

Oregon Tourism Commission Meeting

December 15, 2020

Zoom Meeting and YouTube Live

Commissioners present included: Scott Youngblood, Richard Boyles, Don Anway, Mia Sheppard, Greg Willitts, Nigel Francisco, and Lucinda DiNovo.

Chair Youngblood calls the Commission meeting to order at 9:00 am.

Chair Remarks:

Chair Youngblood thanks all Commissioners for serving their community during this difficult period in Oregon's history and likens Oregon's tourism industry to a phoenix rising from the ashes. He welcomes Commissioners to give their thoughts on the new year. Commissioner DiNovo describes Operation Gift Card, a program to purchase gift cards from local restaurants and sell them to residents at half price, in Coos Bay as an example of communities coming together to create hope and resilience in the industry. Chair Youngblood thanks Commissioner DiNovo for sharing this example of support within the industry.

Public Comment:

On Monday November 30, the Oregon Tourism Commission meeting details were released online for public comment. No public comments were submitted in preparation for this meeting.

Commission Business:

Chair Youngblood confirms that all Commissioners received their commission meeting packets, including financials. All confirm they received the noted materials.

Chair Youngblood confirms Commissioners have reviewed the October 6, 2020 meeting minutes and asks if there are any questions. Commissioner Boyles moves to approve the October 6, 2020 meeting minutes and Commissioner Anway seconds this motion. The motion to accept the October 6, 2020 meeting minutes is unanimously approved.

Financial Update

Commissioner Francisco commends Kathleen Stewart, Comptroller at Travel Oregon, on providing commissioners with a financial report.

Kathleen Stewart joins and describes year to date Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) revenue. TLT is down 52% compared to the first half of FY2020 but was forecasted to be down 68.5%. Kathleen asks if there are questions.

Commissioner Boyles states that this report demonstrates a better result than anticipated but that lodging properties are now seeing a dramatic decline in bookings. He asks Todd Davidson, CEO, if Travel Oregon has plans for further budget modifications.

Todd states that Travel Oregon continues to utilize conservative budget models. One model he describes shows Travel Oregon ahead of predicted forecasts but that Travel Oregon plans on quarters three and four being lean quarters for TLT revenue. He states that if budget modifications are needed, they will be presented at the February 2021 Commission meeting. Todd also states that September 2020 may have higher TLT revenue due to the lodging impacts from statewide wildfires.

CEO Remarks

Todd thanks Chair Youngblood and Commissioner DiNovo for their inspiring remarks. Todd speaks to the faith traditions and cultural celebrations this month that center around hope. He describes the upcoming solstice as the shortest day and longest night of the year and describes this as a metaphor for the turning point Oregon is facing in terms of impacts from wildfires, COVID-19, and social justice. Todd thanks the commissioners, the public, and Travel Oregon staff for the opportunity to create a resilient tourism industry.

REPORTS, UPDATES & DISCUSSIONS:

2020 Stakeholder Survey Results

Todd notes the completion of the 2020 Travel Oregon Stakeholder Survey that will help inform Travel Oregon and its partners strategic planning. Todd introduces Harry Dalgaard, Director of Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP).

Harry shares a timeline for the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program planning cycle. He states that there will be many opportunities for the industry to weigh in on planning and that the RCTP program is still operating under emergency guidelines due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Harry introduces Colin Cares from Driftline Consulting to provide an overview of the 2020 Stakeholder Survey results.

Colin presents a PowerPoint presentation containing the methodology and results of the 2020 Travel Oregon Stakeholder Survey. He describes that the survey was modified from previous years to address social and racial justice, wildfires, and COVID-19 during this unprecedented year.

Todd thanks Colin for the presentation and notes that this is foundational work for Travel Oregon. Todd shares a timeline for creating and implementing a four-year strategic plan and organizational redesign, including strategic plan and budget adoption by the Commission in June 2021. He notes that the RFP for an outside organization to contract with Travel Oregon to aide in this work has closed and an internal committee will be reviewing these proposals this week.

Commissioner Francisco asks how the number of responses to the Stakeholder Survey compares to previous years.

Harry states that in previous years Travel Oregon received around 1500 responses. This year we collected over 1200. He thanks the industry for taking time to complete this survey during such a difficult year.

Commissioner Anway notes that he is surprised by the low involvement in certain regions.

Harry notes that it is always difficult to get the survey out to the industry and some regions have better involvement than others.

Commissioner Anway suggests future brainstorming on how to reach members of our industry better in these lower reporting regions. Harry agrees that this is a goal of Travel Oregon's and is open to feedback on how to increase regional and partner engagement.

