



INFORMATIONAL MEMORANDUM

TO: **Planning and Community Development**

FROM: **Brandon Miles, Business Relations Manager**

CC: **Mayor Ekberg**

DATE: **April 8, 2022**

SUBJECT: **2021 Tourism Promotion Area Review**

ISSUE

At the November 23, 2020 City Council meeting the City Council was briefed on a proposal by staff to conduct a review of the Tourism Promotion Area Interlocal Agreement (ILA) in 2021. The City Council expressed support for staff conducting the review since the ILA has been in place for over five years. Staff would like to provide an update on the review completed in 2021.

BACKGROUND

Tourism Promotion Area Interlocal Agreement

In 2014 the Cities of Tukwila, Des Moines, and SeaTac executed an ILA to form a Tourism Promotion Area (TPA) to cover the combined boundaries of the three cities. Under Washington State law most municipalities in King County cannot form their own TPAs and must partner with at least one other jurisdiction¹. Through the TPA ILA the cities agreed that the City of SeaTac would serve as the legislative authority for the TPA area.

In 2014, after receiving a petition from hoteliers, the City of SeaTac formally adopted a resolution setting out a TPA fee in the three-city area. The total fee was \$2 per night per eligible hotel stay in a hotel or motel with at least 90 rooms². The \$2 rate was the maximum permitted under the current State law. State law was recently amended to allow the rate to go up to \$5 per night, provided 60% of the businesses that would pay the increase petition for the increase, and it is approved by the legislative authority.

Per the TPA ILA, 100% of the TPA fee, less a one percent administrative charge by the Department of Revenue, goes to Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority (SSRTA) for tourism promotion efforts in the three-city area under the "Seattle Southside" brand. In 2019, SSRTA received just over \$3.96 million from the TPA fee.

¹ The City of Federal Way was able to carve an exemption to allow it to form its own TPA without the need to partner with another jurisdiction.

² The TPA fee is a flat fee, while the lodging tax is a percentage. This allows the TPA to collect higher revenue than the lodging tax when rates are low. For example, a room at a hotel going for \$100 a night would only provide \$1 in lodging tax funds, while the TPA gets the full \$2.

The agreement provides a 20-year term; however, any member City can withdraw from the TPA ILA by providing one year's notice to the other members. In addition, like any agreement, the signatories to the TPA ILA can mutually agree to amend the agreement at any time.

Allowable Use of Tourism Promotion Area Fee

Revised Code of Washington 35.101.130 states that the Legislative Authority, "...shall have sole discretion as to how the revenue derived from this charge is to be used to promote tourism promotion that increases the number of tourists to the area."

'Tourism Promotion' is defined as, "...activities and expenditures designed to increase tourism and convention businesses, including but not limited to advertising, publicizing, or otherwise distributing information for the purpose of attracting tourists, and operating tourism designation marketing organizations."

Unlike lodging tax provisions of State Law, the TPA RCW provides a definition of tourist³.

A 'tourist' means a person who travels for business or pleasure on a trip:

- (a) Away from the person's place of residence or business and stays overnight in paid accommodations;*
- (b) To a place at least fifty miles away one way by driving distance from the person's place of residence or business for the day or stays overnight. However, island communities without land access are exempt from the mileage requirement under this subsection (5)(b); or*
- (c) To another country or state outside of the person's place of residence or business.*

In addition to the RCWs outlined above, the TPA ILA also provides requirements on how the TPA funds must be used, the following outlines those provisions.

- a. The general promotion of tourism within the Seattle Southside TPA as specified in the businesses plan of the SSRTA;
- b. The marketing of convention and trade shows that benefit local tourism and the Lodging Businesses in the Seattle Southside TPA;
- c. The marketing of the Seattle Southside TPA region to the travel industry in order to benefit local tourism and the lodging businesses in the Seattle Southside TPA;
- d. The marketing of the Seattle Southside TPA region to recruit sporting events in order to promote local tourism and to benefit the Lodging Businesses and tourism industry within the Seattle Southside TPA; and
- e. Direct administration, operation, formation, and start-up costs associated with Seattle Southside TPA and the ongoing management and maintenance of the Seattle Southside TPA program, including but not limited to staff costs, public notice advertising, legal costs, accounting and auditing (including audits of the Parties and the SSRTA as they relate to this Agreement), as approved by SSRTA Board of Directors, provided no funds will be used for costs not directly related to operation of the Seattle Southside TPA, this Agreement, or the SSRTA.

³ This definition goes into effect on July 1, 2020.

