

STATE PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAVEL COMMISSION
Petit Jean Visitor Center, 1285 Petit Jean Mountain Rd., Morrilton, AR 72110
9:30 a.m. April 22, 2021
Approved May 20, 2021

Commissioners Present

Kalene Griffith, Chair
Eric Jackson, Vice-Chair
Austin Albers *via Zoom*
Jeff Baskin
Bob Connell
Mike Gibson
John Gill
Ron Gossage
Molly Jackson
Weston Lewey
Montine McNulty *via Zoom*
Ness Sechrest *via Zoom*
Jim Shamburger
Mike Wilson
Randy Wolfinbarger

Commissioners absent

Blair Allen

Staff Present

Stacy Hurst, Secretary
Jim Andrews, General Counsel
Leslie Fiskens, Chief of Legislative Affairs
Caleb Osborne, Chief of Staff, *via Zoom*
Cynthia Dunlap, Chief Financial Officer
Elaine Lienhart, Executive Assistant
Travis Napper, Tourism Director
Kristine Puckett, Deputy Tourism Director, *via Zoom*
Melissa Adams, Welcome Center Administrator, *via Zoom*
Leah DiPietro, Communications Manager, *via Zoom*
Jessica Ledbetter, Sales Manager, *via Zoom*
Bridget McLemore, Tourism Administrative Assistant
Grady Spann, State Parks Director
Shea Lewis, State Parks Deputy Director
Kelly Farrell, Program Services Manager
Joe Jacobs, Marketing and Revenue Manager
Jeff King, Planning and Development Manager
Mike Wilson, Parks Operations Manager
Eric Walker, Chief Information Officer, *via Zoom*
LaJeana Carroll, State Parks Executive Assistant

CJRW

Darin Gray
Chris Ho
Jennifer Morgan
Dalaney Thomas

Miles Partnership

Susie Kardas
Daniel Czerwinski, *via Zoom*

Guests (via Zoom)

Gary Jones, Jones Media
Jack Moyer, Eureka Springs Crescent Hotel
Marty Ryall, AR Public Broadcasting
Bill Solleder, Hot Springs Convention and Visitors Bureau
Luke Story, Arkansas Broadcasters Association
Scott Sudduth, North Little Rock Convention and Visitors Bureau

Chair Kalene Griffith called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. and Elaine Lienhart called the roll.

Approval of the Agenda

Shash Goyal moved to approve the agenda as presented. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

Approval of the of February Minutes

Weston Lewey moved to approve the minutes as presented. Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

Financial Report

Chief Fiscal Officer Cynthia Dunlap presented the FY 2021 Year-to-Date Financial Report for the nine (9) month period ending March 31, 2021.

FY 2021 Year-to-Date Revenues were:

- Parks Division Operating Revenue - \$18,246,626 an increase of 1.45%
- War Memorial Operating Revenue - \$534,670 a decrease of -57.35%
- 1/8% Tax Revenues - \$28,942,881 an increase of 8.60%
- 2% Gross Tax collections - \$11,329,535 a decrease of -17.63%

FY 2021 Year-to-Date Expenditures were:

- Department Total - \$72,664,160 a decrease of -17.62%
- Parks Division (including Construction and Grants) - \$57,076,490 a decrease of -16.72%
- Tourism Division - \$9,986,693 a decrease of -32.26%
- Keep Arkansas Beautiful - \$400,054 a decrease of -2.94%
- Administration Division - \$4,361,255 an increase of 70.38%**
- War Memorial - \$839,668 a decrease of -57.02%

* Please Note: percentages (%) are in comparison to the same period in the prior fiscal year.

** Beginning in FY 2021, the Central Administration Division includes ADPHT Shared Services which represents the appropriation for positions that are identified as providing services to all divisions of the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism. Appropriation and funding are allocated to Shared Services, as applicable, from other Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism divisions.

Randy Wolfenbarger moved to approve the financials as presented. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Secretary's Report

Secretary Stacy Hurst gave the secretary's report. She began by commenting on the Oaklawn Hotel grand opening held the previous day. Shared services combined Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism's fiscal operations, information technology services, human resources, and some parts of communications. There is more work to be done.