Colin notes that the timing of the survey, released in October, was competing with our national election cycle and many participants may have been overwhelmed. He notes he was pleased with the quality of data received this year. Harry notes that the contraction of our industry this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic could also have contributed.

Commissioner Anway asks what we can do about the large number of "neutral" responses in the question around engagement with Travel Oregon.

Harry states that these results are similar to what has been reported in the past via Travel Oregon's survey.

Commissioner Anway states that he is concerned about our lack of marketing for future travel planning. He states that he has seen our bordering states marketing campaigns and feels we have been too conservative in our marketing efforts.

Chair Youngblood states that when Katy Clair and Kevin Wright from Travel Oregon's marketing team join the meeting there will be the opportunity to discuss questions around Travel Oregon's marketing campaign strategy.

Todd states that this survey was aimed at capturing the sentiment of all levels of staff members in the industry, including frontline staff, which could address why there are a number of responses that are less involved directly with Travel Oregon.

Harry notes that this was the first year that Travel Oregon provided the survey in Spanish as well as English to drive more diverse responses and while they did not receive many responses in Spanish, it will be a continued strategy.

Todd thanks Harry, Colin, and Staj Olsen from the Travel Oregon team for this work.

2021 Legislative Session Update

Todd introduces Sara Morrissey, Director of Public Affairs and Industry Communications.

Sara provides an overview of federal and state affairs that have resulted since the last commission meeting in October 2020 via a PowerPoint presentation. She describes the COVID Relief Now Coalition, an Emergency COVID Relief Act of 2020 including funding for small businesses, state, local, and tribal governments, funding for airports, and funding for vaccine distribution, testing, and contact tracing for COVID-19. Sara notes that many relief packages are set to expire at the end of the calendar year if no further relief acts are passed. Sara also describes the Great American Outdoors Act. Travel Oregon is working with the US Forest Service to provide feedback on the planned Oregon projects. Sara describes the Federal CARES Act and how it has been allocated within the state's tourism industry space. Sara states that a special session was announced by Governor Brown this morning set for December 21, 2020. She notes it will focus on four bills. Sara describes that the Legislative Session in January could be both in-person and virtual. The state is working on how to receive testimony virtually and establish relationships prior to the planned session.

Sara describes Governor Brown's planned budget and her focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). She notes that the budget includes full funding for the Office of Outdoor Recreation, including a full-time position. Affordable Housing will also be a focus of the Governor's budget.

Travel Oregon will continue to communicate with the State through public affairs staff and our biennial report to LFO. The Commission will receive weekly legislative updates during session.

Sara introduces Jaime Eder, Industry Communications Manager. Jaime describes a series of eight meetings in November and December connecting RDMOs with Travel Oregon, ODA, and the State of Oregon to focus on public affairs, gain insight on current engagement with state legislators and elected officials, and improve understanding of the value of Oregon's tourism economy in Salem.

Commissioner DiNovo expresses her surprise that the state Transient Lodging Tax is not being discussed at these planned sessions due to the high impact on the tourism industry this year.

Sara notes that Travel Oregon does not have a strong sponsor to increase TLT at this point and there has been discussion about attaching TLT to other uses, like affordable housing efforts. Travel Oregon is thus hesitant to move forward with proposing an increase until in-person sessions resume and a champion for increasing TLT is identified.

Commissioner Willitts thanks Sara for her work in this space. He asks what the expectation for Oregon22 contributions are and if they have shifted at all.

Todd states that Travel Oregon's commitment of \$20 million is still on track to be fulfilled and Travel Oregon remains committed to the success of Oregon22.

Chair Youngblood asks Sara if there are any grassroots efforts that members of the industry could undertake in support of US Travel's federal legislative efforts.

Sara notes that she is very involved in reaching out to representatives regularly. She notes that the more information representatives can have while in Washington DC on how the industry is affected in Oregon will improve their messaging to leadership. She is happy to include business profiles from the industry if provided to her.

Todd thanks Sara and Jaime for their presentations.

Todd suggests the Commissioners take a break with plans to resume at 10:25am.

Global Sales in a Virtual World

At 10:25am, Todd resumes the meeting and introduces Greg Eckhart, Director of Global Sales. Greg shares a PowerPoint presentation focused on Travel Oregon's efforts internationally and domestically with travel trade and media in a virtual setting. His presentation also includes future plans to engage these clients during the remainder of this fiscal year.