[https://tukwilawa.sharepoint.com/sites/mayoroffice/cc/Council Agenda Items/Mayor's Office/PCD, 2022.04.18/Toursim Promotion Area Review/1.0 Informational Memorandum \(Info Memo\).docx](https://tukwilawa.sharepoint.com/sites/mayoroffice/cc/Council%20Agenda%20Items/Mayor's%20Office/PCD,2022.04.18/Tourism%20Promotion%20Area%20Review/1.0%20Informational%20Memorandum%20(Info%20Memo).docx)

DISCUSSION

Following the City Council briefing in November of 2020, Economic Development staff met with staff from the Cities of Des Moines and SeaTac and in December of 2020 the three cities agreed to conduct a staff level review of the TPA ILA and to consider any changes, if warranted.

Because of the City of SeaTac's role as the administrator of the TPA, staff from SeaTac organized meetings between the three cities. SSRTA was no part of the initial meetings between the cities, but SeaTac kept SSRTA informed regarding the work of the TPA review. The three cities identified six areas where the cities desired improved outcomes regarding the TPA:

1. Improved communication, coordination, and oversight between the city staff and the SSRTA when the SSRTA's work plan and budget, and new initiatives are developed.
2. Improved coordination between the cities related to SeaTac's administrative oversight of the SSRTA's work plan and budget.
3. Increased communication and transparency between the SSRTA board and city staff.
4. Determine the best approach to item "d)", related to marketing the region to recruit sporting events.
5. Improved clarity related to the SSRTA's use of TPA, lodging tax, and other revenues for discrete projects.
6. The cities and the SSRTA should develop a shared approach to measuring success in achieving the purpose(s) of the TPA

As the cities were conducting their review SSRTA also began the process of hiring a new CEO/President to replace Katherine Kertzman who retired. Mark Everton came on board in the spring of 2021 and began to be engaged in the discussions regarding the TPA review.

Staff from the three cities and SSRTA have agreed on some high-level actions that SSRTA and the cities will undertake following the TPA review, specifically:

1. The SSRTA will actively involve the cities in the development of its 5-year workplan.
2. SeaTac will take a more active role in ensuring clear communication, and resolving any concerns, between the SSRTA and the three cities.
3. The three cities will strive for consistency in communicating to their respective City Councils about TPA-related issues.
4. The three cities and the SSRTA will hold regular (e.g. quarterly or semi-annual) coordination meetings.
5. The SSRTA and three cities will establish joint performance metrics for tourism promotion area revenues, which will be based upon applicable law and the SSRTA's work plan.
6. The SSRTA will consider the adoption of reasonable procedural and policy recommendations by the three cities that are intended to improve communication and transparency.

The items listed above are considered best practices that the cities and SSRTA will follow as we move forward. At this point it does not seem necessary to amend the TPA ILA or enter into any formal agreements. However, Tukwila staff has indicated that should the city have concerns

in the future regarding these best practices not being followed, the City will ask for a formal agreement to be adopted by the parties.

The three cities and SSRTA have already begun to implement the actions outlined above, which have included:

1. Regular meetings between the three cities and SSRTA to discuss high level issues, including the process to updating SSRTA's strategic plan.
2. Being informed of any lobbying efforts SSRTA might be considering doing in order for the cities to express any concerns, if any.
3. Being invited and meeting the new marketing agency SSRTA has hired to market the three city.

Staff appreciates the work of the City of SeaTac in learning the 2021 review and the openness of SSRTA staff to improve communication with the three cities.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATION

Discussion only.

ATTACHMENTS

- January 31, 2022, staff memorandum to City Managers/City Administrator in the cities of SeaTac, Des Moines, and Tukwila.
- Cover Letter from Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority.
- Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority 2022 Workplan.

To: Carl Cole, SeaTac City Manager
David Cline, Tukwila City Administrator
Michael Matthias, Des Moines City Manager

From: City of SeaTac
Evan Maxim, Community & Economic Development Director
Aleksandr Yeremeyev, Economic Development Manager
Tanja Carter, Economic Development Strategist

City of Tukwila
Derek Speck, Economic Development Administrator
Brandon Miles, Business Relations Manager

City of Des Moines
Tim George, City Attorney
Ashley Young, Events & Facilities Manager

Mark Everton, President of the Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority

Date: January 31, 2022

Re: Three-party review of the Seattle Southside Tourism Promotion Area (TPA)

Background

In May of 2021, the City Managers of SeaTac and Des Moines, and the City Administrator of Tukwila met with the economic development staff for all three cities to review a joint memo dated April 28, 2021 (Attachment 1). The joint memo summarized the findings of the three-city review of the TPA and the Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority (SSRTA).

