

OREGON TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING

Sept. 25, 2024

Inn at Cross Keys Station
66 NW Cedar Street
Madras, OR 97741

Tourism Commissioners present included: Chair DiNovo, Vice Chair Willitts and Commissioners Travis Hill, Harish Patel, David Penilton, Jenifer Roe, David Gremmels and Scott Youngblood. Erin Stephenson was not able to attend.

Welcome and Introductions

Chair DiNovo opens the meeting at 9:01 a.m. and welcomes everyone to the September 25, 2024, Oregon Tourism Commission meeting.

Chair DiNovo thanks everyone for being in Madras, noting that the meeting materials, including the agenda and supplemental material can be found on the Travel Oregon Industry website.

Chair DiNovo states that in holding a meeting today, all Public Meeting notice requirements required by state law were met.

The Oregon Tourism Commissioners and Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon, introduce themselves.

Chair DiNovo states that there will be an opportunity to hear comments from stakeholders and partners. Those who plan to share remarks shall use the sign-in sheet.

Chair Remarks

Chair DiNovo shares remarks about the Commissioners dinner at Kah-Nee-Ta Hot Springs Resort and the welcome they received from Starla Green and Jim Souers amongst others. The Commission appreciates the opportunity to visit the resort, learn more about the tribe, and understand the collaborations with local tourism partners.

Chair DiNovo notes the work of the Ashland Welcome Center staff in identifying a missing person and aiding in their safe return.

Local Welcome

Chair DiNovo welcomes Scott Larson, President & CEO of Visit Central Oregon, along with Debbie Taylor, Executive Director of the Madras-Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce, to join us today.

Debbie shares some highlights from the Madras area and the Chamber's work to uplevel the community including updates to the Chamber website.



Scott introduces himself as he started in the role in July 2024 and shares some highlights from the Central Oregon region including an expansion to the Redmond Airport, a strategic planning process, the Destination Management Studio, and new Destination Management Organization (DMO) leadership in the region (Exhibit A).

Commissioner Penilton welcomes Scott to the region and shares appreciation for the Visit Central Oregon team. He also shares his thanks for all of the work Debbie is leading.

Chair DiNovo thanks Scott and Debbie for sharing more about the area and applauds them both for their work in their short tenures.

Stakeholders, Partners and Public Statements

Chair DiNovo states that on Monday, September 9, the Commission meeting notice was posted to the Commission Meetings webpage, notice was sent through Industry Communications and a link to the meeting agendas was posted.

She reminds the group that the public comment period is an invitation to the industry to inform the Commission of updates, information, and constructive thoughts about Oregon's tourism industry. She reminds attendees that a comment form lives continuously on the industry website.

The Commission received no comments in advance.

Chair DiNovo states that we have the opportunity for attendees to sign up in-person to speak with us. She requests that remarks remain respectful and professional and ask that comments be limited to 3 minutes.

No one signed up to share public comment.

Commission Business

Review of Commission Packet

Chair DiNovo asks if all Commissioners have received and had a chance to review their Commission packet – including the financials which were posted to the meetings page. Commissioners answer affirmatively.

Financial Update

Chair DiNovo thanks Vice Chair Willitts, Commissioners Stephenson and Penilton, Todd and Kathleen Stewart for reviewing the financials prior to this meeting.

Vice Chair Willitts discusses the Travel Oregon financials and states that fiscal year-to-date financials (FY24) were included in the Commission materials and have been posted to the Industry Site. FY24 Transient Lodging Tax (TLT), inclusive of accruals from the Oregon Department of Revenue, totaled \$41.4M, up 1.4% over FY23 and 102.4% of the amended budget of \$40.4M.

The excess, or unanticipated, revenue totals \$960,954 and is allocated according to statute: 20%, \$192K to the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP), 10%, \$96K to Competitive Grants, and 70% (\$672K) for agency programs. A plan for the use of the remaining \$672K will be brought forward later this fiscal year for Commission review and approval.

FY25 fiscal year-to date TLT revenue for Q1 is \$9.7M, up 5.3% over the same time period from FY24. Vice Chair Willitts asks if there are any questions.

Commissioner Youngblood states his appreciation of the Finance Director Kathleen Stewart and the ability to accurately forecast budget numbers.

Commissioner Gremmels echoes Commissioner Youngblood's thoughts.

Commission Action

Approval of Minutes (June 2024)

Chair DiNovo shares that Commissioners were sent the draft June 2024 Commission meeting minutes via email on September 9 and asks if there are any questions or comments regarding these documents.

Commissioner Gremmels notes that his comments during the June 4 Commission briefing should include the word "conscientious" when referring to the approach to the budget modification.

Commissioner Penilton asks if Commissioner Hill or Patel have any remaining questions from the June meeting. Commissioners Patel and Hill indicate that they do not have any remaining questions.

