



Board Meeting Minutes from April 17, 2025

Sussex County West Administrative Complex

In attendance: Scott Anthony (Board Co-Chairperson), Heather DeMarie, Mike Dunmyer, Carol Everhart, Ben Gray, Bonnie Hall (Past Chair), Andrew Harton, Maggie Lingo, Fred Mast, Kristin Miller, Matt Parker (Board Chairperson), Bill Pfaff, Linda Price, Betsy Reamer, Jo Schmeiser, Alison Schuch, Jim Smith, Tom Summers, Fred Thompson, Kevin Thompson, Scott Thomas, Nadine Timpanaro, Lauren Weaver, Jessica Welch

Absent: Terry Carson, Drew DiFonzo, Kevin Evans, Patrick Ruhl, Jessica Schlegel

1. Call to Order time: 9:30am by Matt P.

2. Welcome and Introductions: Matt P. welcomed everyone and those in attendance introduced themselves through alphabetical roll call including new board member Heather DeMarie and Andrew Harton who joined the Sussex County Economic Development Office. Quorum confirmed by Scott T.

3. Approval of the January 2025 Meeting Minutes

Motion by: Bonnie H., **Seconded by:** Linda P., **Passed by** the Board.

4. Committee Reports

- **Finance** – Presented by Scott A.

1. The PAT Revenue for the 3rd quarter was up \$20,216 from this same quarter last year (18.33% increase) and is up a total of \$63,135 for the fiscal year (5.15%). In comparison to the budgeted revenue amount for the year however - it is running below budget by about 5%.
2. Of the \$34,586.38 in PAT funds received in March, \$5,222.80 was from the 4.5% short term rental tax. This is the first month any of those funds were received.
3. In total - administrative and marketing expenses are 5.3% under budget for the year. At 3/31/25, there was \$334,627 in the checking account. None of this is reserved for the Culinary Coast campaign, as any money collected from businesses for this has now been spent in full. There also is \$168,846 in SDT's reserve (money market) account. The Edward Jones investment account had a current cost basis at 3/31/25 of \$75,187, after the \$50,000 was transferred in February from the checking account.
4. FY 2026 Budget will be submitted to the board for approval at the next meeting on 4/17, now that it has been reviewed by the finance committee.
5. Starting with the FY 2026 financials, sub-accounts for certain Chart of Account line items will be added for certain areas including advertising, subscriptions, website update, and others.
6. New Initiative on the proposed budget in FY 2026 is Placer AI- demo scheduled for meeting on 4/17.
7. Considering cancelling SDT's Verizon land line phone service in favor of a web-based provider for cost savings and convenience.
8. SDT Chart of Accounts will be provided along with FY 2026 Proposed Budget to Board

Motion to approve the Third Quarter Financial Statements by Matt P.,
Seconded by Bill P., **Passed** by the Board.

- **Investment** – Presented by Matt P.
SDT's Edward Jones Account currently has a balance of \$76,283.94 and has generated a return of a little over 4.7% since its inception.

Review of the proposed FY 2026 Budget – Scott T.

The Finance Committee has reviewed and is proposing a \$1.9 million budget that is conservatively-based.

- **Policies & Procedures** – Presented by Jim S.

Division of Revenue Communication and Proceedings: Scott T. met with Representative Kim Williams and Department of Finance Deputy Director Rebecca Goldsmith on 3/2. Working to make sure that we identify all the Delaware Business License holders that are connected to our hotel inventory list in Sussex County. Scott T. sent a spreadsheet to all the Chamber Heads and Executive Directors to help reconcile. The last column still needs to be completed and that's what Scott shared with the Deputy Secretary. We want to make sure that all hotels are accounted for with a Delaware Business License. The Board's request in October for Audit was not formally requested nor fulfilled.