All three cities expressed a strong desire to maintain the TPA, continue collaborative regional marketing to attract tourists to the three cities, and continue to support the SSRTA. The three cities also identified several desired outcomes that would improve upon the current successes of the SSRTA:

- A. Improved communication, coordination, and oversight between the city staff and the SSRTA when the SSRTA's work plan and budget, and new initiatives are developed;
- B. Improved coordination between the cities related to SeaTac's administrative oversight of the SSRTA's work plan and budget;
- C. Increased communication and transparency between the SSRTA board and city staff;
- D. Determine the best approach to item "d)", related to marketing the region to recruit sporting events;
- E. Improved clarity related to the SSRTA's use of TPA, lodging tax, and other revenues for discrete projects; and
- F. The cities and the SSRTA should develop a shared approach to measuring success in achieving the purpose(s) of the TPA.

At the close of the meeting in May of 2021, staff from the three cities were directed to meet and determine the best approach to achieving the above outcomes.

Joint Meetings & Review

Representatives from the three cities met seven times between May and September. These meetings allowed for a thorough discussion on possible approaches and allowed all three cities to discuss specific desired outcomes. At the close of these meetings, the three cities agreed to approach the SSRTA president to discuss several possible improvements to the working relationship between the SSRTA and the three cities.

In December of 2021, representatives of the three cities met with the SSRTA president (Mark Everton¹) to discuss eight “discussion items”. The meetings between the three cities and the SSRTA were positive and productive. The following recommended approach, while not reflecting all of the items every city desired, will address the desired outcomes identified in May 2021.

Recommended Approach

In general, city staff and the SSRTA have agreed on the following “high level” items; specific components of these items are described in Attachment 2.

1. The SSRTA will actively involve the cities in the development of its 5-year workplan; SeaTac will take a more active role in ensuring clear communication, and resolving any concerns, between the SSRTA and the three cities.
2. The three cities will strive for consistency in communicating to their respective City Councils about TPA-related issues.
3. The three cities and the SSRTA will hold regular (e.g. quarterly or semi-annual) coordination meetings.
4. The SSRTA and three cities will establish joint performance metrics for tourism promotion area revenues, which will be based upon applicable law and the SSRTA’s work plan.
5. The SSRTA will consider the adoption of reasonable procedural and policy recommendations by the three cities that are intended to improve communication and transparency.

Next Steps

The city and SSRTA staff generally agreed that the above approach should address many of the concerns that prompted this review. The organizations have also agreed that an adaptive approach may be required. As noted in the April 2021 memo, a permanent (durable) agreement is valuable; at present, staff recommends that this memo with attachments serve as the agreement.

¹ In June of 2021 the former SSRTA president, Katherine Kurtzman, retired. Mark Everton was hired as the new president of the SSRTA by its board.

Attachment 2 – April 28, 2021 Memo

To: Carl Cole, SeaTac City Manager
David Cline, Tukwila City Administrator
Michael Matthias, Des Moines City Manager

From: City of SeaTac
Evan Maxim, Community & Economic Development Director
Aleksandr Yeremeyev, Economic Development Manager
Tanja Carter, Economic Development Strategist

City of Tukwila
Derek Speck, Economic Development Administrator
Brandon Miles, Business Relations Manager

City of Des Moines
Tim George,
Ashley Young, Events & Facilities Manager

Date: April 28, 2021

Re: Three-party review of the Seattle Southside Tourism Promotion Area (TPA)

Background

In November of 2020, the City of Tukwila initiated contact with the cities of Des Moines and SeaTac, expressing a desire to review and consider improvements to the administration of the TPA. In particular, the three cities sought to ensure that the TPA, and by extension the Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority (SSRTA), is accomplishing the purpose of the TPA as articulated in the Interlocal Agreement. Further, the Interlocal Agreement that enabled the TPA has now been in effect for over six years and the City of Tukwila felt it was an appropriate time for an evaluation.

In mid-December of 2020, the three cities agreed to engage in a staff level review of the TPA program to determine what, if any, adjustments to the administration of the TPA are warranted, and the appropriate mechanism to make any necessary adjustments. Generally, staff understood that a shared understanding of the issues, the legal landscape, and options on how to proceed would result from the staff level review.

Representatives from the three cities met on January 8, January 22, February 12, February 26, and March 12 initially to identify a scope of review and then several options on how to proceed. The SSRTA was not asked to participate directly in the review, though SeaTac staff did inform the SSRTA president that the review was occurring.

