

**FRUITA TOURISM ADVISORY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING - VIRTUAL
MAY 14, 2020
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

Members in Attendance: Eric Mello, Kodi Imondi, Orilee Witte, Denise Hight, Joel Kincaid, Sally D’Agostino, Kristy Driver

Members Absent: None

Staff in Attendance: Mike Bennett, Odette Brach, Shannon Vassen

Guest in Attendance: Ryan Burke, Liz Cassi, and Anna Hrovat-Staedter of Slate Communications; Kayla Brown of the Fruita Chamber of Commerce.

1. Call to Order/Roll Call

The meeting of the Fruita Tourism Advisory Council (“FTAC”) was called to order at 11:01 a.m. A quorum was present at the meeting.

2. Introduction of Kristy Driver – New FTAC Member

Kristy Driver provided a brief introduction of herself. She is the owner of VisitFruita.com and has been in the lodging/hospitality businesses for over 30 years. Ms. Driver explained that Visit Fruita owns a number of properties around town that are rented out on a short-term basis. The FTAC welcome Kristy to the committee and group.

3. Consider Minutes from February 27, 2020 Meeting

The FTAC discussed the minutes from the previous meeting, on February 27, 2020, and recommended the following changes to the minutes: (1) Denise Hight stated that there was an additional guest in attendance, and that was Arlene Jackson from the Colorado National Monument; and (2) Sally D’Agostino stated that she did not second any of the motions at the previous meeting, and that Orilee Witte was the member who seconded the motions. Joel Kincaid motioned to approve the minutes as presented with these changes, Ms. Witte seconded that motion. All were in favor of the approving the minutes with the corrections and the motion carried.

4. Consideration of Mini-Grant – Colorado Canyons Association – Map Project

The FTAC then discussed the mini-grant application from the Colorado Canyons Association (“CCA”). CCA requested a \$500 grant to help fund maps for trailheads throughout the McInnis National Conservation Area (Devil’s Canyon, Pollock Bench, and Rabbit Valley).

Ms. Hight began the discussion with stating that she really liked the project. Odette Brach, Human Resources Director for the City of Fruita, then described that in the past, the FTAC has help fund these maps for CCA. She stated that it has been many years since CCA last received funding, so that the funding lasts for a few years. Ms. Witte then described that the Visitor's Center uses the maps a lot, and that she is in support of the application.

Ms. Driver asked a few questions about the maps and wanted to reach out to CCA about how often the maps are stocked and where they are typically located. Mike Bennett, the City Manager for the City of Fruita, explained that the CCA partners with the Bureau of Land Management to distribute the maps, and the maps typically go quick. The FTAC agreed that they would reach out to CCA for the additional information and get back.

After the discussion, Mr. Kincaid made a motion that the FTAC recommend approval of the mini grant to CCA in the amount of \$500. Eric Mello seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion and it passed unanimously.

5. Update from Slate Communications/Update on Budget and Overview of Lodging Projections/Messaging Moving Forward

Mr. Bennett began the discussion on the next agenda item and stated that they will be combining agenda items five, six, and seven into one item. Mr. Bennett began by providing an overview of the City of Fruita's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For all City updates on COVID-19, Mr. Bennett recommended that the group visit fruita.org/covid19.

Mr. Bennett also described that he participates in a weekly call with various Public Land Agencies (such as the Bureau of Land Management, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, etc). These agencies are reporting, Mr. Bennett stated, increased traffic and use on public lands as well as increases in dispersed camping. A lot of this traffic came from people visiting from out of area, Mr. Bennett explained. With that in mind, Mr. Bennett described previous marketing efforts from Slate and the City of Fruita. Previous marketing efforts have asked visitors to stay home or not to recreate more than 10 miles from their home, to practice social distancing on trails, and to avoid large groups on trails or at trailheads.

After that discussion, Ryan Burke, Chief Communications Officer for Slate Communications, provided an introduction to the update from Slate Communications. Mr. Burke described the FTAC retreat from last year and identified a few areas where Slate wanted to focus efforts on this year. For example, Slate wanted to focus on storytelling, sustainability and environmentally, education, and putting the community first. Mr. Burked stated that Slate is shifting their marketing plan, cutting their budget, and really focusing on amenities for the regional residents to explore.

Following the introduction, Liz Cassi, Communications and Account Manager for Slate Communication, continued the update. Ms. Cassi described that Slate had three goals entering the year, and these were to educate, inspire, and invite people to Fruita. Since the pandemic started, Ms. Cassi stated, the focus has been more on education and the inspiring piece and has shifted away from inviting piece. She stated that there has been a lot of positive feedback from

locals and visitors on this. Slate has also paused efforts on SoJern and made the decision to postpone that until next year.

For the first quarter recap from Slate Communications, Anna Hrovat-Staedter, Marketing Specialist, provided the overview. A few highlights from the beginning of the year include that page views to the website increased significantly, the Elevation Outdoors awards did well to showcase Fruita, and that the GoFruita Social Media is also doing well.

After the first quarter update, Mr. Burke discussed ways that Slate may change current marketing efforts. An example, Mr. Burke discussed promoting more staycations for Mesa County residents. He offered a suggestion of looking more locally, and using these same resources in the future. In addition, Mr. Burke stated that Slate will use this time to stockpile and build video library – basically, to get all material necessary to really push marketing when it is acceptable to travel.

Ms. Hrovat-Staedter then presented the updated budget and marketing implementation plan to the FTAC. Slate has identified around \$20,000 in budget cuts in anticipation of reduced revenues. Most of these cuts were identified in the digital marketing and collaborative partnerships line items of the budget and can be resumed next year.

Shannon Vassen, Management Analyst for the City of Fruita, presented on lodging tax projections. Mr. Vassen provided a brief overview of the Marketing and Promotion Fund/Budget and explained that the year started out well for lodging taxes. Both January and February lodging tax revenues were up when compared to the previous year. Mr. Vassen detailed, however, that revenues in March decreased significantly. Mr. Vassen described that after working with the Finance Department, and looking at other communities, Fruita came up with several scenarios or projections for lodging taxes for the remainder of the year. The City is projecting that lodging taxes will decrease 40% April through June, and 30% each month for the remainder of the year. This will result in a decrease of roughly \$44,000 through the end of the year. Mr. Vassen explained that tourism fund does have a healthy fund balance or savings account, and even if revenues decrease significantly, the fund should be able to sustain those decreases.

After that, the FTAC discussed future marketing ideas, and these included staycation ideas (for Mesa County residents), advertising more remote or less traveled trails, and new areas. The group discussed that these ideas are relevant currently and Slate will be able to use these in the future for marketing efforts. The group then discussed specific strategies moving forward, and how to respond as new phases of the reopening plans become implemented.

6. Additional Items

There were two additional items that the FTAC discussed following the previous agenda items. First, is that at the next meeting, the FTAC will be having a policy discussion on what to do regarding special event funding if events are cancelled (and the funding has been paid). Mr. Kincaid reiterated that he wanted to have a full discussion about this and did not want to make any decisions on it at the current meeting.

Second, the group discussed the FTAC meeting schedule moving forward. The FTAC agreed to return to monthly meetings, and that the next meeting in June, will be held virtually. That meeting will be on June 25, 2020 at 11:00 a.m.

There were no other items that were discussed.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 1:05 p.m.