Todd thanks Greg for his presentation and focus on long-term relationships with business clients. Todd asks the Commissioners if there are questions.

Commissioner Francisco asks what the timelines are for international borders reopening.

Greg states that Travel Oregon is monitoring Canada's border reopening closely and has heard that an opening date in March is possible. Spring of 2021 looks promising for overseas flights to resume as well.

Chair Youngblood asks if there is increased desirability for travel to Oregon internationally due to our lower case counts in comparison to other states with higher case counts.

Greg states that Canadians are more attuned to state-by-state news and case counts due to their proximity to the border. He continues that most tour operators are looking exclusively at outdoor recreation opportunities, small towns and rural destinations, which bodes well for Oregon.

Commissioner DiNovo asks if Global Sales has received questions about the protests and riots in Portland and if it is affecting travel sentiment.

Greg states that the Global Sales team had prepared talking points in partnership with Travel Portland in preparation for virtual tradeshow but that it has not deterred tour operators in planning travel to the state or to Portland.

Marketing Communication Approach

Todd introduces Kevin Wright, Vice President of Global Marketing.

Kevin begins his presentation by speaking to Commissioner Anway's comment earlier in the meeting and agrees that Travel Oregon would like to be doing more future planning marketing but has been asked not to by the Governor's office.

Kevin shares a PowerPoint presentation highlighting Travel Oregon's marketing approach this year, the Give the Gift of Oregon campaign, and a two-phased approach to future marketing. Kevin shares the 30-second spot for "Welcome Back to Oregon", part of Phase 1 to Travel Oregon's marketing plan. Phase 2 includes a third iteration of the Only Slightly Exaggerated campaign and Kevin shares a draft script of the upcoming OSE campaign with the Commission. He also shares an inspirational letter sent by park ranger Melissa Meitle advocating for a third round of OSE, showing the impact this campaign has had on Travel Oregon's audience. Todd introduces Melissa Meitle to speak to the Commission directly.

Melissa speaks to her gratitude for having direct contact with Travel Oregon and the campaign itself. She thanks Kevin and Todd for allowing her to see the work Travel Oregon does through the meeting today. Melissa speaks to her pride in working in Oregon as an Oregonian.

Todd opens the floor for Commissioners to speak directly to Melissa.

Commissioner Willitts states how wonderful it is to hear what the Commission and industry are doing right when he often only hears criticisms.

Commissioner DiNovo thanks Melissa and commends Kevin for showing his emotion today.

Commissioner Sheppard notes that she is inspired to hear how Travel Oregon work has touched the public directly.

Todd asks if the Commission has any questions for Kevin.

Commissioner Boyles states that he is hopeful that the timeline Kevin presented will come to fruition and thanks him for his presentation.

Commissioner DiNovo asks what efforts Kevin is working on to continue to support Travel Portland, as Portland is the gateway to the rest of Oregon.

Kevin responds that he has a standing meeting with Greg Newland at Travel Portland and they also plan to return to marketing in the spring, if appropriate. He notes that they have also collaborated on the Give the Gift of Oregon campaign. States that Travel Oregon is developing robust cooperative marketing programs for the future for RDMOs to engage in. Katy Clair, Director of Marketing, joins to elaborate on collaboration with RDMOs through RCTP to engage in marketing programs and coordinate efforts once it is appropriate to market again.

Commissioner Anway thanks Kevin for his presentation and states his concern in not reaching those that choose to travel this winter despite restrictions and those that are already planning their summer vacations.

Todd thanks Kevin and Katy for sharing their plans and perspectives.

Additional Business:

Todd shares that Travel Oregon is leaning heavily into strategic planning and preparation at this moment. He states that Travel Oregon's mission is more important than ever. While the path forward does not appear clear at this moment, he describes Travel Oregonians as the explorers that will help chart a path forward. Todd expresses his gratitude for the Commission during this year.

Chair Youngblood asks if the Commissioners have any announcements or additional business to share.

Commissioner DiNovo shares that the Coquille Indian Tribe has a new development in Medford in partnership with Margaritaville Enterprises to open a new 111-room Compass hotel opening in early 2022. This will drive economic recovery in South Medford and the Phoenix area.

Commissioner Willitts shares a small hope that when they are able to meet in person again that they visit the communities in which this year's Commission meetings were originally planned, including Lakeview and Welches.

Chair Youngblood thanks the Commission for their time and resilience.

Chair Youngblood notes that the next scheduled Commission meeting is February 23, 2021. The meeting adjourned at 11:50 am.