Chair DiNovo takes a motion for approval.

- Commissioner Gremmels moves to approve and Commissioner Penilton seconds the motion.
- Chair DiNovo asks that all in favor say 'aye'. All Commissioners say 'aye'.
- Chair DiNovo asks for any opposition.
- Hearing none, the motion carries.

The June 2024 Commission meeting minutes are approved and will be posted to the Commission Section of the Travel Oregon Industry website.

Elections for Nominating Committee

Chair DiNovo shares that she asked Commissioners Penilton and Gremmels to lead the Nominating Committee to select the Chair and Vice Chair for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Commissioner Gremmels thanks the Commission for the trust placed on him and Commissioner Penilton. Commissioner Penilton thanks the Commissioners for their attention, engagement and excitement for the work of the Commission and its leadership. The nominating committee agrees that Chair DiNovo and Vice Chair Willitts shall continue as Chair and Vice Chair for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Chair DiNovo appreciates the trust granted her and Vice Chair Willitts in their leadership. Vice Chair Willitts thanks Commissioners Gremmels and Penilton for the time and commitment they showed to the process. Commissioner Penilton thanks Commissioner Youngblood for his past work to create a process for the nominating committee.

Chair DiNovo takes a motion for approval of Chair and Vice Chair.

- Commissioner Patel moves to approve and Commissioner Hill seconds the motion.
- Chair DiNovo asks that all in favor say 'aye'. All Commissioners say 'aye'. Chair DiNovo and Vice Chair Willitts recuse themselves from voting.
- Chair DiNovo asks for any opposition.
- Hearing none, the motion carries.

CEO Evaluation

Chair DiNovo states that the Commission held a closed Executive Session on September 24 pursuant to ORS 192.660 (2) (d), for the purpose of reviewing and evaluating the employment-related performance of the chief executive officer, specifically the CEO Evaluation, of any public body, a public officer, employee or staff member who does not request an open hearing.

Chair DiNovo states that the evaluation is continuing and details will be held at a future meeting.

RFP Decision on RCTP and OWCLPTTP

Chair DiNovo shares that yesterday Commissioners had the opportunity to hear about the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP) and Oregon Wine Country License Plate Tourism Promotion Program (OWCLPTTP) RFP process which included engagement and participation from Vice Chair Willitts and herself.

Chair DiNovo asks Harry Dalgaard, Director of Regional Based Services, and Kevney Dugan, VP of Destination Stewardship, to provide a high-level overview of those recommendations before the Commission takes action.

Harry recaps the recommendation that Experience Mt. Hood and The Gorge receive the RDMO designation with four 2-year contracts, conditional on a midpoint review by the Oregon Tourism Commission (Exhibit B).

Chair DiNovo asks if there are any questions or comments regarding these RCTP and Oregon Wine Country License Plate Tourism Promotion Program designations. There are no questions.

Chair DiNovo asks for a motion for approval of the outlined recommendations.

- Commissioner Youngblood moves to approve and Commissioner Gremmels seconds the motion.
- Chair DiNovo asks that all in favor say 'aye'. All Commissioners say 'aye'.
- Chair DiNovo asks for any opposition.
- Hearing no opposition, the motion carries.

The RCTP and Oregon Wine Country License Plate Tourism Promotion Program designation is approved for Clackamas County Tourism dba Experience Mt. Hood and The Gorge to be the RDMO for the Mt. Hood and Columbia Gorge region.

Todd Davidson shares his appreciation for the Commissioners and especially Commissioners Gremmels and Penilton for leading the Nominating Committee as it sets a strong foundation for the upcoming work of the Commission.

Todd acknowledges Alana Hughson, former President & CEO of Visit Central Oregon and former Executive Director of the Oregon Destination Association, for her attendance at today's meeting.

Sales Show Strategy & Royal Hampton Court Flower Show update

Todd notes international travel statistics and reduced international air lift from Asia in advance of the presentation from the Global Sales team.

Todd states that the first report today is an update regarding the Sales Show Strategy & Royal Hampton Court Flower Show and welcomes Greg Eckhart, Director of Global Sales and Lorna Davis, Global Sales Manager, to join us and walk us through the latest information.

Greg and Lorna walk the Commission through a PowerPoint presentation providing updates on the Sales Show Strategy and Royal Hampton Court Flower Show (Exhibit C) including:

- Meeting the Global Sales team including Greg, Lorna, Thomas Moser, and Rose Naigus
- International Activations & Business to Business Sales Development
- Royal Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival July 2024
- Royal Horticultural Society
- Partnership with Brand USA to develop an Oregon-based garden
- Festival Show Guide placement
- Media partners including Gardener's World
- Media and trade events
- Global Sales Activations
- Oregon's Adjusted Recovery Data (2023 vs. 2019) Visitor Arrivals

Commissioner Youngblood asks how many attendees attended the RHS festival. Lorna replies that 130,000 people attended the show.

