

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

Minutes of the 5th Meeting of the 2024 Interim

October 24, 2024

Call to Order and Roll Call

The fifth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology was held on October 24, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Max Wise, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Max Wise, Co-Chair; Representatives Kim King, Co-Chair, and Phillip Pratt, Co-Chair; Senators Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Robby Mills, Phillip Wheeler, and Mike Wilson; Representatives Chad Aull, Shane Baker, Ryan Dotson, Chris Fugate, Richard Heath, Nima Kulkarni, Savannah Maddox, Candy Massaroni, Shawn McPherson, Michael Sarge Pollock, Rachel Roberts, Sarah Stalker, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Nancy Tate, Bill Wesley, Richard White, Nick Wilson, and Susan Witten.

Guests: Brian Raney, Founder, Awesome Inc.; Emily Wehrle, Director of Operations, Awesome Inc.; Mackenzie Hanes, Partnership Manager, Awesome Inc.; and Erik Hubbard, Executive Director, Backroads of Appalachia.

LRC Staff: Janine Coy, Christian Deeter, Austin Johnson, Matissa Robinson, and Sasche Allen.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the September 26, 2024, meeting was made by Representative Pollock, seconded by Representative Fugate, and approved by voice vote.

Awesome Inc: Building the Entrepreneurial Community in Kentucky

Awesome Inc. is a technology focused organization dedicated to fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and education within the tech sector. A range of services and programs are offered that support startups, professionals, and students interested in tech related careers and entrepreneurship. The organization's four core values are be good, be excellent, be a friend, and be you. These values are meant to encourage individuals to make the Commonwealth a better place to live, work, and play by helping entrepreneurs build successful startups. Awesome Inc. provides coworking spaces, accelerator programs, a

coding school, community programs, and networking events. Awesome Inc. has served 700 startups. Almost 800 jobs have been created by accelerator companies, and over \$155,000,000 in investments have been raised. The company has a grant partnership program with the Cabinet for Economic Development to expand support and opportunities for startups.

Representative Aull commended Awesome Inc. and spoke about his experience with the company.

Representative McPherson suggested a future partnership between Awesome Inc. and Western Kentucky University.

Answering a question from Representative Pollock, Ms. Wehrle discussed the 5 Across program that consists of statewide pitch competitions for entrepreneurs. In response to a follow question, Mr. Raney said although the company mainly focuses on high tech sectors, all types of entrepreneur sectors are encouraged.

Responding to Chairman Wise, Mr. Raney confirmed that Awesome Inc has an existing partnership with the Governor's School for Entrepreneurs.

Backroads of Appalachia Update

Backroads of Appalachia brings economic growth to Eastern Kentucky with all forms of motorsports throughout Appalachia along 56 routes and more than 1,300 points of highlighted interest. The organization's objectives include economic development through motorsports, supporting those in transition and recovery, and maintaining strong partnerships with local small businesses. Highlights of 2024 consist of film documentaries, House Bill 29 passed in the 2024 legislative session, and various rallies, hill climbs, and races. Mr. Hubbard showed several videos of motorsport events, rally races, and Green APU's Appalachian Application. Motorsport enthusiasts travel from around the world to Eastern Kentucky to experience Backroads of Appalachia's events. Mr. Hubbard also discussed the Appalachian Regional Commission's three state initiative, Appalachian Overland Triangle, that consists of overlanding and adventure bike riding. In addition, the organization has provided donation centers, supply runs, and heavy equipment operations to communities recovering from natural disasters in the eastern portion of the state and surrounding states. Backroads of Appalachia has an estimated 2024 economic impact of more than \$50 million and has brought more than 37,000 visitors to Eastern Kentucky.

Chairman Wise commented about the passion displayed by Mr. Hubbard and commended him for his work in Eastern Kentucky.

Answering a question from Representative Witten, Mr. Hubbard discussed how Backroads

of Appalachian works with communities to close roads and routes to safely hold races and events including safety, traffic control, and emergency management planning. He emphasized training volunteers and individuals in recovery to assist with events.

Responding to Representative Roberts, Mr. Hubbard elaborated on the use of electric vehicles, and said he does not foresee the vehicles being widely used in the future due to the risk of combustion.

Senator Funke Frommeyer thanked Mr. Hubbard for his work and dedication and shared her experiences with his organization.

Representative Dotson made remarks about the beneficial role Backroads Appalachia plays in the revitalization of Eastern Kentucky.

Representative Fugate detailed his experience with Backroads of Appalachia and spoke about its positive impact throughout the entire region. Mr. Hubbard responded by discussing county specific impacts and changing the negative stigma of the region.

Representative Wesley made remarks about Backroads of Appalachia hosting events in his district. Mr. Hubbard responded by highlighting events in Slade and Stanton.

Representative Tackett Laferty suggested Jenny Wiley State Resort Park, located in her district, as a possible location for future events.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:32 PM.