



**Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes  
February 10, 2025  
Convention Center Board Room 214 - 1:00 pm**

*The following individuals were in attendance:*

**Commission and Voting Members** – Tourism Commission Chair and Council President, Matt James; Councilman John Gehrig; Councilman Will Savage; Voting Members Sal Fasano, HMRA. OCDC Joe Wilson. **Absent:** Mayor Meehan; OC Chamber of Commerce; Garvey Heiderman..

**Staff members present** – Terry McGean, City Manager; Tom Perlozzo, Director of Tourism; Larry Noccolino, Exec. Director; Frank Miller, Special Events Director; Jessica Waters, Director; Erin Jones, Fiona O'Brien, Abigail Yesko, Kathryn Bethard, Marketing & Communications; Kim Mueller, Director of Sales; Nicole Olson, Chip Woytowitz, Ashley Johnson, Tourism Sales; Leslie Raven, Tourism & Business Development.

**Also present:** Susan Jones, HMRA; Amy Thompson, OC Chamber of Commerce; David Noonan, OCDC; Melanie Pursel, Worcester County; Rina Thaler, Crystal Collins, Art League of Ocean City; Brian Shane, OC Today-The Dispatch.

**Tourism Commission Chair and Council President Matt James called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES.**

**MOTION** to approve Minutes from October 21, 2024 Tourism Commission meeting was made by Councilman John Gehrig and seconded by Councilman Will Savage. The vote was unanimous (5-0) with Mayor Meehan and OC Chamber of Commerce; Garvey Heiderman absent.

Tourism Commission Chair and Council President Matt James stated the Art League of Ocean City presentation was moved up in the agenda due to a scheduling conflict.

**ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY FOR ART LEAGUE OF OCEAN CITY PRESENTATION**

**By Memo Diriker of StratAcumen**

Professor Memo Diriker from StratAcumen, previously head of the BEACON Center at Salisbury University, conducted an annual impact study for the Art League focusing on economic impact on tourism which included:

- Significant growth of the organization noted.
- Stressed importance of understanding economic contributions to the community.

**Economic Impact Findings**

Three types of economic activities with high return on investment:

1. Manufacturing exports.
2. College students bring money to spend on local economy.
3. Tourism spending, particularly related to the Art League, attracts 60% visitors from regional areas outside the local area with a greater spending impact of approximately \$16M annually, 44% higher than their local patrons.



- Art League visitors supported over 13,200 jobs, and contributed \$243M to state and local governments based on the latest available figures.
- Conservative estimates for economic impact of the Art League over a 10-year period is over \$30M in the local economy; actual impact may be higher.

#### **Future Plans and Advocacy**

- Discussion on using data for advocacy purposes.
- Maryland Arts Day upcoming; data will support discussions.
- Comparison of local impact versus statewide data.
- Upcoming events: Plein Air
- Art League's Film Festival scheduled for March 6th through 9th.
- Report to be rolled out to public and Mayor & City Council.

### **TOURISM and BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

#### **MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS by Jessica Waters, Director**

##### **150-Year Anniversary Update**

- Planning continues underway for the 150th anniversary celebration.
- 150th Logo is out and being marketed regionally with new and existing events for the year-long celebration.
- Created 150<sup>th</sup> days of celebrations partnering with local businesses, communities and organizations such as HMRA, Art League, with new initiatives to promote local dine and shop packages along with a mix of new opportunities.

##### **Mobile Museum**

- Collaboration with the Lifesaving Station Museum to create a mobile museum.
- Will highlight different exhibits each month.
- February's exhibit will highlight lifesaving history at the Boat Show moving on to other events such as Love on Tap, Art League exhibits, etc. highlighting different historical events from the museum. Had an event at Dreamfest. Will exhibit every First Friday at Art League.

##### **Spring Fest**

- Planning an anniversary garden and flower bar. Working with local florists for a floral wall for photo opportunities and hands-on activities while at Springfest.
- Developing a nighttime Farmer's Market idea, inspired by the successful Sunday morning Farmers Markets in Berlin. Take sunsets and tie an artisan event into 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
- All works in progress above. Looking to find partners.

##### **Summer Events**

- Movies on the beach with decade themes. Different decade themes for each movie night.
- Summer send-off event planned. Feedback was positive when Air Show was moved to third week of August last year. Festivities include a balloon glow, drone show, potential kite festival, and laser show. Goal is to entice people to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup>.