On the short-term rental side, we need to develop an inventory list, and that's going to be a separate list. And from a licensee holder standpoint, they are categorized as "accommodation intermediaries" on data.delaware.gov. 2. There is a considerable gap of revenue for STR just from January between what is expected and what is received Jessica W. is comparing AirDNA Reports with what the Division of Revenue is reporting. Jim S. requested a P&P meeting specifically to address these issues.

Executive Director Succession Planning: The P&P Committee has drafted the plan and would like the Board to share further comments and feedback. It has been posted in the virtual boardroom.

- **Marketing** – Presented by Bonnie H.

The committee sent a 10 question survey to the applicant chamber executive directors and Bonnie thanked them for providing feedback regarding the tools and resources most needed and prioritized. Cooperative advertising opportunities (especially digital) were among the top responses. The proposed FY 26 Marketing Plan and Budget includes these offerings.

SDT's exhausted the remaining \$130,000 of its EDA ARPA grant in FY 25, and that is why some of the advertising line items are lower in the FY 26 Budget.

Bonnie outlined and called out highlights of SDT's Third Quarter Marketing Report that was shared and posted in the Boardroom.

Bonnie referenced the SDT Media Coverage Report, powered by SDT's subscription to Muck Rack. SDT's advertising value equivalency (AVE) this quarter was \$313,000 with 33 million unique visits per month to the publications cited in the report.

SDT's Tourism Ambassador Program to date has 221 participants with 179 completing certification.

Jeremy O'Neil with Placer ai joined the meeting via Zoom to present and demonstrate the services of Placer ai regarding traffic movement from SDT's drive-from markets. Their services are primarily based on credit card transactions and apps on mobile devices to track movement and activities. Jeremy used examples from the Sea Witch Festival and the Fire and Ice Festival to demonstrate how this works. SDT's proposed budget includes \$50,000 under New Initiatives that is earmarked for a measurement solution such as Placer ai. This would be based on a cooperative, cost-sharing arrangement with applicant chambers who would utilize this service and subscription. Among other vendors is Zartico that measures similar data along with digital movement. The Delaware Tourism Office is considering a switch from ADARA to Zartico.

Scott T. referred to the FY 26 Marketing Plan that the committee has proposed and reviewed including the following highlights:

- Spends and returns will be tracked on a campaign basis to better measure the effectiveness of each campaign.
- A Crowdriff Content Creator platform will be used to curate and implement much more video in SDT's social media channels, mainly Instagram.
- **Advocacy** – No Update

5. Vote to Adopt the FY 26 Marketing Plan –

Motion by: Kristin M., Seconded by: Ali S., Passed by the Board.

6. Vote to Adopt the FY 26 Budget –

Motion by: Bonnie H., Seconded by: Scott A., Passed by the Board.

7. FY 26 Co-Chairperson Nomination and Vote –

Scott A. nominated Fred T. and asked if there were any more nominations. Having none, **Scott A. made a motion** to install Fred T. as SDT Co-Chairperson starting FY 26. **Seconded by Jim S....Passed by the Board.**

8. DTO Update – Presented by Jessica W.

- Working on a restaurants video to showcase DE's culinary scene that will include Southern Delaware's Culinary Coast™
- No Sports Tourism Capital Grants are included in this year's Bond Bill
- Trail programs are evolving including adding a new State Birding Trail.
- DTO is hosting a National Travel & Tourism Week Event on May 5th at 11am at the Delaware Artist Collaboration's Creative Market in West Rehoboth

9. Other Business / Announcements

- Bonnie H. announced that May 3rd is Heritage Day at the Nanticoke Indian Museum and that a new museum curator has just started.
- Lauren W. announced that May 3rd is BFACC's Ocean to Bay Bike Tour and the area will be teaming with 2,000 cyclist riding in the event. Lauren W. also mentioned she has been involved in an aquatic center project and can provide more information to those interested.

10. Next Board Meeting is on July 17, 2025 from 9:30am - 11:30am.

11. Meeting Adjourned at 11:14 am