

**VCB Board of Director's Meeting Minutes
Holiday Inn, St. Augustine Beach, Florida
December 2, 2009 – 1:30 p.m.**

Present: Charles Cox, Kathy Fleming, John Fraser, Tina Puckett, Irving Kass, Bob O'Neill, Mark Schwantner, Virginia Whetstone, Vice Mayor Errol Jones, County Commissioner Ron Sanchez for Cyndi Stephenson.

Not present: David Mariotti

Staff Present: Richard Goldman, Barbara Golden, Lori Driscoll, Jay Humphreys,

Others: Paul Williamson, Doreen Sterlacci

Meeting called to order by Charles Cox at 1:35 p.m.

Roll Call: Barbara Golden called roll.

Charles Cox welcomed and congratulated Ron Sanchez as the new Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners.

Approval of Minutes: Mark Schwantner made a motion to approve as presented the minutes from the Board of Director's meeting held on November 4, 2009. Motion was seconded by Irving Kass. **Approved unanimously.**

Treasurer's Report: Bob O'Neill reported that the VCB operating budget carries a current balance of \$570,000 less monthly expenses. He also noted that the VCB has incurred a large liability of \$436,000. The liability is high and it was noted that that amount will be decreased through the year as monthly expenses are paid out. The current VCB balance is \$63,000, an \$11,000 increase over last month. He further reported that Bed Tax collections for the month of September were reported to be \$232,626, indicating an upward trend over the previous year's report for the same time period.

Approval of Treasurer's Report: Kathy Fleming made a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented. The motion was seconded by Irving Kass. **Approved unanimously.**

Executive Committee Report:

Charles Cox welcomed Richard Goldman and introduced him as the new Executive Director of the VCB.

Charles Cox resigned as the Interim Director of the VCB effective immediately. The Board thanked Charles for his time and hard work while he served.

Charles Cox reported that the VCB's new offices are in final preparation for staff's move – the anticipated move date is mid-December. He further reported that staff has submitted a request to the county to surplus all assets, furniture and equipment so these items can be assigned to the VCB by the Board of County Commissioners to serve the community for the common good.

Cox reported that Richard Goldman is currently getting familiar with the staff and the budget and reviewing the marketing plan. It was noted that, as soon as possible, he will plan a workshop for staff, board members and other partners with Ypartnership to review and plan the scope of work between the VCB and Ypartnership.

Goldman reported that he is working on the Ypartnership scope of work for Board input and review.

Cox reported that the VCB contract had some minor change requests from the TDC Board. The changes require additional review by the County legal staff. It was reported that the contract has to go back to the TDC for approval prior to advancing to the County Commission for final approval. The soonest the contract can go on the County Commission agenda will be in January.

Cox reported that the Beach VIC contract was removed from the County Commission agenda. The TDC has requested that the VCB develop a long term plan for a Beach VIC. The VCB will work with Troy Blevins, County Parks and Recreation to come up with the requested plan.

Chairman Cox turned the remainder of the Executive Committee report over to Richard Goldman who thanked the Board for their confidence and said he looks forward to being a part of the destination's growth.

Goldman informed the Board that he has met with staff and is confident with the staff's professionalism and commitment to the success of the county's tourism promotional efforts.

Partnership Applications:

Goldman presented the following partner applications for December: Spice and Tea Exchange of St. Augustine; SOS Antiques; Tours by the Sea Segway Tours, BrrrBerry Frozen Yogurt. It was also noted that the Executive Committee had previously approved Market on Granada, Golf Made Simple, Endless Summer Charters, Couture Weddings, A Fantasy in Flowers, and Whitney Lab Center for Marine Studies. Charles Cox made a motion to accept all as new partners. The motion was seconded by Tina Puckett. **Approved unanimously.**

Mark Schwantner instructed the Board on how to use the information in the monthly Smith Travel Report/STARR Report. The VCB receives a monthly

report that compares *average daily rates*, occupancy data and other information from other resort areas in the state with those that report in our destination. SAPV&B is the smallest destination that is included in the data set. Schwantner reported that according to the Smith Report, St. Johns County occupancy dropped 5.1% for the month as compared to last year. At the same time, Jacksonville's occupancy dropped 12%, so comparatively as a destination, St. Johns County is not doing too badly. Goldman further described the meanings of some of the report's content, described how it is collected and the usefulness of the report in helping the VCB to gauge and compare our destination with other resort areas and destinations.

Kathy Fleming suggested that the VCB also share the quarterly report from Florida Attractions Association with the Board so that they are equally aware of the status of that segment of the industry.

It was noted that both reports do have limited sharing elements and cannot be published.

Cox reported on the VCB's Website Dashboard data provided in the Board packet. The report indicates how long a user stays on our site and the most requested pages on the site. In addition, the report includes geographic location of visitors to the site and other useful information that allow us to monitor what visitors are looking at on our website.

Cox asked Jay Humphreys to report on the VCB Communications Department. Humphreys said Coastal Living Magazine had just published a 5-page color feature about St. Augustine that resulted from a visit arranged last year by the VCB for a staff writer and photographer from the publication. The value of the article is about \$200,000, but cost the VCB and partners less than \$1000 in hosting costs. He also reported that Southern Living featured St. Augustine in its September issue. The feature was valued at \$179,000. He also said that as a result of a VCB-issued news release, the Associated Press just ran a holiday getaway feature that included St. Augustine.

Humphreys further reported that in the next couple of weeks, several writers are scheduled to visit the area. One recent visit included the chief scout from Paramount Pictures who was investigating St. Augustine as a potential location for the movie Transformers 3. Even if the destination is not selected, the scout is now familiar with the area and it will may be considered as a location for other films.

The Communications Staff also informed the Board about the process that the VCB goes through to vet writers requesting media hosting and noted the staff is available to assist partners in vetting journalists who contact partners directly.

New Business:

Kathy Fleming informed the Board that NOAA has been contacted by a local citizen organization, Friend of Matanzas, to request designation of the area's waterway as a National Maritime Sanctuary. There is a possibility of having very strict Federal maritime limitations put in place if the designation is successful. It was suggested that the local tourism industry stay involved and be part of the dialogue and process so that any regulations or negative impact that may be imposed on our local tourism and fishing industry are minimal. Fleming will work with staff and the Board to bring information about this and other possible national designations to their attention. It was reiterated that being involved in the process and keeping the dialogue open will help to keep the outcome positive.

Chairman Cox requested updates from the public. Paul Williamson, public affairs director for the City of St. Augustine, reported the city is encouraging the public to come downtown through the week by giving \$5 parking vouchers to the first 500 residents who come to the Utility Department to pay their water bill. The cards provided will be renewable so that the city can monitor resident's use of public parking. To help prepare for peak holiday visitation, the city also shared parking and event information with all downtown business owners.

Bob O'Neill requested that the Board thank Charles Cox for his assistance in keeping the VCB running while the search for a new Director was underway.

Virginia Whetstone made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mark Schwantner. **Approved unanimously.** Meeting adjourned at 2:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Barbara Golden