



Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes

March 9, 2026

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; Mayor Richard Meehan; Council Member John Gehrig; Jr., Council Member Carol Proctor; Voting Members Sal Fasano, Chamber of Commerce; Ruth Waters, HMRA. **Absent:** OCDC; Joe Wilson

Staff Members Present – Terry McGean, City Manager; Tom Perlozzo, Director of Tourism; Larry Noccolino, Director, Convention Center Services; Jessica Waters; Director; Molly Wooten, Abigail Yesko, Kathryn Bethard; Fiona O'Brien, Marketing & Communications; Kim Mueller, Director of Sales; Chip Woytowitz, Sports Sales; Brenda Moore, Special Events Director, Leslie Raven, Tourism & Business Development.

Also present: Melanie Pursel, Worcester County Tourism; Zach Bankert, OCDC; Rina Thaler and Crystal Collins, Art League of Ocean City; Zach Bankert, OCDC; Josh Chamberlain, Amigo Creative; Bethany Hooper, OC Today-The Dispatch.

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

Tourism Commission Chair and Council President, Matt James welcomed Council Member Carol Proctor to the Tourism Commission replacing Councilman Will Savage.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION to approve **Minutes** from **November 3, 2025** Tourism Commission meeting was made by Council Member Carol Proctor and seconded by Voting Member Sal Fasano. **The vote was (6-0)** with Voting Member Joe Wilson absent.

ZARTICO PACING REPORT NEXT-GEN VISITATION INSIGHTS PRESENTATION by Bill Obreiter, VP Destinations, Zartico

Zartico is a data science company that helps Ocean City understand visitor origins, destinations, and future trends for decision-making. The tourism economy's impact uses big data sets like movement data from cell phone devices, credit card data, and lodging data.

Data Set- Explanations/Caveats

- Data primarily from Amadeus for chain hotel pacing and Key Data for short-term vacation rentals.
- Benefit: Allows seeing daily demand up to 12 months ahead (for 21 hotels representing 2,757 rooms-21% sample), compared to the previous year.
 - Doesn't include independent hotels.
 - Includes Airbnb and VRBO data.
- Revenue shown is measured hotel revenue, not total market revenue, but indicates trends.

February Performance as of Jan 28 and as of March 1

- Measured increase of \$142,000 combined, a 5.2% blended increase in revenue vs. February 2025.
- Second consecutive month of increases after a 12% blended increase in January.
- November and December were down due to decreased travel from D.C. and Baltimore.



- Steady improvements in rate, RevPAR, paid occupancy, and measured revenue for both short-term rentals and hotels.
 - Blue numbers: chain hotels.
 - Red numbers: short-term vacation rentals.
 - Left number: 2026 data.
 - Right number: 2024 data.

February Demand Compare RevPar w/Date Shift

- Hotel at top performance by day.
- Hotel and vacation rental performance broken out by day, with a one-day date shift to match weekends.
- "The dotted line is last year and the solid line is this year."
- Increase in the first or second weekend of the month.
- Decrease in the third weekend of the month due to a blizzard.
 - Blizzard hit on the night of the 22nd, impacting the 20th and 21st.
- Overall, the month was up in all major metrics.

February In Market Spending Analysis by Visitor Type:

- Data set allows analysis of in-market credit card swipes.
 - Provides demographic information: age, household income.
- Visitor composition: residents, local visitors, and visitors from >50 miles away.
 - Residents: Live within Ocean City funding boundary (purple).
 - Local visitors: Live 1-50 miles outside the boundary (gray).
 - Visitors: Travel >50 miles.
- Spending breakdown: accommodations, restaurants, retail.
 - Local visitors contribute more to restaurants and retail.
 - Accommodations are primarily for people traveling >50 miles.

By Feeder Markets

- Top five feeder markets represent ~60% of overall spending.
 - Blue line: percentage of overall spend in market.
 - Purple line: average daily spend in Ocean City.
- Spending allocation: accommodation, food/beverage, retail, gas, arts/entertainment.
 - Accommodations are number one, shifting to food/beverage in summer due to day trippers.
- Food spending: eating places/restaurants, fast food, grocery stores.
 - Grocery stores trend higher in summer due to Airbnb/VRBO renters.
 - Bars/restaurants account for 63% of food spending in market during this time period.

By Hotel Feeder Market Performance

- Volume vs. stay quality is measured.
 - Check-in percentage > revenue = lower quality market.
 - Revenue > check-in percentage = higher quality market.
- DC generates more revenue per person for accommodations than Baltimore.
- Quality markets: average daily rate (ADR) >10% higher than February average (shown in green).
- State value: measure of average transaction for accommodations and reservation value pre-tax.
 - Green markets: >10% higher for both state quality and ADR (Dover, New York, Hartford, Harrisburg, Allentown).