##### **150th Anniversary Events**

- Sunfest planning to include community hero or chalk riot event.
- New event called Rising Tides Festival to be held November 22, 2025 inside the Convention Center. Collaboration with "I love the 90s and 200's" and "70's Soul Jam tour" music for a decade



celebration. Tickets on sale now. Creating event inside event with fun music and activities being planned. Step back into the decade bring grandparents and children.

### **Winterfest**

- A work in progress concept for Fire and Ice Fridays with a Fire and Ice Garden to include fire pits, food and wine.
- Grand finale Anniversary gala planned for December 12, 2025 with a black-tie affair at the Convention Center as a final sendoff.
- Christine from OC Life-saving Station Museum discussed the Petticoat Regime. Ruth Toomey of MTC spearheaded an idea creating a historic walking tour starting at the Ocean City Life-saving Station Museum with five historic spots noting historic references to women in Ocean City's history.
- Scheduled for May 8, coinciding with National Tour and Travel Week.
- Opportunities for those that want to get involved to enhance what's already being done to uplift the celebration.

### **Budget, Funding, And Resources For 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

- Allocated \$197,000 for event budget.
- Discussion on the need for additional funds for the second half of calendar year. Is there enough money? Managing budget by using sponsorship funds as a resource when needed. Will meet with City Manager to discuss second half of year.
- Use the 1932 Storm as a feature event.
- Highlighting the significance of the area's history in sport and commercial fishing.
- Need more people and more money.
- Discussion on initial numbers and changes in project ideas.
- Rising Times festival is hefty price tag. Expected to pay for itself through ticket sales.
- Website is [ococean.com/150<sup>th</sup>](http://ococean.com/150th). Will keep everyone updated.

### **SPORTS COMPLEX UPDATE – By Tom Perlozzo**

- Partnership with the Maryland Stadium Authority has been established.
- Architect and operator hired; currently missing a key component -- location.
- Sports Facilities Mgmt. has been helping. Three shortlisted sites found with significant negatives and positives.

#### **Property Solicitation Process**

- No firm has been hired to search for properties; Sports Complex Comm. search ongoing.
- Over 100 properties reviewed; same three sites frequently considered.
- Appraisals done on shortlisted sites; Sports Complex Committee knows everything about the sights front and back. Each comes with certain problems that are trying to be worked out.

#### **Timeline and Funding Concerns**

- No timeline from the stadium authority; economic study supports state funding.
- \$850,000 available for design consultant; \$500,000 is a state grant pending site selection.
- None of sights have water and sewer. Need to be able to get it.

### **Marketing Insights**

- Weekly meetings with BVK team to review media spend and results and making adjustments as needed.
- Focus on spending allocated money effectively.



- Insights on familiarity, perception, and likelihood of visits measured.

#### **ROI and Advertising Results**

- Reported ROI of \$260 return for every dollar spent to the economy.
- Comprehensive analysis included creative rating, lift, trips, spending, and advertising recall by market segment.
- Comprehensive results: Generated over 600,000 trips influenced by media efforts.
- Open to questions regarding the advertising plan and creative.

#### **Upcoming Events and Improvements**

- Mention of Tourism Day and Taste of the Eastern Shore on Thursday and Friday this week in Annapolis.
- Boardwalk arches being repaired with new lettering, lighting. Red removed replacing with a blue roof. Everything will be refurbished to look brand new.
- Proposal for a "smile sign" on the boardwalk. Looking at Somerset right now but will work with Public Works to make sure everything is in place. Will take to City Manager and go from there.

#### **CONVENTION CENTER UPDATES – Larry Noccolino-Executive Director**

- Large elevator approved; small freight elevator to start after Boat Show.
- Escalator expected completion around April 20th to 25th.
- Still Refresh with artwork and painting.
- HMRA coming up in March
- Cheerleader events here in the next month. More parking is desperately needed.

#### **TaraFlex Flooring – By Tom Perlozzo, Director**

- Presentation for purchase of TaraFlex sports flooring for the Convention Center will be presented before Mayor and City Council February 11<sup>th</sup>. Largest installation of TaraFlex flooring in the US. Puts OC on the map.
- Chip Woytowitz, Sports Marketing & Event Manager, closed business with USA Field Hockey National Indoor Festival. Event scheduled for the week before Christmas 2025.
- Estimated impact: close to \$946,000. 1500 Athletes. 3000 spectators.
- Flooring cost was under \$800K.
- Flooring details: Vinyl floor with sponge underlay, better than sport court.
- Used in the Olympics for volleyball. All major D1 sports use this flooring.
- Don't have to put the whole flooring down at once. Can be changed around easily. Gives opportunity for larger events.