Commissioner Youngblood asks if travel spend is incrementally less than in 2019 after the data adjustments. Greg answers affirmatively. Commissioner Youngblood acknowledges the work toward the long term in recovering international visitors and applauds the work of the Global Sales team.

Commissioner Penilton acknowledges the tenure of the Global Sales team. He asks about existing collaborations, especially Brand USA and airline partners. Greg affirms the relationship with Brand USA and an upcoming India Sales Mission in January 2025. Delta Air Lines is not operating the PDX to Amsterdam flight. KLM is now operating that flight. KLM operating the flight may give an advantage to the in-bound traveler but may decrease some outbound loyalty.

Todd acknowledges the work of Brand USA in China, Japan and Korea despite the lack of direct air service. Chinese visitors do not have the same airlift as they did pre-pandemic but there is pent up demand to travel to the USA.

Vice Chair Willitts thanks the presenters and for their work representing Oregon internationally. He asks about the adjusted recovery data. Greg acknowledges that Tourism Economics needed to adjust the data given the timing of their past presentation in March 2024 and will work to identify the proper timing of a future presentation.

Commissioner Hill asks about any measurable activations or if the goal is brand exposure. Greg says that it is difficult to get booking numbers in Europe due to privacy issues, so the garden activation is more of a brand awareness activation.

Commissioner Gremmels acknowledges the work to include native Oregon plants and the ability to identify an immersive guest. He asks if the Global Sales team will repeat the activation at the Royal Horticultural Society and if RHS can share data in the interest in the Oregon garden from their website. Lorna answers that RHS does not share that data or what garden locations were most popular. Lorna says that plans for 2025 are underway.

Chair DiNovo acknowledges the tireless work and admiration of the presenters' work.

Commissioner Youngblood acknowledges that Todd Davidson serves as Chair of Brand USA and our strong relationship with that organization.

Commissioner Patel asks how many days the team activated at Royal Hampton Court. Lorna answers seven days.

Commissioner Penilton looks forward to the team continuing to leverage their work.

Todd acknowledges that most familiarization tours are a few days, but Lorna's recent trip with a Belgian tour group was 14 days.

Chair DiNovo recesses the meeting at 10:28.

Chair DiNovo reconvenes the meeting at 10:41.

Why Guides Program Update & Survey results

Todd states that the next update will come from Scott Bricker, Director of Destination Stewardship, and Kate Baumgartner, External and Public Affairs Strategist, who will share about the Why Guides program.

Scott and Kate provide the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation sharing highlights and updates regarding the Why Guides program (Exhibit D) including:

- Why Guides are the best way to explore Oregon
- Inventorying the Product
- Programming Pillars
- Current Approach to Annual Programming
- 2024 Why Guides Program Survey

- 35 responses
- Value of Programming
- 2024 Season Offerings
- Areas of Future Interest
- Experiences Seeking Permits
- Recreation Liability Background
- Travel Oregon and Why Guides role to assess challenges
- Insurance
- Legal Challenges
- Other Findings

Commissioner Patel acknowledges that insurance can be difficult even for hoteliers.

Commissioner Youngblood asks if there is a corollary between the lack of liability waivers and the insurance costs and clarifies to ask if insurance providers may be penalizing Oregon guides because the insurance provider understands that waivers are not valid. Kate answers that providers are well aware of the options they can offer and some have decided to drop coverage.

Chair DiNovo acknowledges that 88% of survey respondents would recommend the Why Guide program. She asks how more guides can be encouraged to join the program. Scott answers that there is no specific targeted outreach but communication goes through Travel Oregon's normal channels. The registry does remain open through October 7.

Commissioner Penilton acknowledges the efforts made by the team to increase guide participation at IPW and at educational conferences through scholarships. He acknowledges that guides in communities have downstream effects by taking their guests to local businesses. He concludes to state that guides have been impacted by insurance providers altering or dropping coverage.

Scott Bricker acknowledges the fragile nature of the tour guide business.

Commissioner Roe acknowledges the work that has been done to provide improvements to the guiding business over the years. She states that guides are spread thin and often do not have the time to commit to further engagement opportunities as much as Travel Oregon would like.

Commissioner Roe asks if America Outdoors is part of the Why Guides conversation. Scott states that work has been done with Oregon Outfitters and Guides Association (OOGA) and there is more space to engage with federal partners. Kate acknowledges that there is additional space to convene further conversations.

Kate acknowledges the strong relationship with the Oregon State Marine Board. Commissioner Roe acknowledges that many permits are needed based on what designation of land the guide works on. She shares that America's Outdoors, at the federal level, may help fill some gaps.