The legislative session has been busy; six bills the Department wanted to accomplish were successful. Leslie Fisker will report on this further. The Governor issued a return to work order for May 17; a policy is being developed for employees.

Leslie Fisker reported on the legislative session. The legislature should be going into recess Tuesday or Thursday of the last week in April. There are two big bills; one is Act 440 which pertains to dynamic pricing. This Act will change the pricing policy for State Parks. Support was gained to be able to increase prices by 20% and decrease prices by 50%. Another key component of dynamic pricing is that pricing changes will be reviewed and approved quickly to allow flexibility. Another Act deals with the threshold price on contracts; this has been raised from \$25,000 to \$50,000. Many other bills are impacting tourism; Fisker will generate a report about those. There are currently about seventy bills being tracked, such as Act 339, the Drinks To-Go, an Act regarding the school start date, designated entertainment districts, and others. Some of these bills will go into effect as soon as the legislature adjourns, however, the six bills that the Department worked on will not go into effect for ninety days. Discussion ensued.

Jim Andrews reported on legal issues. Two matters were brought before the Arkansas Claims Commission; both were injuries sustained by parks visitors while walking on the premises. Both have motions to dismiss before the Arkansas Claims Commission on grounds of failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted and assumption of risk by the park visitor. The Attorney General is defending State Parks on a suit filed by a group of residents on Toltec Mounds State Park. The claim is

that State Parks has manipulated the level of the lake water. The Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency are both involved in this matter. A consent decree for the ideal lake level is being sought. In May or June, Andrews will be returning to the Commission with the Cedar Glen Exchange, a contract entered into with the Horne family. Discussion ensued.

Eric Walker gave a report on the continued efforts to improve connectivity in State Parks and Welcome Centers. The communication infrastructure in a lot of parks is decades old, some only consisting of telephone lines, which are starting to fail. It has been a struggle to provide adequate connectivity for employees, let alone for guests. Vendors are reluctant to install copper wire with fiberoptic cable being more advanced. With the technological needs of employees and guests, fiberoptic cable would be the best option. Walker's team has been working with Mike Wilson, State Parks Operations Manager, who provided a list of Parks that urgently need to be updated. Walker's team has also been working with the Department of Information Services (DIS). DIS has obtained quotes for the fifteen parks on Wilson's list. Upgrades are in progress at two parks and two welcome centers. Fiberoptic cable has been installed at thirty-nine parks already. Walker is working with Verizon to install a mini-cell tower at Devil's Den State Park, to offer cell service to areas in that park which do not receive service. This is being done at no charge; if deemed successful, then similar solutions can be added to other parks with little to no cell service. Discussion ensued. Secretary Hurst plans to request federal funding for this project.

TOURISM DIVISION

Director's Report

Travis Napper gave the director's report. Staff in Tourism have been back in the office for three weeks. There has been room for an additional advertising spend. The two percent tourism tax is coming in better than previously projected; it is only down 17% instead of 40%. Tourism has been able to spend \$1.4 million in additional efforts and media placement. The road trip giveaway this year will be an aviation trip. Tourism participated in Destination Capitol Hill. Festivals and events are starting back up—at least ten in the next week.

The Harrison Welcome Center is back open after closing for repairs for about two weeks, due to flooding. The unmanned welcome center is being prepared for reopening. Eleven new brochures have been approved for use in the welcome centers. There has been an increase in community/industry involvement.

Conventions, tradeshow, and sales missions are ramping back up. Sales participated in the Southeast Tourism Society's Virtual Discovery, Brand USA's Global Marketplace, the Travel South Global Summit, and Christian Meetings and Conventions Association's recent conference.

