

MINUTES

HOUSTON FIRST CORPORATION

SALES, TOURISM, AND MARKETING COMMITTEE
March 2, 2020 – 10:30 A.M.
Partnership Tower, 701 Avenida de las Americas, Ste. 200
Houston, Texas 77010
HFC BOARD ROOM

The Sales, Tourism, and Marketing Committee ("Committee") of Houston First Corporation (the "Corporation" or "HFC"), a Texas local corporation created and organized by the City of Houston as a local government corporation pursuant to TEX. TRANSP. CODE ANN. §431.101 et seq. and TEX LOC. GOV'T. CODE ANN. §394.001 et seq., posted a meeting at Partnership Tower, 701 Avenida de las Americas, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 77010, on Monday, March 2, 2020, commencing at 10:30 a.m.

Written notice of the meeting including the date, hour, place and agenda for the meeting was posted in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act.

The following Committee members were present for the meeting: Council Member David Robinson (Chair), Bobby Singh (Co-Chair), Desrye Morgan, Elizabeth Brock, Ryan Martin, Patricia Voss, Scot Cotton, James Batt, Reginald Martin, Kim Davis, Jacques D'Rovencourt, Tom Segesta, and David Mincberg.

The meeting was called to order at 10:35 a.m. and a quorum was established.

1. **Public Comments.** None.
2. **Review and approval of minutes from prior meeting.** Following a motion duly seconded, the Sales, Tourism, and Marketing Committee meeting minutes of December 16, 2019 were approved as presented. Reginald Martin was not present for the vote.
3. **Presentations and Reports.**
 - A. **Sales Report.** Cindy Decker reported that the sales team had a great year in 2019 with a 22% increase in lead production and a record number of site visits. Ms. Decker attributed the sales team's success to destination appeal and a decrease in the number of lost opportunities.

Council Member David Robinson asked if the downtown area is right-sized in terms of hotel inventory. Ms. Decker confirmed that the downtown area appears to be in good shape.



Scot Cotton asked if there was any data that showed where bookings fell throughout the year. Ms. Decker stated that the sales team is doing what they can to fill need periods and discussed the optimal pace.

- B. Tourism Report. Jorge Franz reported that the Houston Experience Marketplace sold 5,368 experiences and made \$154,924 in sales in 2019. He also stated that the number of experiences purchased by people outside of Texas and the U.S. has increased.

Through travel trade initiatives, according to Mr. Franz, the Tourism department continues to work with agents abroad to train them on how to market Houston. Mr. Franz stated this is especially true for the Mexican market, and they hope to focus on other international markets in 2020.

Mr. Franz informed the Committee that the Tourism Summit will take place on April 30, 2020 and feature Helen Stoddard, Head of Global Events at Twitter, as a keynote speaker. Additionally, Mr. Franz stated, an event will be held on Avenida Plaza from 4:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m. that will be open to the entire hotel and hospitality industry, even to attendees who did not participate in the Tourism Summit.

Mr. Franz then introduced Maureen Haley to discuss the latest Welcome Center initiative.

Ms. Haley stated in an effort to drive traffic to the Welcome Center, Tourism is now tracking visitation from inside the convention center and at street-level based on anticipated building attendance and engagement with Welcome Center staff.

David Minberg commented that the numbers appeared low. Ms. Haley explained that the data is based on new camera technology that continues to improve. Tourism also has a working group that reviews the information on a weekly basis and is working with downtown hotels to train front line personnel to direct visitors to the Welcome Center.

Holly Clapham-Rosenow added that they have also worked to standardize business hours and only recently begun to use social media to promote the Welcome Center.

Bobby Singh stated that the low number of visitors may be due to lack of visibility and suggested that staff create additional signage.

Elizabeth Brock also suggested extended business hours during Party on the Plaza.

Kim Davis suggested that staff create additional signs to display outside the Welcome Center and staff confirmed additional signage is a violation of local City ordinances.



Mr. Franz concluded his presentation by stating that the leisure travel economic impact goal is 100,000 room nights and is being tracked through Expedia and ADARA.