Commissioner Youngblood asks if there is a legislative advocate that Commissioners may not be aware of. Kate answers that Protect Oregon Coalition is the most active and engaged organization.

Commissioner Youngblood asks about seasonality and the ability for guides to generate revenue year-round. He asks for an example to help guides and outfitters experience less seasonality. Scott answers that expansion into snow sports and dark sky tours are more common options recently. He continues that guides acknowledge that assistance is desired to expand their offerings into a multi-season approach.

Commissioner Roe acknowledges her openness to have more conversations with Travel Oregon staff and acknowledges the added lead times to expand offerings and acquire new permits.

Commissioner Penilton states his appreciation of Travel Oregon's work to reduce seasonality through marketing efforts.

Central Oregon Destination Management Studio

Todd states that the next update today will come from Alexa Carey, Destination Stewardship Strategist, and guests from Visit Central Oregon.

Alexa welcomes Kristine McConnell, Sasha Bosco, and Peyton Black from Visit Central Oregon to walk the Commission through their efforts for the Central Oregon Destination Management Studio (Exhibit E) including:

- Process and timing
- Workshop calendar
- Destination Stewardship Summit
- Core Team members from Explore Prineville, Explore Sisters, Visit Bend, Travel Oregon, South Wasco Alliance, Visit Central Oregon
- Steering Committee
- Draft Program Outcomes
- Learning Tour Calendar
- Impact Areas
- Added Capacity from RARE member Peyton Black

Todd shares his appreciation for Alexa's leadership and her continued partnership with the RARE program (Rural Access to Rural Environments). Todd notes that two RARE members now work with the Destination Stewardship team of Travel Oregon.

Commissioner Penilton shares his thanks to the presenters and their engagement with the community.

Vice Chair Willitts acknowledges the strengths of Alexa and Kristine in collaboration and their energies in the region.

Chair DiNovo acknowledges Peyton's background in rural planning and thanks her for her work.

Crisis Communication Plan Update and Regional Support



Todd states that the last update today will come from Julia Amato, Communications Director, and Angie Galimanis of Lawrence Public Relations.

Julia and Angie walk the Commission through a PowerPoint presentation (Exhibit F) including:

- Why a crisis communications plan is needed
- How the communications plan was built
- Task Force Leadership
- What the plan looks like in action
- What defines a crisis
- Crisis Communications in action
- Next Steps
 - Developing regional plans
 - Gathering the task force
 - Oregon Coast Visitors Association Summit keynote to highlight Crisis Communications plan

Vice Chair Willitts thanks the presenters and acknowledges the importance of technical tools to inform residents and visitors to understand fire movement and smoke forecasts.

Commissioner Gremmels thanks Travel Oregon for initiating the plan and using it. He asks what the plan is to update the plan regularly. Angie answers that the plans are constantly being updated and teams are asked to meet at least yearly to go through the plans in details and be reviewed.

Commissioner Penilton asks how fires get identified which require the crisis communications plan to be activated. Julia answers that stories and media coverage often dictate what sort of response is needed so visitors can stay informed. Angie echoes that communications can amplify emergency agency messages and continue to learn from other DMO partners, like Hawaii.

Commissioner Hill asks about the two regions that already had plans made. Julia answers that Travel Portland and Travel Southern Oregon created their plans separately but have indicated that they want to be involved in the task force.

Commissioner Youngblood thanks the presenters and appreciates the mentions of the Oregon Emergency Management. He states the importance of hoteliers in registering with the OEM Office so they can assist when crises happen.

Other Business

Todd shares his gratitude for Chair DiNovo and Vice Chair Willitts serving in leadership roles.

Chair DiNovo acknowledges that when Commissioner questions are not fully answered during the meeting, Travel Oregon staff gather the answers and will email the responses back to all Commissioners.



Commissioner Penilton shares his appreciation for Chair DiNovo's leadership especially given the values of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Chair DiNovo thanks Commissioner Penilton for his comments. Commissioner Penilton also thanks Vice Chair Willitts for his leadership.

Chair DiNovo asks Commissioner Hill to share about new products in his work for the Umpqua Indian Development Corporation. Commissioner Hill shares about some technological offerings and gaming products.

Chair DiNovo thanks Commissioner Gremmels and Penilton for their work on the nominating committee. Chair DiNovo acknowledges her fellow Commissioners and expresses her gratitude for the ways they continue to step up and serve outside of just participating in the quarterly meetings.

The next Oregon Tourism Commission meeting will be December 3 and 4 in the Mt. Hood & Columbia River Gorge region and more information will be posted to the industry website as soon as it's available.

Chair DiNovo adjourns the meeting at 12:18 p.m.