Communications has an upcoming Geiger media study tour June 13 – 17. Tourism has a new podcast: Discover Arkansas. This is a complement to the Discover Arkansas section on Arkansas.com. The first episode was on "Unique Arkansas." Melissa Conley and Colton Faull are heading up this project. The 2024 eclipse session at the Governor's Conference was very popular. One of the guest speakers time was cut short, however, a follow-up session was held to accommodate for it. Over one hundred people joined the follow-up session. Tourism won the "Best Travel Email Message" award by an

Internet Advertising Competition. Tourism will be participating in National Travel and Tourism Week, May 2 – 8.

Research and Development has thirteen applicants for the Small Festival Advertising Grant Program. These are grants for cities with populations less than 10,500. The 2021 Governor's Conference on Tourism was virtual. Of the 1,116 registered, 774 interacted with the app, which is 69% of registrants. There were eight sessions with fourteen speakers. The auction had 117 bids and raised over \$8,500. There have been two follow-up sessions to-date. The 2022 conference will be in Fayetteville. Joy Barlogie resigned from Tourism and is now with the Arkansas Hospitality Association.

The 2021 two percent tourism tax collection was compared to the 2016 – 2020 average instead of simply comparing it to 2020, as 2020 was an unusual year. Traditional occupancy and person-to-person (short-term) occupancy during January and February were down from the record months in 2020. Traditional occupancy during January and February was down compared to 2020, whereas person-to-person occupancy was slightly up. Literature requests were up significantly in the first quarter compared to the 2016 – 2020 average. Visitation in January and February was down compared to the 2016 – 2020 average. Welcome Center visitation for the first quarter was down compared to 2019, but level with 2020. Discussion ensued.

CJRW

Susie Kardas began the presentation for CJRW. Month-over-month conversions between February and March of 2021 were up 51% for total users. Partner referrals saw a 90% increase. Guides ordered increased by 37% and guides viewed online increased by 50%. Year-over-year conversions between March 2020 and March 2021 showed increases across the board. There was a 64% increase in total users, an 83% increase in partner referrals, a 103% increase in guides ordered, and an 89% increase in guides viewed online. The newsletter's growth and performance showed well. There was a 0.2% unsubscribe rate; around 7,000 subscribers were removed for GDPR compliancy; increase in open rates since initial purge saw a rise of 107%. Traffic patterns in 2020 were the inverse of what would typically be expected. 2020 digital media placement was reallocated, with flights in April to June and September to October. The March 2021 conversion rate was 14%; that is almost a record since the pandemic, and it is the highest conversion rate since March 2018. Website traffic from organic search saw a 39% increase in the first quarter of 2021 over the first quarter of 2020; there was a 49% gain in the first quarter of 2021 over the first quarter of 2019. Views of restaurant pages increased by 83% from the first quarter of 2021 over the first quarter of 2020; compared to 2019, there was a 7% increase. Page views of accommodations saw a 20% decrease from 2020 to 2021 and a 54% decrease in 2021 compared to 2019 in the first quarter.

In a travel sentiment study, 88% of respondents have plans to travel within six months. Of those, 37% plan to travel within two months. Thirty-two percent of participants will drive to a destination as opposed to flying. Half of the respondents support opening the community to visitors, which has grown since November. As of the end of March, 57% of people feel comfortable at restaurants and retail stores—the highest since the start of the pandemic. Thirty-four percent of people will wait to travel until they receive the vaccine. Thirty-nine percent say the vaccine won't impact travel plans. Discussion ensued.

Chris Ho continued CJRW's presentation. Search engine marketing performance showed a 31.9% increase in clicks from March 2020 to March 2021, a 42.3% increase in conversions, a 7.9% increase in the conversion rate, and a 19.8% decrease in spend. Clicks increased from March 2019's 21,612 to 27,569 in 2021. Conversions increased from 5,743 in 2019 to 8,028 in 2021. The conversion rate increased from 26.5% in 2019 to 19.1% in 2021. Spend decreased from \$37,003 in 2019 to \$23,845 in 2021. Google's dynamic text ads have been used over keyword ads. A given ad will take a visitor to the corresponding interior page within Arkansas.com. Some budget has been shifted from Google to Bing. From March 2020 to March 2021, clicks on Bing are up 232.4%; conversions are up 393%; the conversion rate is up 19.9%, and spend has increased by 127.3%. Combined Google and Bing numbers show an increase in clicks by 63.1%, conversions by 90.7%, the conversion rate by 17%, and spend by 10%.

