \$60,000 expenditure for legislative advocacy with The Victory Group through 2025. The strategic plan funding workgroup was supportive of Boxall's recommendation.

Riggs made a motion to enter a legislative advocacy contract with The Victory Group for a not-to-exceed amount of \$60,000 through 2025. Preston seconded. 7-0 Vote.

- **Proposed Amendments to the Heritage Committee Charters:** Dehn informed the Council that membership of the Historical Marker and Heritage Tree committees, including size, membership from partner agencies, and content-specific groups is outlined in each charter. Both charters state that the decision "to renew an existing member or accept a new member or advisor will be placed upon the entire Committee." Annual votes are held to meet this obligation. However, both charters subsequently state that "Committee membership shall be approved by the Travel Information Council." Dehn said it is unclear if heritage committee membership has been brought to and approved by the Council. Council approval of heritage committee membership is not stated in the agency's operating procedures. TIC Councilor representation on both committees, provides a built-in level of oversight. If the Council does not feel they need to approve of heritage committee membership, staff recommends removing that clause and making the following adjustments to the charters: 1) A roster of committee membership shall be presented to the Travel Information Council for review after annual elections. 2) The Travel Information Council reserves the right to remove a member of the volunteer committee.

Preston made a motion to amend the charters for the Historical Marker Committee and Heritage Tree Committee charters by removing the clause "Committee membership shall be approved by the Travel Information Council." and adding that a roster of committee membership shall be presented to the Travel Information Council for review after annual elections and The Travel Information Council reserves the right to remove a member of the volunteer committee. Riggs seconded. 7-0 Vote.

Dehn left the meeting at 12:18 p.m.

New Business

- **Agreed Upon Procedures Report:** Roth presented the results of the Moss Adams agreed-upon procedures review. Roth said that there was one item that was noted in the review. A \$5,079 reclassification of depreciation and amortization expense from non-Rest Area funds to Rest Area funds on the Budget to Actual report was identified. This depreciation was coded to the non-Rest Area fund in the Council budget for technical reasons, to ensure that the ODOT Highway Fund cash

flow analysis presented to the Council with the budget excludes the correct amount of non-cash depreciation expense. Staff will be looking at updating the mapping of these expenses so that they are included in non-Rest Area funds in the Budget to Actual report to ensure consistency between that report and the budget.

- **Offsite Council Meeting Planning:** The Council decided to locate the June 10, 2024, meeting in Eugene, OR.
- Other Announcements: None.

Adjourn: 12:28 p.m.

Next Meetings:

June 10, 2024
