

Diversity Council Meeting Minutes

Feb. 25 2016

Council members present: Terrance Herriott, Tim McCray, Erika Hill, Coleman Randall, Carla Schuessler, Yvette Jefferson, Kenny Generette, April Garner, Tiffany Andrews, Brad Jordan.

Council members not present: Gina Trimarco Cligrow, Natalie Daise, Travis Overton.

Staff present: Diana Greene, Cindy Gettig, Kori, Amanda Blomquist, Kim DaRoja, Ursula Grant, Susan Phillips (via phone).

The meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m.

I. Welcome & Introductions

II. Council Background/Purpose

Terrance Herriott said the council came about through the effort of some individuals through the chamber. The primary goal is to address the minority business community's needs.

He said minority includes African-Americans, Asian-Americans, veterans, women. We want to be an outlet for them we want to figure out specifically who they are in our area and community so we can better serve them and help them and expose them to the benefits of being a chamber member. Figure out what they may need to help their business grow.

He asked the council to come up with two to three minority owned businesses or business professionals. He said we'd like to compile a database so we can reach out to these people to help them. We also want to pick your brains to find out what you think they need and what you'd like to address this year or issues you want to tackle.

III. Diversity in our Local Business Community

a. How Can We Learn More?

"We're going to learn more from you," Herriott said. "We need to figure out a specific target market."

He said nobody has kept a record of minority owned businesses so we have to find out who they are. He asked council to take a couple weeks to think of businesses and people and email them to Amanda.Blomquist@visitmyrtlebeach.com.

He also asked council members to email Amanda ideas of things to work out during the year.

Tiffany Andrews asked what the MBACC membership fee is and asked if the list of names provided is so these people become members.

Herriott said not primarily.

Andrews asked if people will be assisted regardless of membership.

Herriott said yes.

Diana Greene said the point of this council isn't to get members. She said we are starting at the ground level to find out who these people are and what they need.

Jordan suggested polling the membership to find out if business owners identify as a minority. He said that might be something the ambassadors could help with. Once identified, he said we could find out if they are using their designation and what challenges they've found using that designation. Jordan said there are a lot of federal programs designated for women owned, minority owned and service-disabled veteran owned businesses.

From the chamber's perspective, Jordan suggested following federal money in the local community.

Andrews said it sounds like you'd like the council to be somewhat of a watchdog for when there are minority monies available, that the list we have has a fair shake at the dollars.

Jordan said he'd go a step forward and say the chamber is a watchdog for it.

April Garner said she wants to find out and define the council's purpose and identify what minorities are being talked about.

Herriott said minority has been used broadly and ethnicities were not excluded. He said he thinks we can address each segment – African-American, Asian, Latino, women, veterans, etc.

Tim McCray said Horry County businesses have lost out on federal dollars because they couldn't be identified for DBEs (Disadvantaged Business Entities).

Jordan said the federal government defines DBEs so the chamber should be able to use models available out there. He suggested comparing what the SBA, state and federal government designate and offer for DBEs.

Andrews said she would like to see things that can be done to leverage the playing field. She said she likes to set milestones. She also said she doesn't want to put minority businesses in a box. "If I can write a historical piece on the Gullah Geechee then I can write a historical piece about Myrtle Beach."

Jordan said programs are meant to assist small businesses to be successful businesses whether they are minority or not.

Herriott asked if we should identify and then find out what services and programs are needed or if it can be done simultaneously.

Jefferson said she thinks it can be done at the same time. She said we need to make sure people know the chamber is interested in minorities and that the council exists.

Greene asked if something should be placed on the annual membership survey about whether these are minority owned businesses or if it should be on the membership application.

Randall said maybe not on the application. He said it might make people think they will be rejected if they are a minority.

Andrews suggested asking if people would be willing to be a mentor to other businesses to help open doors for these businesses.

Herriott said these are great ideas. He asked council members to put these ideas on paper and send those to Amanda Blomquist.

IV. Chamber update

a. Marketing

Susan Phillips (via phone) said the marketing department does a lot of market research and uses focus groups to help with advertising that markets the destination. She said these ads can't just be what we like, they have to apply to everyone to get the 17.2 million visitors per year we are currently seeing.

She shared info from a survey marketing did that showed African-Americans are interested in Myrtle Beach, that they're looking for more than just the beach, that moms want coupons. She said they also had unprompted feedback about Bike Fest as a safety concern.

Phillips said she goes on several press trips during the year and visits with multiple media members including magazines that target minorities.

Andrews asked about seeing samples of the ads and commercials. She said culture sensitivity has been lacking in all businesses. She said it would be helpful to have folks on the team that are a part of the communities you are trying to reach would make the message more authentic. She said she was curious about the demographics of the audience who express fears about Bike Fest. She said she saw on a slide that 70 percent of people are looking for cultural events. She said that lets us know we need more diverse events.

Garner asked what these writers are writing about. She said there's a good plan to get media here, but said we need to give them something to talk about.

Phillips said itineraries for the publications are customized as strictly or loosely as they prefer. She asks what they would be interested in seeing and doing. She said the publishers want to see everything, they don't want it to be restricted.

Garner said the chamber needs to help impart this heart in the businesses to make sure all businesses are welcoming to all of our visitors because they reflect on Myrtle Beach.

Andrews asked if the ads are in English and Spanish?

Phillips said there's a focus on African American visitor's right now and that there would need to be a focus group on Latinos before English and Spanish ads are made, but it is something that will be looked at in the future.

b. Group Sales

Kim DaRocha introduced Ursula Grant – said the group sales department is lucky to have Grant to represent the chamber because she really can speak to the ethnicities at conferences she attends. One is the Diversity Marketplace conference held in D.C. annually.

DaRocha said there's been approx. 22 percent increase in the family reunion market since the Confederate Flag came down [from the S.C. Statehouse]. The corporate & association is also trending upwards, but slower.

Grant has been working on the AKA South Atlantic Regional Conference coming next month for the last two years.

She said when working with different specific ethnicities she noted that they wanted specifics on how many African-Americans are working in your business and how many are working in management positions at hotels and other businesses.

During small group familiarization trips, DaRoja said they try to have a group that represents men, women and different ethnicities.

c. Membership

Greene gave the council an overview of what membership does.

She said we have about 2,700 members and the Membership Division has a lot of councils that we look to for input to make sure what we are doing is relevant. We have partnerships with the US Chamber, SC Chamber and a unique hospitality partnership.

We hold several events each year, some are for members others are community based.

We oversee the ambassador program, member-to-member discounts, affinity programs, networking events, Chamber Academy education program.

V. Next Steps

Terrance again asked the council to identify people that we should reach out to and what the council members would like to see the council do.

VI. Meeting Dates/Committee Contacts

Council was provided with a list of upcoming meeting dates and contact information for the councils.

The meeting adjourned at 10:29 a.m.