Facebook and Instagram showed 1,018,525 ads served at a cost of \$6.62 per ad, reaching 287,490 people with a cost per 1,000 reached at \$23.44 with 1,161 guide requests and 2,708 total conversions for March 2021. CJRW launched ads that highlight specific locations in Arkansas. These ads performed very well and generated a large amount of link clicks compared to other ads. Total guide requests and conversions from ads continue to increase. Website statistics from paid social traffic remain consistent since the switch to a more conversion-based strategy.

State Parks Division

Parks Committee Report

Commissioner Eric Jackson reported that the Parks Committee met on April 21, 2021. Arkansas State Parks (ASP) reported 1 million more visitors from March 2020 to March 2021 than were reported the previous year. Unfortunately, ASP is still struggling with low staffing; occupancy numbers are strong. Some highlights for ASP, staff at War Memorial Stadium is getting ready for the Salt Bowl and Razorback game. The Louisiana Purchase State Park reopened following improvements, and Devil's Den State Park Monument Trails will open on May 6, 2021.

Commissioner Jackson remarked Joe Jacobs reported the top 11 parks for the first three months of 2021, with some restraint on expenses, increased revenue and ASP is almost 2 million ahead of March 2020. Staffing continues to be a problem at the remote parks resulting in reduced facility hours and facilities remaining closed, which makes it hard for ASP to deliver on the promise to their visitors to the parks.

Commissioner Jackson reported Jeff King presented a project update with 90 current projects across the state, with two projects reporting problems. At the Crater of Diamonds State Park bathhouse, the contractor will have to tear out and redo the slab and is running behind schedule; and the DeGray Lake Resort State Park Lodge where the renovation has uncovered some additional repairs that will need to be corrected. ASP is in the final phases for three property acquisitions.

Commissioner Jackson stated Mike Wilson, Parks Operation Manager, presented a report on weather incidents caused by prolonged freezing temperatures and snow, and an update on the Cedar Falls bridge replacement—it is close to being finished and should open by mid-May.

Commissioner Jackson said Kelly Farrell reported interpretive programs are still being affected by COVID restrictions and in-person outdoor programs will be offered on Fridays and Saturdays. The interpretive section is now using a new report for interpretive contacts: **Report About Interpretive Numbers (RAIN)**.

Commissioner Jackson remarked Joe Jacobs reported ASP typically has five to six million dollars in future reservations; ASP has eight million advanced reservations on the books right now. New legislation for dynamic pricing for ASP was signed by Governor Hutchison that will allow up to a 20% increase on high demand times and up to a 50% discount for lower occupancy times for ASP facility and equipment rentals, that will go into effect later this year. Discussion ensued.

John Gill made a motion for the State Parks, Recreation, and Travel Commission to express their appreciation for Senator Jonathan Dismang and Representative Lee Johnson for their leadership on the passage of Act 652 in the 93rd General Assembly 2021, related to dynamic pricing for Arkansas State Parks. Jim Shamburger seconded, and the motion carried.

Parks Director

Grady Spann presented Danny Sims, Petit Jean State Park Maintenance Supervisor, with a Parks Director's Commendation and an Arkansas State Park honor coin for his work managing replacement of the Cedar Creek Trail Bridge damaged by the storm in April 2020. In addition to his regular park duties, he managed the bridge construction resulting in 1,800 man-hours and in the process saved ASP a half-million dollars, protected the resources, and completed the job in-house resulting in a shorter downtime. Discussion followed.

Bob Connell motioned to place a wayside exhibit at the bridge to tell the story of rebuilding the Cedar Creek Trail bridge to honor the staff and volunteers involved in the rebuilding of the Cedar Falls Trail bridge. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

OFC Update

Shea Lewis presented a report on the updated 2021 operational plan for the Ozark Folk Center State Park (OFC). In January 2020, ASP presented a plan for the OFC for 2020, then COVID restrictions interrupted that plan in March of 2020. As restrictions lifted and parks started reopening facilities, COVID restrictions prevented the auditorium from reopening and OFC reported low visitation. Occupancy of the Dry Creek Cabins was and is at an all-time low and still to this day Blanchard Springs Caverns remains closed. ASP plans to manage operations at OFC at a sustainable level based on visitation.