#### **Sports Complex**

- Chip has a list of rights holders and promoters ready to sign.
- Limited weekends available at the Convention Center due to conventions. Chip Woytowitz, Sports Marketing & Event Manager, working with County & City Park and Rec departments.
- Chip is filling weekends with new options while waiting for the sports complex.

#### **CONVENTION CENTER-SALES – Kim Mueller, Director of Sales**

##### **Meeting Planner Advisory Board**

- Back in November 2024, a Meeting Planner Advisory Board with 12 planners from the Mid-Atlantic region was formed with key planners who influence site selection, are active in



organizations like MPI & PCMA and hold lead roles in various industry organizations as well as active on industry social platforms.

- Goal aimed to enhance meetings and convention positioning, driving more group business in the Sunday through Thursday market in the off season.
- Conducted a perception study for meeting planners with Northstar Travel. Allowed planners to be presented with specific challenges and opportunities ensuring their feedback is targeted, actionable and aligned with the most significant barriers needed to be overcome.
- 57% of 250 surveyed planners knew of Ocean City but had little knowledge of it as a meeting destination. Those familiar stated OC's range of activities, affordability, health and safety of attendees were key factors when choosing a destination.
- Focus on bringing planners to Ocean City for firsthand experience.
- 30 to 40 meeting planners scheduled to visit in April for various events: MPI Potomac Chapter Board Meeting; HelmsBriscoe FAM Trip, Advisory Board visit allowing planners to see, experience our hotels, restaurants and attractions up close. Share experience with their circle of groups. Will continue in 2025.

#### **Overall Numbers**

- Second half of 2024: 104 leads turned into contracts with a total economic impact: a little over \$83 million.
- Estimated number of attendees: above 155,000 customers.
- Contracting extends to 2027, not just short-term events.
- On the shortlist for hosting US Sports Congress 2026. Site visit in March or April 2025. Will bring in at least 200 rights holders to destination.

#### **Member Engagement**

- Sales & Partnership Relations Manager, Nicole Olson working on relationships with stakeholders.
- Has secured 444 members this year with goal of 500 for 2025.
- Online booking system through OC Ocean:
- Ended 2024 with Book Direct Nos. over 225,000 referrals and over 5.9 million impressions for the year. Total member of properties with Book Direct is 32.

#### **Convention Center Parking Update – Terry McGean, City Manager**

- Convention Center parking mass plan study is done. Stadium won't let OC release to public until it's released to their Board. Shooting for March 11<sup>th</sup> as a release date.

#### **Convention Center Exterior Plan.**

- Tom Perlozzo stated the Mayor wants the building to have a more visible, aesthetic exterior. Wants to add a great nighttime element Trying to light the building differently. Will have quotes and video to show at next meeting. Work can be done in parts or pieces. Developing a plan to showcase improvements, future plans for building.

#### **SPECIAL EVENTS – Frank Miller, Director**

##### **Upcoming Events**

- Springfest planning for 2025 underway.
- Announcement of lineup. Key performances:
  1. Thursday night Strangelove, a Depeche Mode tribute that brings energy and an immersive experience.
  2. Friday night Hunter Hayes, country singer with 50 award nominations and 2B streams.



- 3. Legendary Wailers with Junior Marvin on Saturday night.
- Springfest dates moved up to April 24th through 27th.
- Cruisin is first week of May (the old Springfest week) and before Boardwalk Rocks.

#### **Air Show and Events**

- Air show returning in June 2025 instead of August.
- Discussion on Monster Truck event for October 2024. Had red tape issues with the state. They are past that. Conversations with City Council to begin shortly.

#### **Oceans Calling Announcement**

- C3 announces line up on February 12th at noon for Oceans Calling.
- Simultaneous release on Ocean 98.1 Live.
- Ticket sales expected to start a few days after the announcement.
- Pre-sale likely on Friday morning at 10 AM. On sale at 11:00 a.m.

#### **Country Calling Event**

- Country Calling extended from two days to three days.
- Anticipated to be a significant event this year.
- One entertainer's name is known but not disclosed.
- Tickets on sale in March.

