

Kirkland Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC) Retreat Minutes

January 19, 2011

8 – 11 a.m.

Kirkland City Hall

Facilitator: Marie Stake

Present: Penny Sweet (Chair), Jac Cooper, Ryan Noel, Les Utley, Dan Meyer, Kathryn McNeill, Julie Huffman (staff), Ellen Miller-Wolfe (staff).

Absent: Shirley Day

Staff Update

- City webmaster Rob Mullin presented the redesigned ExploreKirkland.com website with a new search feature for shopping and dining by cuisine/type and neighborhood, as well as a google mapping feature.
- Staffmember Julie Huffman presented the new Visitor's and Dining Guides for LTAC feedback. Guides were developed based upon feedback from the hotels.
- Frause's Christina Starr presented an overview of the public relations and advertising plan for 2011 and encouraged the LTAC members to share their plans in order to maximize exposure.
- Christina also presented the plan for the new social media Facebook page, anticipated to be live in April.

Facilitated Discussion

Facilitated Discussion Overview

- I. LTAC's mission/role/scope
- II. A look at the tourism grant funding criteria
- III. Explore ways to improve the grant funding review process

Anticipated Outcomes

- Explore and seek consensus with LTAC members about the mission, role and scope of Kirkland's Lodging Tax Advisory Committee
- Discuss ways to improve the City's Tourism Grant Program's funding criteria and review process

I. Mission, Role, Scope

- Facilitator referenced state law (RCW 67.28.080) which defines the authority of a lodging tax advisory committee and city code which defines the authority of Kirkland's LTAC (KMC 5.19)
- Facilitator explored with members the feedback received prior to retreat about LTAC's role
 - *Promoting community locally & building community vs. outside promotion*
 - *Compromise of community building and outside promotion is where criteria lie*

- *LTAC is a resource for the City Council on tourism and hospitality issues*
- *A sounding board for City Council*
- *To get hospitality interests more involved in the community*
- *Members are ambassadors to promote tourism to shopkeepers and other community entities*
- Through the appreciative inquiry technique, facilitator gathered perspectives on LTAC's role
 - **What has worked well for LTAC as an advisory board?**
 - *Committee leadership changed*
 - *Even in down economy LTAC has a better sense of purpose*
 - *More City & business partnerships and coordination of efforts has continued*
 - *LTAC and the City Council has embraced tourism, and is looking for connections to economic development*
 - **What do you as a member of LTAC value about your role?**
 - *Able to give hotel industry perspective*
 - *Excited about tourism*
 - *Bring shopkeeper connection*
 - *Can share grantee's perspective*
 - *Belief that LTAC is "ears" (catalyst) for City Council*
 - *Value cultural perspective*
 - **How do you see LTAC's mission changing in the next 2-5 years? Next 5 years?**
 - Advanced feedback from LTAC
 - *Promote culture and arts as significant complement of economic development*
 - *Partnership role on small projects throughout the year*
 - *Collaboration and partnership opportunities*
 - *Subcommittee projects*
 - *Hospitality needs base of business so involvement in economic development*
 - *Business community in need of tourism resources (conference space)*
 - *Waterfront linkages and marketing waterfront*
 - *Woodinville is connection for Kirkland (We have hotels; they have wineries)*
 - *Maps*
 - *Feedback on guides*
 - Feedback from Retreat
 - *More meetings will result in more informal connections, which have led to valuable partnerships*
 - *As Cultural Council receives less city funding, it will look to tourism for support*
 - *Legislative emphasis on economic development*
 - *More education to build awareness of tangible results economic development (Show city money at work)*
 - *Track return-on-investment*
 - *Tap/target business traveler*
 - *Closer collaboration between tourism and economic development*
 - *Educate with sounding boards about the importance of tourism, hospitality, and LTAC*
 - *Business Roundtable*
 - *Study Session with Council*
 - *Tourism Networking Group*
 - *Chamber and KDA*

- *LTAC should be Ambassadors*
 - *Communicate the value of Tourism*
 - *Create formal Ambassador program (ambassadorships)*
- *City should conduct a Economic Study*
- *Create a tighter link to community*
- *Change LTAC's name*
- *LTAC members should participate in events*
- *LTAC should guide tourism; promote tourism*
- *LTAC should learn more about Kirkland's relationship to other cities/communities*
- *Connecting with annexation area and Totem Lake Business District*

II. Tourism Grant Funding Criteria

- Facilitator lead an exercise that allowed LTAC to determine which of the existing tourism grant funding criteria should continue and what new criteria should be included in the next cycle.
 - The following existing criteria **shall be applied** in the next funding cycle:
 - Increase hotel occupancy with extended stay
 - Increase day trippers
 - Increase overnight stays during off-season (Oct-May)
 - Provides visitor attractions and/or promotes area's attractions
 - Attract more businesses to Kirkland; generates more business for motels/hotels
 - Event employs partnerships
 - New event & event with a track record
 - Event showcases waterfront (consistent with branding study)
 - The following existing criteria is to be **removed** from current application materials
 - "Improves Kirkland's overall image to stimulate a positive customer awareness"
 - The following criteria **should be added** to application materials
 - Event must take place in the City of Kirkland
 - Applicant must prove return-on-investment; business plan needs to be included in application and must include a budget
 - Event must increase the number of repeat visitors
 - Facilitator's Recommendations:
 - The issue of whether grant applications from profit and non-profit agencies should be treated differently, and identified as such in the application process, should be further discussed by the LTAC. The current application materials do not distinguish between one or the other.
 - ACTION: Staff to return to LTAC with update application materials (cover letter & application)

III. Grant Funding Review Process

- Facilitator quickly reviewed the current tourism grant funding review process
 1. Advertise grant application timeline (April/May)
 2. Applications received (June)
 3. Applications reviewed by LTAC (July)
 4. Funding allocated by LTAC (August)
 5. Recommendations to City Council; Council approves/amends/rejects recommendations (August)
 6. Fund awarded via budget adoption (December)
 7. Staff initiates contracts with selected recipients (January)
- Brainstorm thoughts on process for next cycle

- 3-Step Process will take place over 2 meetings. First meeting: (1) Presentation by applicants to LTAC. Second meeting: (2) Individual Review of application by LTAC members; and (3) LTAC selects and allocates funding amounts
- Rank first; then assign allocation of funding amounts
- Applications should be grouped by category and sent out to committee members ahead of time for review
- Flexibility in allocation needs to remain part of the process
- LTAC/Staff should host a "how to" workshop for potential applicants
- Tiered structure used in 2010 process worked well
- Better define staff role in review process

Final Thoughts

Les Utley asked to address the LTAC regarding a proposal to use approximately \$15,000 in reserve funds. He indicated that the Chamber and KDA will be collocated in new space on Kirkland Avenue that was formerly a yogurt restaurant. The space would be a visitor center as well as a hub for downtown merchants. He suggested some items for outfitting the space including carpeting, signs, computers, etc....Ellen indicated that her recollection was that permanent improvements to a visitor center would require that the City had a property interest. She would research what was allowable with tourism funding. She suggested that the Chamber submit a needs list, she would do the necessary legal research, and the item would be brought back to the LTAC at its next meeting for a recommendation. The LTAC supported the proposal.