Lewis stated the proposal today is to stay with the original plan and focus on fiscal savings, operational changes, reducing hours of operations, revisions to the Skillet Restaurant's menu pricing, changes to job descriptions, changing group sales goals, finding underwriting for the Ozark Highlands Radio, increase groups, maximize opportunities, and review the park mission.

In addition to the original operating plan, ASP will define what is an acceptable loss at the OFC to maximize the return on investment, reduce the operation season back to the traditional Folk Fest in April to Beanfest in October, meet with the Arkansas Department of Health for specific guidelines for

the Ozark Highlands Theater, continue with daily music in the craft grounds on the Blacksmith Stage, evaluate opportunities for special concerts, and implementation of five music-themed weekends beginning in 2021. The themed weekends offered will be Bluegrass weekend in August, String Band weekend in October, Dulcimer Weekend in Spring 2022, and two other themed weekends to be announced at a future date.

ASP knows that visitation has been on a slow and steady decline. The OFC is successful in completing their mission, Ozark Highlands Radio has been successful but has not led to improved visitation, the music scene has changed, expenses have increased and total revenue remains flat, facilities are in good condition, marketing campaigns have not shown a return on investment, there is room for revenue growth in lodging, the Skillet Restaurant continues to do well, Craft Grounds admissions remain constant, and a noticeable decline continues in gift sales and music events. Discussion followed.

QWSP Train Concessionaire License Agreement

Grady Spann reported Ronnie Waggoner has sold his interest in the Morning Glory station concession at Queen Wilhelmina State Park to Mr. Roger Elkins. Mr. Elkins has requested a concession license agreement for the miniature railroad, gift shop/snack bar, and miniature golf concession at Queen Wilhelmina State Park. As per the prior agreement from the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission, the agreement was reduced to a one-year term at the January 28, 2021 meeting. Mr. Elkins has agreed to the terms and Spann requested approval of a one-year concessionaire license agreement. Discussion ensued.

Jim Shamburger moved to approve the concessionaire license agreement with Arkansas State Parks and Roger Elkins, Queen Wilhelmina State Park for a period of one year. Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.

Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area – McDaniel Property Use Permit Agreement

Grady Spann reported on October 25, 1996, the SPRTC granted a residential Use Permit Agreement for Bobby L. and Margie L. Martin to use an existing logging road through state park property to reach their newly purchased property on 2.84 acres. Arkansas State Parks has received a request from the landowner, Bobby Martin, for an additional Use Permit Agreement. As part of their estate planning, they are gifting property to their daughter, Lori McDaniel, and husband Mike McDaniel, to build a residence on part of the Martin's 2.84-acre property.

The new Use Permit Agreement will allow the McDaniel's access utilizing the same road as Bobby and Margie Martin but also utilizing a future recorded easement through the Martin's private property to service a new residence.

Bob Connell moved to approve a Use Permit Agreement to new property owners Lori and Mike McDaniel at Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area as follows:

A part of the Northwest Quarter of Section 19, Township 19 North, Range 28 West in Benton County, Arkansas, as shown in a survey attached providing a fifteen-foot (15'-0) wide, seven and one-half (7.5) feet on either side of a centerline, and approximately 2,435-

foot-long right-of-way for residential access and underground (buried) utilities across a portion of the Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area.

Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

Mammoth Spring State Park – Little League Concessionaire License Agreement

Grady Spann reported Mammoth Spring Little League of Mammoth Spring requested renewal for the existing agreement at Mammoth Spring State Park. Mammoth Spring Little League desires to extend the current agreement for an additional five years, as per previous lease extensions. The current Agreement with the Mammoth Spring Little League at Mammoth Spring State Park expired on December 31, 2020. Spann requested approval of a concession license agreement for five years to expire on December 31, 2025. Discussion ensued.