March Pacing Performance and March Demand Compare (RevPar w Date Shift)

- Revenue on the books for March 1 compared to last year and a month ago.
 - Increase in measured revenue vs. a month ago and last year.
 - ADR increased vs. last year but softened compared to a month ago.
 - Occupancy grew ~14 points per hotel in the last 30 days.
- Forecasting third straight month of accommodation growth vs. 2025.
- Lower hotel demand for St. Patrick's Day parade weekend, higher demand for the last weekend of the month (27th/28th).
- **St. Patrick's Day** advanced bookings are down, but St. Patrick's Day proper is up 8% vs. last year.
 - ADR has been flat since December but is down \$8 vs. last year.

Spring Hotel Feeder Market Performance: Last Spring (March 15-May 15)

- Targeted for marketing due to higher stay quality accommodations.
 - Washington and Baltimore stand out.
- Performance of feeder markets (March 15 - May 15) compared to the average.
 - Green numbers: >10% increase vs. last year.
- Booking window analysis to get advanced reservations.

April and May Pacing Forecasts (as of Jan 28 and As of March 1)

- April: Pacing to be the fourth straight month of year-over-year growth.
- May: Down overall, but improving.
 - Pacing down 37% for hotels and 46% for vacation rentals as of March 1.
 - Lack of Boardwalk Rock event is a major factor.
- Boardwalk Rock impact: ~100% increase in revenue vs. the same weekend in 2024 (no Boardwalk Rock).
 - 91.6% occupancy at \$321 ADR, making it a top-five weekend.

Summer Forecasts

- Early summer (June/July): Pacing slightly up.
 - Hotel is flat, vacation rental is up vs. last year.
 - \$9 million gain in total measured bookings vs. a month ago.
 - ADR increased from \$338 to \$342, compared to \$339 last year.
 - Vacation rentals are up every day starting June 5 through the end of July.
- August: Still early, but White Marlin Open shows a 20% increase for hotels (Monday-Friday).
 - "We are seeing continued growth of demand during this midweek time period, the second week of August."

Ocean's Calling and Country Calling

- Ocean's Calling: Pacing up, but analysis backed out to February 11 due to lineup announcement date differences.
 - Last year, \$800,000 in bookings occurred in 48 hours after the announcement.
- Country Calling: Weekend following Ocean's Calling is also growing in revenue.
 - \$28,000 increase in total book revenue vs. last year.
 - Lineup not yet announced, measuring Apples to Apples.

Tax Discussion

- Revenue measured is net of taxes, fees, and ancillary services.



- Numbers do not factor in tax.
- A 1% tax increase would result in a net 1% increase in collected taxable revenue.

BVK 2026 Paid Media – Darci Bandi, BVK VP Account Director

Brand Goals for 2026

- Build on brand awareness to remain top of mind.
 - Using the Smile campaign.
- Shift perception to increase interest and affinity.
- Increase visitation, especially in fall and early winter.

Strategic Parameters of Paid Media Plan

- Year-round presence (dialed back in winter).
- Key data points: seasonal targeting.
 - Millennial moms are a top audience all year.
 - Gen Xers and active young males are targeted more in the Fall.
- Custom messages by audience.
- Prioritize channels where people are looking for travel.

Tactics and Creative

- Mix of paid and earned media.
- Video content: connected TV, pre-roll, social media, broadcast.
- Digital panels: flex messaging, optimize based on performance.
- Awareness: out-of-home and print.
- Social media: mix of channels and ad units.
- TikTok travel ad launching in May.

AdUnits

- Amazon Pause Ads:
 - Appears when viewers pause Amazon content.
 - Targeting options: geography, audience segment (e.g., travel intenders).
- Paid Social ads: Video ads perform strongly.

Custom Content Activations

- Partnership with Delish for Instagram Reels:
 - Focuses on foodie themes.
 - Content themes: Boardwalk Classics, family-friendly dining, seafood experiences.
- Custom content with *Travel and Leisure*, *Food and Wine*, and *Parents*.
 - *Travel and Leisure*: Focus on the destination as a whole.
 - *Food and Wine*: Showcase the evolving food scene.
 - *Parents*: Highlighting family-friendly itineraries.

Hopper Program

- Goal: To increase early bookings, especially for May.
- Three components:
 - Video ad on Pinterest driving to a customized microsite.
 - Microsite content: what to do, where to stay, what to eat.
 - Discount to spur booking (does not impact hotel revenue).



Media Schedule Highlights

- March-July & August-October: Seasonal messaging.
- May: TripAdvisor editorial, sports sponsorships, TikTok travel billboards, heavier cable TV presence.
- June: People Social series, Delish Reels, influencer boosting, print ads.
- September: Print ads, program with a traveling golfer influencer.