- C. Market Update. Cindy Decker discussed the market strategy based on RevPar (revenue per available room) and ADR (average daily rate) changes across Houston markets. Ms. Decker stated based on the pace report, sales is ahead of for 2020, but will not maintain this pace throughout the year, as seen by the cancellation of CERA Week. However, according to Ms. Decker, 2021 looks very strong. She also stated 2023 is an opportunity year, but is on optimal pace, while 2024, 2025, and 2026 are all ahead of pace.

Scot Cotton asked for an update based on the impact of the corona virus. Ms. Decker stated as of last week, the market is ahead of pace, but she expects that to change. She further explained that staff will strategize and do a media promotion to promote local travel. Ms. Clapham-Rosenow added that there is a coalition within the State of Texas that is sharing information as it relates to the pandemic and looking at travel intent. Jorge Franz also noted that he has postponed travel to Asia.

Ryan Martin stated whatever HFC can do to address health concerns, such as additional sanitization stations in facilities is important. He also added that a number of other large international events are being cancelled so the litmus test will be the NCAA tournament.

David Minchberg asked that staff provide an update on what is being done to address COVID-19 by Friday.

Scot Cotton discussed some of the measures being implemented by the Marriott Marquis. Jacques D'Rovencourt discussed the changes made at the Hilton that were discussed with CERA, before the group decided to cancel their event.

Ryan Martin also suggested that there be additional discussions with Michael Heckman regarding WPC 2020.

Brenda Bazan informed the Committee that she will bring all the stakeholders involved together so that they can respond as one and provide a re-forecast of the 2020 HFC Budget.

- D. Marketing Report. Holly Clapham-Rosenow began her report by discussing the supplement included in the meeting packet regarding the corona virus. She further explained that the market continues to study the grey area or neutral markets. Ms. Clapham-Rosenow stated while there is little that can be done to prevent the fear factor, they continue to develop globalized solutions.

Reginald Martin stated that HFC should engage Texas Medical Center and their programming on resources related to the corona virus.



Desrye Morgan asked if HFC has included information and preventative messaging on the HFC website. Staff stated that they have not at this time and are addressing group concerns on a case-by-case basis. Ms. Clapham-Rosenow stated some groups want to know what the City of Houston is doing as a whole, while others refer to the CDC, Health Department, etc. and that information is included on the dashboard.

James Batt discussed a recent BBC interview and leading expert from Texas Medical Center.

Tom Segesta stated what's important is what the public can do, not just what HFC is doing in an effort to be proactive.

Kim Davis stated that is important to provide messaging as a way to alert the public that HFC is monitoring the situation.

Ms. Clapham-Rosenow continued her report and stated that 2019 was a big year for social media with significant increases in followers on Facebook, Instagram, and total reach on Twitter. She also explained Marketing is down on impressions, as anticipated, but they have focused on integrated marketing and producing more content. For example, she added, they have created branding that looks at Houston's impact beyond travel, such as a place to live, work, study, and do business. She also showed the 2020 digital campaign, "Do Something New, Explore HOU."

She concluded her presentation by announcing that Marketing is partnering with James Beard to host the Media Awards and will include a destination spotlight on Houston.

- E. Houston Film Commission. Rick Ferguson gave an overview of 2019 film projects and expenditures. Mr. Ferguson also announced that the film, "24th," about the all-black Twenty-Fourth United States Infantry and the Houston Riot of 1917 will debut at the SXSW Film Festival. Mr. Ferguson is currently working with the City and Memorial Park Conservancy to host a screening in Houston. Additionally, the film, "Bull" that was shot in Houston in 2018 will also debut at the film festival and he would like to host a screening in April.

With regard to the impact of the corona virus, Mr. Ferguson stated a number of projects such as car commercials have been postponed. He also received an email over the weekend with a petition created by Austin resident to cancel SXSW so he will keep everyone informed.

Mr. Singh suggested that staff reverse the order of presentations for future meetings.

4. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 11:53 a.m.

