

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

## **Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the 2023 Interim November 9, 2023**

### **Call to Order and Roll Call**

The sixth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology was held on November 9, 2023, 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: Senator Max Wise Co-Chair; Representatives Phillip Pratt Co-Chair; Kim King Co-Chair; Senators Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Jason Howell, Robby Mills, Phillip Wheeler, and Mike Wilson; Representatives Chad Aull, Shane Baker, Daniel Fister, Deanna Frazier Gordon, Chris Freeland, Chris Fugate, Daniel Grossberg, Richard Heath, Candy Massaroni, Shawn McPherson, Michael Sarge Pollock, Rachel Roberts, Sarah Stalker, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Nancy Tate, Killian Timoney, Timmy Truett, Bill Wesley, Richard White, and Nick Wilson.

Guests: David S. Beck, President and CEO, Kentucky Venues; Russ Meyer, Commissioner, Department of Parks; Ron Vanover, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Parks; and Charles Higginbotham, Executive Director of Information Technology, Department of Parks.

LRC Staff: Janine Coy, Helen Hacker, Eric Rodenberg, Crystal Thompson, and Sasche Allen.

### **Approval of Minutes**

A motion to approve the minutes of the October 26, 2023, meeting was made by Representative Fister, seconded by Representative Timoney, and approved by voice vote.

### **Kentucky Venues Update**

David Beck, President and Chief Executive Officer for Kentucky Venues, presented an update on the organization, which manages the Kentucky International Convention Center and the Kentucky Exposition Center. These venues host approximately 340 events per year, and in the current year, approximately 6.5 million people have attended. The venue events throughout the year are responsible for an estimated 70 percent of

hotel occupancies in Louisville and neighboring counties. The venues' business has recovered from losses suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic, and now exceeds 106 percent pre-pandemic numbers. The financial commitment by the General Assembly to improve facilities has had a positive impact on the Commonwealth.

Responding to Representative King, Mr. Beck described ways Kentucky Venues markets its facilities and events.

Representative Grossberg commented on Kentucky Venues events he has attended and described the economic and cultural impact these events have on the Commonwealth. Mr. Beck went on to discuss future events of the organization and the importance of maintaining beneficial partnerships.

Answering a question from Representative Heath, Mr. Beck remarked on the attendance of members of the General Assembly at the National Farm Machinery Show that takes place annually at the Kentucky Exposition Center and accounts for 20 percent of Kentucky Venues' operating income. He would welcome suggestions to increase legislator participation.

Replying to Representative McPherson, he confirmed the organization has submitted its budgetary proposal to the Tourism, Arts, and Heritage Cabinet for the coming year. Mr. Beck went on to detail workforce challenges of the organization including staffing and the increased cost of products needed to maintain facilities.

### **Kentucky Department of Parks Update**

Russ Meyer, Commissioner of the Department of Parks and Ron Vanover, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Parks, gave an update on the Department's ongoing upgrades and improvements. Testimony was given that of the \$150 million appropriated for the State Park Improvement Project approximately \$79 million has been dedicated to campground upgrades, utility improvements, broadband upgrades, and Lake Barkley and Jenny Wiley State Parks structural repairs. A proposal for \$71 million in unallocated funds from the project was presented. This proposal includes building system improvements, accommodation hospitality upgrades, and recreational amenities upgrades.

Addressing comments made by Representative King, Commissioner Meyer spoke about increasing and enhancing the Department.

Responding to Representative Pratt, Commissioner Meyer discussed planned updates to golf courses and utilizing Ultradwarf Bermudagrass.

Answering questions from Representative Fugate, Commissioner Meyer stated the Department received its \$79 million allocation from the last budget session in August of 2023. Responding to follow up questions, Director Higginbotham said 16 of 17 state park resorts are equipped with high-speed internet but progress is being made to update the last park without the service, and 16 campgrounds are equipped with broadband with five more in progress. All recreational parks across the state have been updated to offer the service. Funds for these broadband updates have already been allocated.

Representative Tackett Laferty made remarks about repairs needed to the state park in her district. Commissioner Meyer added that despite the repairs and improvements that have already been made or are in progress, there is much more to improve. Addressing a follow up question about recreational vehicle tourism in the eastern portion of the state, Deputy Commissioner Vanover said Seth Wheat, Director of Interpretation and Engagement with the Department, would be the appropriate person to contact for additional information.

Replying to Senator Wise, Commissioner Meyer discussed the utilization of public private partnerships and said the Department would be willing to discuss the matter further with the General Assembly.

Representative Pollock made remarks about the low cost of maintaining Ultradwarf Bermudagrass and the General Assembly being notified about the progress of planned projects throughout the state park system. Commissioner Meyer responded by detailing the Department's regular communication with local officials across the state.

Addressing Senator Funke Frommeyer, Commissioner Meyer said he would follow up with her about occupancy rates of state parks and state park resorts.

Answering a question from Senator Howell, Commissioner Meyer discussed the marketing strategy of the Department. In response to a follow up question, he confirmed that the Department has obtained alcoholic beverage licenses in all areas where it is permitted.

Responding to questions from Representative Roberts, the Commissioner agreed that delayed funding may have increased the cost of some projects, but the Department is moving forward.

Replying to Representative McPherson, the Commissioner reiterated that the General Assembly initially allocated \$71 million state park improvement projects but added funding for Lake Barkley and Jenny Wiley State Parks just before the bill was passed which brought the total allocation to \$79 million.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.