#### **Boardwalk Rock and Other Events**

- Boardwalk Rock expected to be equally significant.
- Limited tickets available, with a cap on sales.
- Transportation and logistics are in planning stages now.
- Plans for 8 hot air balloons lit up along boardwalk and laser shows with 40-50 kites in August.
- Event dates: August 22nd to 24th. Trying to marry up events for 150<sup>th</sup>.
- Additional events may be incorporated.

#### **Other Special Events**

- Discussion on Rock the Docks concerts.
- Weekly concerts on the boardwalk not happening on dock. Looking at other locations.
- Potential for events at 3rd Street Park and private properties.
- Upcoming contract discussion for Cruising event.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

#### **Chamber of Commerce –**

##### **Saturday, Feb. 22 • Like Water for Chocolate Scavenger Hunt**

Join us for a Chocolate Scavenger Hunt! Visit each location, eat some chocolate, find a clue, arrange the words to complete the secret sentence, then turn in your card at Ocean 13 by 6pm for a chance to win prizes donated by participating businesses!

11am-6pm • Various locations in Ocean City

##### **Friday, Feb. 28 • You're Invited to the OC Chamber Annual Awards Celebration**

Join us for a spectacular evening as we celebrate our 75th Anniversary and honor the outstanding nominees and recipients of the OC Chamber Awards! For just \$125 per ticket, enjoy a three-course plated dinner and two drink tickets while mingling with community members. Don't miss this opportunity to recognize excellence in our community.





6-10pm • Roland E. Powell Convention Center, Bayfront Ballroom

**Saturday, Mar. 22 • 2025 Ocean City Chamber Job Fair**

Employers: Find your next great hire! Connect with eager job seekers ready to work in various industries. Showcase your business and meet potential employees face-to-face. Booths include prime placement and event promotion. Reserve your booth today!

12-2pm • Princess Royale, 9100 Coastal Hwy.

**Tuesday, Apr. 29 • SAVE THE DATE! 37th Annual OC Chamber Cup Golf Tournament**

Register as a foursome or an individual and we can match you with a team!

11am Check In; 12pm Tee Off • Ocean City Golf Club

**HMRA - Showcase Solutions Workshops:**

- Keynote Speaker: Jason Brooks - Leading with The Right Mindset: Managing vs Leading vs Coaching
- Lodging Market Review & Forecast
- US Travel Association – national trends, impact of new administration on J1/H2Bs
- Prime Cost - Your Key to Making \$\$\$
- **Spotlight Stage:** Ask the Expert, Behind the Brand, and Hip Sip sessions Restaurant Association of **MD World Food Championship** Cooking Qualifier **OC's 150<sup>th</sup>** Interactive Station
- **Restaurant Association of MD** will hold its annual **Awards Gala** on Sunday evening in the Ballroom as part of the Expo.
- Added **Shuttle service** this year from the Castle in the Sand lot!
- **Volunteers still needed** for Registration Desk at Expo – Call Susan today! 💎
- All details at OceanCityTradeExpo.com

Questions, comments – [susanjones@ocvisitor.com](mailto:susanjones@ocvisitor.com) 410.726.0334

**OCDC – REPORT TO THE OCEAN CITY TOURISM COMMISSION**

- The OCDC receives and approves applications for the following revitalization programs: **Façade Improvement Program**
- Commercial Façade Improvement Program
- Green Building Initiatives Program
- Roof Improvement Program
- Streetside Fence Program
- Downtown Lighting Program
- Business Assistance Program
- Development & Assistance Program (Workforce Housing)
- In December of 2024, the OCDC secured a State Revitalization Program grant from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development in the amount of \$300,000 to assist in the preservation of the Henry Hotel.
- In addition, the OCDC secured \$100,000 for Façade and Commercial Façade Improvement Programs and \$50,000 for the Green Building Initiatives Program. Business and property owners can apply for assistance in all of these programs.



- **UPCOMING EVENTS**

- The OCDC's After Dark will take place on February 19<sup>th</sup> from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM at Buxy's Salty Dog Saloon. Enjoy complimentary hors d'oeuvres and happy hour drink prices. All are welcome. You do not have to be an OCDC member to attend.

**Worcester County – No report**

**OC Art League – No Report**

**Closed Session Report: Closed Session was canceled due to lack of quorum.**

**Councilman John Gehrig made a motion to adjourn meeting; seconded by Councilman Savage. Meeting adjourned at 2:01 p.m.**