TOURISM and BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT – Tom Perlozzo, Director

Marketing & Communications Director, Jessica Waters, explained the importance Ocean City’s influencers have had with marketing OC. With that said, OC Tourism conspired with Josh Chamberlain of Amigo Creative to produce a reality show called “Only in Ocean City” with influencer Stephanie Pratt. Brief video shown about series.

Only in Ocean City" Series presented by Josh Chamberlain, Amigo Creative

- Partnership with Josh Chamberlain from Amigo Creatives to create a video series.
- Hosted by Stephanie Pratt (from The Hills).
- Opportunity to partner with local businesses.
- Teaser and sample episode shown.
- Eight episodes to be released, starting in April.
 - Two-to-three-minute clips on Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook.
- A press release will be sent out today.
- The content is owned by Ocean City and can be shared with partners.

CONVENTION CENTER SALES REPORT by Kim Mueller, Director of Sales

FY25 Performance

- 131 Events Hosted
- 260,000+ Attendees
- \$138.9 Million Economic Impact Generated
- These events supported hotel occupancy, restaurant traffic, and business activity throughout the destination.

FY26 Business on the Books (to date)

- 99 Events Confirmed
- 265,000 Projected Attendees
- \$108 Million in Economic Impact
- This pacing reflects strong continued demand for Ocean City as a meetings, conventions, and event destination.

Major Business Opportunities in Development

- Mid-Atlantic Shriner Association Convention
- Proposed host destination 2028–2030
- 3,500 attendees
- 5-day event
- Target dates between Labor Day and Bike Week
- Includes convention programming and a large parade event

American Quilter’s Society Show

- Proposed 2027–2029 rotation



- 2,500 attendees
- 4-day convention and exhibition
- Targeting November shoulder season. Both opportunities would support large-scale convention business in key off-peak periods. "Really trying to hit those shoulder season, off season dates"

Discover Ocean City

- Being more aggressive in pursuing events/conventions for hotels.
- Partnering with Smart Meetings to bring 20 meeting planners to Ocean City in May for three days.

CONVENTION CENTER MISC.by Larry Noccolino, Director

Convention Center Updates

- Hoping Convention Center Outside lights will be green for the weekend.
- WiFi update: Down to two companies, decision in a couple of weeks.
- Small passenger elevator should be complete by the end of the month.

SPECIAL EVENTS by Brenda Moore, Director of Special Events

- **Winterfest:** Wrapped up, evaluating new concepts for next year.
 - Considering staying open January 1st and 2nd.
- **New Year's Eve:** Considering moving downtown fireworks to 7 PM on New Year's Day.
- **Springfest:** April 23rd, incorporating a street theming festival.
 - Michael Kirby, an international street painter, will be a headlining artist.
 - Two stages with free entertainment all day.
 - Headliners at the PAC.
- **Memorial Day:** Joining hands with the Mayor for a Memorial service.

250th Anniversary- How Ocean City Will Celebrate

- Extended fireworks display downtown.
- Stage with two bands (Tom Petty and Neil Diamond tribute bands).
- Considering a speed painter with a big video wall.
- Incorporating the 250th anniversary into existing summer events.
- "We're going to be trying to get people who might be going to the big cities like Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, DC to extend their vacations and head down to Ocean City."

Monday Fun Days Summer Series

- The Council requested a review of Monday night summer events, and the team proposed Monday Fun Days Summer Series."
- The goal is to reduce the number of Monday night fireworks and create four bigger events to boost economic impact.
- The first event might be an 80s night with a tribute band, costume contest, and fireworks. Other themes include Reggae night and a Jimmy Buffett night.
- The budget for each event is around \$35,000.
-

Revisiting Fireworks

- Director Perlozzo spearheaded the conversation about revisiting the fireworks.
- Monday was chosen for fireworks due to the lower cost of keeping the firework company in town overnight.
- Council Member Gehrig suggested moving the fireworks to Thursday to kick off the weekend and encourage



longer stays, as the average length of stay is decreasing.

- He believes the current value-added events have lost their appeal and should be packaged into a bigger event.

Weekend Travel

- Director Perlozzo emphasizes the importance of dominating summer and owning the town's identity as a weekend travel destination.
- Suggested marketing to nearby areas for weekend stays and potentially having Monday Funday and Thursday night fireworks.
- Thursday and Sunday nights are typically tough for hotels, so a Thursday event could encourage people to arrive a day early.