Jim Shamburger moved to approve the concession license agreement terms with Arkansas State Parks and Mammoth Spring Little League, Mammoth Spring State Park for a period of five years. Mike Wilson seconded, and the motion carried.

SPRTC Certificate of Appreciation

Grady Spann requested the approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for Mark Campbell for his over thirty-nine years of service to Arkansas State Parks.

Ron Gossage moved to approve a certificate of appreciation for Mark Campbell for his over 39 years of service to Arkansas State Parks. Weston Lewey seconded, and the motion carried.

SPRTC Certificate of Appreciation

Spann requested the approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for Billy Garrett for his over forty-two years of service to Arkansas State Parks.

Molly Jackson moved to approve a certificate of appreciation for Billy Garrett for his over 42 years of service to Arkansas State Parks. Randy Wolfenbarger seconded, and the motion carried.

SPRTC Certificate of Appreciation

Spann requested the approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for Stella Seale for her over twenty-nine years of service to Arkansas State Parks.

Eric Jackson moved to approve a certificate of appreciation for Stella Seale for her over 29 years of service to Arkansas State Parks. Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

SPRTC Certificate of Appreciation

Spann requested the approval for a Certificate of Appreciation for Tony Harris for his over twenty-eight years of service to Arkansas State Parks.

Weston Lewey moved to approve a certificate of appreciation for Tony Harris for his over 28 years of service to Arkansas State Parks. Eric Jackson seconded, and the motion carried.

Devil's Den State Park – Memorial Tree Donation

Jeff King reported Arkansas State Parks (ASP) has a tree and plaque donation request necessitating SPRTC approval at Devil's Den State Park (DDSP). Ms. Carrie East, along with mutual college girlfriends, fondly called the "10th Street Girls," recently had one of their girlfriends lose her father-in-law, Mr. Ted Quinn, and wanted to honor him and give his family some comfort. Devil's Den State Park was selected as a good location in proximity to Fayetteville. In addition to the increased visitation to Devil's Den State Park by the family, the installation of a native oak tree in the Day-Use Area would benefit the park visitors with beauty and shade and the wildlife with acorns. It would also help with reforestation and erosion control in the area where some trees were lost due to an extreme flooding event a few years ago.

The 10th Street Girls agreed to provide a donation to the park that would cover the majority of costs associated with the purchase, delivery, and installation by a nursery of a 2" caliper native White Oak tree and the metal tree plaque that will hang from the tree branch until the trunk is large enough to attach to the trunk with the proper botanical mounting hardware. The requested verbiage for the tree's memorial plaque is: *"This tree was donated to Devil's Den State Park in honor of Ted Quinn, whose wisdom and ways planted seeds in the minds of many. Donated Spring, 2021."* Arkansas State Parks is seeking permission from the State Parks, Recreation and Travel Commission to accept this donation and install the memorial tree and plaque. Discussion ensued.

Eric Jackson moved to approve the memorial tree and plaque as follows: Devil's Den State Park Memorial Tree and Plaque; plaque to read, *"This tree was donated to Devil's Den State Park in honor of Ted Quinn, whose wisdom and ways planted seeds in the minds of many. Donated Spring, 2021."* Ron Gossage seconded, and the motion carried.

Devil's Den State Park – Acceptance of Monument Trail Improvements from the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation

King stated through Memorandum of Agreement with Arkansas State Parks, the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundation (APRF) has completed sections (Phase II) of Monument Trails at Devil's Den State Park totaling approximately twelve miles of Monument Trail development. Devil's Den State Park is now home to a total of 18 miles of shared-used Monument Trail. This Phase II donation is in addition to the previously donated six miles of rehabilitated/rerouted trail at Fossil Flats (Phase I).

The Phase II Monument Trail improvements that have been developed at Devil's Den State Park, honor and expand on the original vision for mountain biking at the park and the trail presents an adventure of epic proportions for those who travel to the "birthplace" of mountain biking in Arkansas. The total value of these Phase II improvements is \$862,256.00.

