

Aiken City Council Minutes

September 16, 2003

WORK SESSION

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Clyburn, Cuning, Price, Smith, Sprawls and Vaughters.

Others Present: Roger LeDuc, Glenn Parker, and Sara Ridout.

Mayor Cavanaugh called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to discuss tourism and the city's role in tourism.

Mr. LeDuc stated Glenn Parker, Recreation Director, would be making a presentation to Council on the research he has done on tourism. He said the staff would like some direction from Council as to what they would like the staff to do concerning tourism.

Mr. Parker stated he would like to review some questions that Council had about what had been done with the Accommodation Tax money given to the Chamber and how they spent it. He said he would also like to make some suggestions as to what the city might do concerning tourism.

He said there had been a meeting with the Chamber, restaurant owners, and motel owners. He said the group felt there was a need to build a relationship among the restaurants, the hotels and the cultural arts groups and to create some weekend tour packages. He said four primary things came from the initial discussions—the need to be informed, including the local merchants so they can stock their shelves; publications to better publicize what we do in Aiken and to partner with others; the need to attract, train and retain hospitality workers so they can tell visitors what is going on in Aiken; and the need to attract corporate and business meetings. The group came up with three committees: communications, tour packages, and hospitality workers. The communications focused on consolidating everything into one area—one area where everyone could go to find out information on what is going on. They talked about publications, brochures, a dining guide, a consolidated calendar, newsletters and a web site. The tour packages committee did not accomplish much, and this is an area that needs work. On hospitality workers the emphasis was to attract good workers into the community, train the workers and retain them. Mr. Parker felt the city could play a role in training the hospitality workers in helping them to know what is going on in the community. The idea of an ambassador program was discussed. Mr. Parker presented a copy of the brochure which was prepared. He felt it was a general overall brochure but felt there should be another brochure on what to do in Aiken.

Mr. Parker then reviewed how the Chamber had spent the Accommodations Tax money, the 30% from State funds. He said the amount had ranged from \$27,000 to \$32,000. He said the Chamber spent 55% of the money on advertising, such as billboards and ads in magazines, and they conducted bus tours.

Mr. Parker stated, with the city taking over tourism, the city would conduct the bus tours. They discussed starting the bus tours at the back of City Hall or possibly at the Playhouse. They also discussed the possibility of purchasing a trolley bus for the tour. It was stated the cost for renting the bus is \$300 for one-half day. It was pointed out the city could purchase a refurbished trolley bus for \$20,000. They also discussed possibly having tours in the middle of the week as well as weekends.

Mr. Parker then discussed that the Chamber would continue to have regional maps and a quality of life brochure and would mail relocation packages. The Chamber would continue to promote and hold Aiken's Makin.

Mr. Parker stated the City would be responsible for the Triple Crown. He said the city would develop a marketing plan, including the arts and culture, equestrian, sports, history

and natural resources. The city would partner with other agencies to promote tourism. He then reviewed some possible tourism plans. He suggested the city could book tour packages. In the future, tours may be booked on line. He said the city would conduct an inventory of tourism opportunities. The city would like to make the website more tourist-oriented. He said the city would like to focus on new areas for tourism and create events for off-season to bring people in. He said they would like to encourage more use of the Playhouse building for arts and for business seminars and conferences.

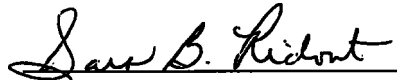
Council discussed possibilities for tourism. Council felt that it would take a highly motivated person to head up the tourism and pull everything together. Council pointed out there are a lot of events going on in Aiken; they just needed to be promoted. There are horse shows, polo matches, and events for children.

Mr. LeDuc pointed out the city would like to discontinue the billboard advertisements and the magazine ads. He said they would like to purchase a trolley bus, as they felt it would be a great marketing tool. If the city produces the tourism brochure, the Chamber will hand them out.

Other items pointed out which may draw people were the new tennis courts and the proposed skate park.

It was also pointed out that the websites for Woodside and Cedar Creek do a great job in promoting Aiken. Another suggestion was a special section of the newspaper similar to the Weekend section of the State newspaper which promotes events.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 A.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk