

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON TOURISM, SMALL BUSINESS, AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Minutes of the 6th Meeting of the 2022 Interim

November 17, 2022

Call to Order and Roll Call

The 6th meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology was held on Thursday, November 17, 2022, at 1:00 PM, in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Representative Kim King, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representatives Kim King, Co-Chair, and Phillip Pratt, Co-Chair; Senators Rick Girdler, Robby Mills, Adrienne Southworth, Reginald Thomas, Phillip Wheeler, Mike Wilson, and David Yates; Representatives Shane Baker, Josh Branscum, George Brown Jr., Josh Calloway, Jeffery Donohue, Ryan Dotson, Daniel Fister, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, Jim Gooch Jr., Richard Heath, Thomas Huff, Norma Kirk-McCormick, William Lawrence, Ruth Ann Palumbo, Josie Raymond, Brandon Reed, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Killian Timoney, Timmy Truett, Bill Wesley, and Richard White.

Guests: Daarik Gray, Executive Director, Harrodsburg-Mercer County Tourist Commission; Russ Meyer, Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Parks; Ron Vanover, Deputy Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Parks; and Colonel Chris Crockett, Director, Ranger Division, Kentucky Department of Parks.

LRC Staff: Janine Coy, Audrey Ernstberger, Crystal Thompson, and Sasche Allen.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the October 27, 2022, meeting was made by Senator Wilson, seconded by Representative Truett, and approved by voice vote.

Harrodsburg 250th Anniversary

Daarik Gray, Executive Director of the Harrodsburg-Mercer County Tourist Commission, presented the plans for the Harrodsburg 250th Anniversary celebration, an event designed to commemorate the Commonwealth's oldest city and generate economic development in the area. The festival will take place on June 13, 2024 to June 16, 2024 and will include historical reenactments, speeches, live music, kids' activities, and various types of vendors.

Department of Parks Update

Russ Meyer, Commissioner of the Department of Parks, Ron Vanover, Deputy Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Parks, and Colonel Chris Crockett, Director of the Ranger Division, discussed the Department's organizational structure and role in providing tornado and flood disaster relief in the eastern and western portions of the state. The Department provided 13,300 relief rooms and 4,815 first responder rooms across the state at various state parks for the Western Kentucky tornado relief. In addition, approximately 9,000 relief rooms were provided for flood victims in Eastern Kentucky.

Answering questions from Representative Branscum, Commissioner Meyer discussed the investment in Burnside Island and the much-needed renovations of numerous state parks and lodges. Some renovations and deferred maintenance will be completed with ARPA funds that have been allocated to the Tourism, Arts, and Heritage Cabinet.

Representative Fugate made statements regarding the limitations of state park rangers' authority and discussed the future of adventure tourism in the eastern part of the state.

Representative Tackett Laferty expressed her appreciation for the Department's role in the tornado and flood relief.

Replying to a question from Representative Heath, Commissioner Meyer stated that all individuals impacted by the Western Kentucky tornado outbreak that were utilizing state park facilities had transitioned out of lodges as of July 17, 2022.

Addressing a question from Senator Mills, the Commissioner reiterated that the proposal for the use of ARPA funds will be presented to the Committee on Appropriations and Revenue. There will be reimbursement for relief rooms from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Responding to questions from Representative Baker, Deputy Commissioner Vanover said he would follow up with the committee with information regarding 2022 occupancy rates of state park resorts, but the Department has seen revenue and occupancy increase towards pre-Covid levels. Addressing follow up questions, the Deputy Commissioner confirmed that state park resorts and lodges that have been renovated have higher occupancy rates than those that have not been renovated.

Representative Raymond made comments about visiting state park resorts.

Answering a question from Senator Southworth, Colonel Crockett explained that although all park rangers are certified police officers and receive annual training from the Department of Criminal Justice Training and, the current jurisdiction is limited to state park property and roadways that transverse through state parks.

Representative Tackett Laferty made remarks regarding the 100th year of the parks system in the Commonwealth in 2024.

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:12 p.m.