The previously mentioned Memorandum of Agreement calls for the transfer of exclusive rights and ownership of the projects to Arkansas State Parks, upon completion of the development projects. In conjunction with Arkansas Code Annotated 22-4-103, King asked the State Parks, Recreation, and Travel Commission, at its discretion, to accept these contributions of the APRF used to improve the state park system. Discussion ensued.

John Gill moved to formally accept the gift of the Arkansas Parks & Recreation Foundations improvements completed at Devil's Den State Park. Bob Connell seconded, and the motion carried.

Delta Heritage Trail State Park – Acquisition of Property at Arkansas City

Jeff King reported as part of the requirements of the Walton Family Foundation Grant to the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism (ADPHT) for completion of the Delta Heritage Trail (DHT), a recognition piece for the life and accomplishments of John H. Johnson (J.H.J.) is to be included as a component of the trail development.

The city of Arkansas City is agreeable to the donation of the property for development by ADPHT; ASP recommends the land adjacent to our existing DHT Robert S. Moore, Jr. Arkansas City Trailhead be acquired for the development of the J.H.J. component.

The lots were previously associated with a proposed parking lot and walking trail development project, initiated by Arkansas City and partially funded by a FY19 Recreational Trail Program (RTP) Grant. It is proposed that, through a to-be-developed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with ADPHT, the City, and ARDOT, Arkansas City's awarded RTP Grant funds would be transferred to ADPHT for funding of the development of the DHT Phase VII project from Elaine to Mellwood. In exchange, ADPHT would agree to expend funds from the Walton Family Foundation grant for the development of the property originally planned for RTP improvements by Arkansas City.

John Gill moved for initial approval to pursue the A.C.A. 22-4-106 process for the Arkansas City property acquisitions as follows:

Lots and partial lots all within Block 19 of Arkansas City, along with the donation of a platted alleyway to be abandoned (all totaling approximately 1.1 acres)

Jim Shamburger seconded, and the motion carried.

CJRW / Miles

Susie Kardas reported the Arkansas State Parks' February 2021 to March 2021 conversion breakdown month-to-month comparison had a 78% increase in website traffic, a 115% increase in booking site clicks, 722 guides ordered was a 27% decrease, 975 guides viewed online was a 67% increase, and Arkansas.com referrals was a 130% increase.

March 2020 to March 2021 yearly comparison shows a 37% increase in website traffic, a 60% increase in booking site clicks, and a 122% decrease in the Arkansas.com referrals. In March 2020, the guides were not available in the warehouse for order; 722 guides were ordered in March 2021, 975 guides viewed online in March of 2021, and a 122% increase in Arkansas.com referrals.

The total traffic and conversion rate show March 2021 has the highest month since October 2020 and the highest conversion rate for the first quarter of 2021.

The views on the ASP's accommodation pages showed a 67% increase in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020. The event page views show a 47% decrease in the first quarter of 2021 compared to the first quarter of 2020 before the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The Digital Discovery webpage had 37,573-page views from March 2020 through March 2021 with an average stay time of 4 minutes and 13 seconds; this is still well above the national average. The combined Event and Digital Discovery graphic illustrates the Digital Discovery content is mitigating some of the lost traffic on the event calendar due to COVID-19. The website traffic from organic search has stayed strong for organic search since May 2020 website traffic continues to outperform most of the 2020 levels.

Kardas provided a summary of the Miles report: accommodations are far outpacing 2020 booking, particularly cabins (+37%) and camping (+24%); weekend availability fly-in is performing best, with a 6.7% click through rate (CTR) (typically expect 1-2% CTR); and parks are starting to resume outdoor events on Fridays and Saturdays. It is going to be important to use digital programming to complement the parks where possible. ASP is still being mindful but creating and promoting virtual events, and ASP is still building a library of digital discovery content, but as interpreters start in-person programming, they will continue to utilize evergreen content.

Ron Gossage moved to adjourn the meeting at 12:40 P.M. Mike Gibson seconded, and the motion carried.

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