

# MINUTES

## HOUSTON FIRST CORPORATION

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**Sales, Tourism, and Marketing Committee Meeting**  
**June 6, 2023 – 10:00 A.M.**  
**Partnership Tower, 701 Avenida de las Americas, Suite 200**  
**Houston, Texas 77010**  
**HOUSTON FIRST BOARD ROOM**

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*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., held a meeting at the Partnership Tower, 701 Avenida de las Americas, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Boardroom, Houston, Harris County, Texas 77010 on Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023, commencing at 10:00 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 participated in the meeting: Bobby Singh (Chair), Nicki Keenan (Vice-Chair), James Batt, Meg Booth, Connie Cochran, Stephanie Haynes, Ryan Martin, Eric Schmauch, Gerald Womack.*

- I. **Call to Order.** The Committee Chair called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and a quorum was achieved at 10:04 a.m.
- II. **Public Comments.** None
- III. **Review and approval of minutes from prior meeting.** Following a duly seconded motion, the September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022, and November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022, minutes were approved as presented.
- IV. **Presentations, Reports, and Updates.**
  - A. **Houston First President & CEO’s Report**

Michael Heckman, President and CEO, announced that Senate Bill 1057 passed the legislature and awaited the Governor’s signature. He explained that the bill would allow Houston to benefit from a funding stream that Dallas and Fort Worth legislatively acquired in 2013. Mr. Heckman emphasized that the bill would provide about \$2 billion from State Hotel Occupancy Tax to update Houston’s George R. Brown Convention Center (“GRB”) and convention district. He then clarified that funding restrictions limited the funds to defined projects.

Mr. Heckman transitioned and noted that HFC planned to promptly circulate a press release about the achievements of Houston Week during the Mexico Mission. He explained that the event had unified representation, including HFC, the Greater Houston Partnership, and the Texas Medical Center.

## B. Marketing, Sales & Tourism Report

Holly Clapham, Chief Marketing Officer, announced that HFC's Marketing team received five Telly Awards, the video and television production industry's highest accolade. She added that three of the five awards were related to brand unification and that HFC was now seven awards from its one-hundredth award.

Ms. Clapham transitioned into reporting on Houston Week. She explained that Houston Week was an alignment of activations in Mexico. Ms. Clapham added that after Houston Week, HFC planned to initiate an annual integrated marketing campaign to highlight Houston. According to Ms. Clapham, from 2022 to 2023, Mexican visitors to Houston increased by 41% year-over-year, and visitor spending increased by 68%. Similarly, she highlighted that HFC would announce that Houston planned to return to Mexico in November 2023 as the only international destination highlighted in Mexico City's Food & Wine Event. In parallel, Ms. Clapham indicated Houston Week resulted in two memorandums of understanding, involved four diplomatic meetings, included twenty-seven media interviews, and trained forty-five travel agents.

Jorge Franz, Senior Vice President of Tourism and Industry Relations, indicated that Houston Week aimed to facilitate lead generation and contract negotiation opportunities with wholesalers, operators, and meeting planners. Mr. Franz emphasized that it was important for HFC and its partners to re-engage with contacts in Mexico. He explained that Houston's Trade Delegation included 12 trade industry partners from hotels, attractions, and Destination Marketing Companies. He then noted that during Houston Week, Houston's Trade Delegation attended presentations, roundtables, and trade shows in Monterrey & Mexico City, which provided networking opportunities with top wholesalers.

Ms. Clapham reported that 70 media outlets RSVP'd to the Hola Houston event in Mexico, three times the number of media outlets compared to 2022. She added that Hola Houston engaged with 111 businesses, had 199 travel trade clients RSVP, generated 212 million earned media impressions, and scheduled 348 appointments with travel trade.

Ms. Clapham and Mr. Franz emphasized the importance of the participation of the Texas Medical Center, United Airlines, and the Museum of Fine Arts.

Ms. Clapham transitioned to covering advertising. According to Ms. Clapham, HFC dominantly placed a Houston ad in the Wall Street Journal for twelve years. She highlighted that tracked performance indicated that the Houston ad's recall was 34% above benchmark and 13% above benchmark in overall impression. Correspondingly, she conveyed that the Houston ad caused two out of three travelers to consider Houston as a vacation destination, and about three out of five would visit for business.