Options for Fireworks

- Option 1: Eliminate Monday fireworks and move them to Thursday.
- Option 2: Have four to six bigger events with larger fireworks.
- If the fireworks are moved to Thursday every week, there won't be funds available for other events like bands and stages.
- Consolidating the budget and using it for events like Memorial Day or Labor Day was suggested.

Additional Suggestions

- Boardwalk business owners don't benefit much from the fireworks and dance parties.
- Hotels could collectively market coming in on Thursdays to start the weekend early.
- The committee is moving the Monday night fireworks, and Tom will work out the contract details with the vendor.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE – No Report



Our **Fall Hospitality Huddle** was a collaboration with Salisbury University's Perdue School of Business BEACON group where we explored AI in Hospitality. Although hospitality will always be rooted in genuine human connection, artificial intelligence (AI) is here to stay. To navigate its many possibilities, we teamed up with Salisbury University's BEACON experts for their insights. Because there is so much to share and learn, a follow up session is planned.

The **Winter Hospitality Huddle** is in partnership with MD's Coast Economic Development and Tourism and will explore workforce - slated for **March 24th**.

We've expanded our annual **Trade Expo**. Taking place on **March 8 & 9**, we'll have 2 floors of exhibits featuring 509 booths!

The **Nibble & Networks** (formerly our Dinner Meetings) are beginning.

- November 13th BLU
- December 18th Harpoon Hanna's
- January 15th Aloft Hotel -moved to January 8, 2026 due to OC Tourism Event.



- February 19th Vista Rooftop
- April 16th Oyster & Scales
- Rebranding will soon be officially unveiled (sneak peek – new logo at the top!)

Save the Date - January 30th at Morley Hall!

OCDC – No report

WORCESTER COUNTY – No report

OC ART LEAGUE --10th Annual Ocean City Film Festival March 5-8, was a big success! It featured 100 independent films, parties, and events over the course of 4 days at multiple venues throughout the resort.

-Venues included: Seacrets, Fagers, Cambria Hotel, Spain Wine Bar, Princess Royale, Dough Roller 41st, Gold Coast Theater, Flagship theater, and the Art League.

-Additional sponsor venues offered lodging and food specials, making it a town wide event

-Tourism impact is expected to generate over 500,000 in spending and a total of 1.25 million in total impact, including room stays, restaurant visits, local shopping, and publicity value connected to festival activities.

-The Community art mural created at Sunfest has been successfully installed on the East Wall of the Art League's building creating a visual impact and improved curb appeal from 94th street

- The Maryland Board of Public Works has officially approved Capital Arts Grant funding for \$83,000 towards construction of a shaded pergola for the courtyard of the Art League. The funding may also be used towards the construction of an addition to the building.

-The Art League is working with the Special Events team to bring the first ever Chalk art feature to Springfest April 23-26.

Council Member John Gehrig made a motion to adjourn the Tourism Commission meeting; seconded by Council Member Carol Proctor. Meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

REPORT ON CLOSED SESSION

Closed Session Notice and Report - Monday, March 9, 2026, 2:18 PM – 2:50 PM. After the Tourism Commission open session adjourned on Monday, March 9, 2026 at 2:15 p.m., a closed session was held on Monday, March 9, 2026 at 2:18 p.m. at Roland E. Powell Convention Center, Room 214, 4001 Coastal Highway, Ocean City, MD as authorized under General Article §3- 305(b)(14): Before a contract is awarded or bids are opened, discuss a matter directly related to a negotiation strategy or the contents of a bid or proposal, if public discussion or disclosure would adversely impact the ability of the public body to participate in the competitive bidding or proposal process. This exception was invoked to discuss marketing contractual matters.

Motion to convene into Closed Session

RESULT: APPROVED (6-0) **ABSENT:** Joe Wilson

MOVER: John Gehrig, Jr. Council Member **SECONDER:** Carol Proctor, Council Member.

AYES: James, Meehan, Gehrig Jr, Proctor, Fasano, Waters

ABSENT: Wilson.

Persons present: Tourism Commission Chair and Council President Matthew M. James; Mayor Rick Meehan, Council Members John Gehrig, Jr., Carol Proctor; Voting Members Sal Fasano and Ruth Waters; City Manager



Terry McGean; Tourism & Business Development Director Tom Perlozzo; Marketing & Communications Director Jessica Waters; Director of Sales Kim Mueller.

No action was taken.

Motion to close at 2:50 PM.

RESULT: APPROVED (6-0) **ABSENT:** Joe Wilson

MOVER: Sal Fasano, Voting Member.

SECONDER: Mayor Richard Meehan

AYES: Tourism Commission Chair and Council President Matthew M. James, Mayor Richard Meehan; Council Member John Gehrig Jr., Council Member Carol Proctor, Voting Members Sal Fasano and Ruth Waters.

ABSENT: Wilson