# Houstonfirst

Ms. Clapham stated that HFC tasked its Marketing team with defining and implementing a strategy to boost room night occupancy. She conveyed that in April 2023, HFC generated 17,229 room nights, 226,328 flight bookings, \$170 ADR, and \$2,931,213 gross bookings from its Houston ad. She added that HFC measured the Houston ad via the Amadeus program (Sabre, Travel Port, Amadeus) and that April 2023 was the first month HFC used the program. In parallel, Ms. Clapham conveyed that according to Cvent (Meetings), in April 2023, the Houston ad had an overall conversion of 13.1% for room nights, a higher conversion percentage than any of HFC's competitors. Similarly, she described that according to Expedia, in April 2023, Houston had 12,000 room nights, 924 hotel bookings, 894 flight bookings, and \$2,186,000 gross bookings. In parallel, Ms. Clapham described that Domestic Digital Display demonstrated that the Houston ad generated 6,500 room nights.

Ms. Clapham reported that to date, HFC attained 231 million earned media impressions, including domestic and international. She added that the total impressions included impressions from the NCAA Media Welcome Event and deployment of the first media center inside the Men's Final Four Fan Fest, which Capital One sponsored.

According to Ms. Clapham, HFC's social media numbers totaled 134,000 followers and accomplished 1,955,300 impressions. In parallel, she noted HFC's Instagram had 842,400 post engagements, and HFC's Facebook had 806,900 Likes, and 1,162,100 impressions.

John Solis, Senior Vice President of Sales and Client Services, reported on HFC's production from January 2023 through May 2023. He stated that HFC had a 1.8 million lead volume, a 71% year-over-year increase. In parallel, Ms. Solis expressed that Houston had 186 for 117,383 bookings for room nights, a 23% year-over-year increase. According to Mr. Solis, HFC had 52 new business site visits and 40 planned visits. He explained that HFC's lead volume consisted of several categories, which included Corporate at 53%, Association at 27%, SMERF (Social, Military, Educational, Religious, and Fraternal groups) at 10%, Sports at 6%, and Third-Party Planner at 4%.

Mr. Solis indicated that HFC's year-to-date definite business in 2023 was on pace with 2019. He emphasized that HFC terminated all virtual programs and that in-person attendance was over 90%. Mr. Solis also reported that site visits were increasing, with 52 site visits as of May 2023 compared to 62 at the end of 2019 and 40 planned site visits as of May 2023 compared to 36 at the end of 2019.

Mr. Solis emphasized that hosted meetings through May 2023 totaled 231 with 282,588 room nights and 321,664 attendees, compared to 263 total hosted meetings with 367,742 room nights and 316,980 attendees. Mr. Solis then covered the First Robotics Competition. He stated that the 2017 First Robotics Competition had 26,000 attendees, the 2022 competition had 33,000 attendees, and the 2023 competition had 48,000 attendees. He then highlighted that HFC anticipated First Robotics' future event would have 50,000 attendees.

Mr. Franz reported that he recently returned from IPW, the United States Travel Association's premier international marketplace and the United States' largest generator for travel. He explained that Houston had over 200 appointments with international and domestic leisure buyers, meeting and incentive buyers, and media. He also detailed that Houston hosted 25 international trade and media clients for a pre-IPW FAM and 16 international trade and media client for a post-IPW FAM. Similarly, Mr. Franz highlighted that Houston had the largest activation footprint at the closing night reception hosted by the State of Texas Tourism Office or Travel Texas.

Mr. Franz revealed that the Houston Insider program would return and aimed to focus on frontline staff to sell Houston with an online certification tool.

According to Mr. Franz, HFC would focus on multicultural product development to create and elevate six multicultural experiences emphasizing Houston's diversity. Correspondingly, he added that HFC would prepare six site sales on the Houston Experience Marketplace by November 2023.

Mr. Franz further recounted that HFC aimed to increase the profitability of the Houston Experience Marketplace. He noted that HFC placed Marketplace iPads at the GRB and in hotels and trained frontline staff, managers, and directors on how to sell through the Marketplace to increase profitability. In parallel, Mr. Franz included that HFC sought to allow wholesalers, tour operators, and travel agencies access to sell in the Marketplace.

Mr. Franz proudly announced that the Texas Travel Awards awarded Laura Haces, Senior Manager of Product Development, the "Best Step-On Guide" award this year.

According to Mr. Franz, the Houston Film Commission ("Film Commission") was focused on partnering with film industry members to increase funding for the Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program, which recently increased from \$45 million to \$200 million for 2023-2025. He illuminated that Alfred Cervantes, Film Commission Executive Director, sought to increase funding and announced that the Film Commission hired Isaac Muñoz as a Film Location Coordinator.

Mr. Heckman suggested that the Committee hold another meeting in September 2023 and again at the end of 2023 to approve the budget.

V. **Adjourn.** The meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.