Scope of Review and Approach

The Interlocal Agreement (ILA) establishes the intended use of TPA funds. The TPA funds may be used for five categories of work: a) promoting tourism, b) marketing convention and trade shows, c) marketing the TPA region to the travel industry, d) marketing the TPA region to recruit sporting events, and e) the operations and administration of the SSRTA. The three cities have concluded that items “a)”, “d)”, and “e)” warranted additional review (see attached).

Once the scope of review was established, the staff identified the desired outcomes that would address the concerns, and possible mechanisms to achieve the desired outcomes.

Desired Outcomes

Staff from all three cities expressed a strong desire to maintain the TPA, continue collaborative regional marketing to attract tourists to the three cities, and continue supporting the SSRTA. The following desired outcomes improve upon the current successes of the SSRTA and destination marketing efforts by economic development staff in the three cities.

Generally, there is consensus around the following desired outcomes:

- A. Improved communication, coordination, and oversight between the city staff and the SSRTA when the SSRTA’s work plan and budget, and new initiatives are developed;
- B. Improved coordination between the cities related to SeaTac’s administrative oversight of the SSRTA’s work plan and budget;
- C. Increased communication and transparency between the SSRTA board and city staff;
- D. Determine the best approach to item “d)”, related to marketing the region to recruit sporting events;
- E. Improved clarity related to the SSRTA’s use of TPA, lodging tax, and other revenues for discrete projects; and
- F. The cities and the SSRTA should develop a shared approach to measuring success in achieving the purpose(s) of the TPA.

A. Improved communication, coordination, and oversight between the city staff and the SSRTA when the SSRTA’s work plan and budget, and new initiatives are developed. This outcome relates to both items “a)” the general promotion of the TPA region and “e)” the operations and administration of the SSRTA. The communication and coordination between the SSRTA and the cities over the last several years has varied significantly from city to city. This has led to several issues, specifically related to: brand identity, marketing within and outside of 50 miles, uncoordinated lobbying, and alignment between the SSRTA’s work plan and the cities’ work plans. There is also concern that the SSRTA work plan has broadened to include items not directly related to tourism promotion, which may lead to the inefficient duplication of efforts with other organizations (e.g. the Seattle Southside Chamber of Commerce). A standard approach to communication and coordination between the cities and the SSRTA should address

these issues. The cities also desire to ensure that the SSRTA's work plan serves the needs of the ratepayers, which would be addressed through improved support and oversight as the work plan is developed. The cities should work with the SSRTA to develop the next 5-year work plan, scheduled for mid to late 2021 after the new SSRTA president is hired. The cities and SSRTA should establish a procedure to ensure coordination as new SSRTA initiatives are identified. The SSRTA work plans should be informed by, and supportive of, destination development initiatives and priorities of the TPA cities.

B. Improved coordination between the cities related to SeaTac's administrative oversight of the SSRTA's work plan and budget. This outcome relates primarily to item "e)", the operations and administration of the SSRTA. There has been little coordination between the cities during the annual review and approval of the SSRTA budget by the City of SeaTac. City staff from Des Moines and Tukwila have attempted to establish direct contact with the SSRTA to varying degrees of success. There is no clear collective direction from the cities to the SSRTA related to the prioritization of work plan items, nor is there collaboration between the cities around a shared understanding of the SSRTA work plan. The cities should establish standardized working procedures for coordinating their work and communicating with the SSRTA.

C. Increased communication and transparency between the SSRTA board and city staff. This outcome relates to both items "a)" the general promotion of the TPA region and "e)" the operations and administration of the SSRTA. The city staff have limited contact and insight into the decision-making processes of the SSRTA board. City staff also have not established a direct relationship with the SSRTA board members, so it is unclear if the SSRTA board understands the cities' role relative to the TPA, economic development, destination development, and marketing. Due to the lack of communication and transparency, it is unclear whether the SSRTA board and the cities are providing consistent direction and guidance to the SSRTA. City and SSRTA staff should partner to increase contact between city staff and SSRTA board members and ensure best practices for open public meetings.

D. Determine the best approach to item "d)", related to marketing the region to recruit sporting events. Item "d)" is unusual in the ILA in that it represents a specific set of actions and outcomes rather than a broader goal or purpose statement. Because of the specific nature of the statement, it is unclear whether there has been significant progress in accomplishing item "d)". City staff discussed several possible desirable outcomes, including amendment of the ILA to focus on desired outcomes or possible clarification with the SSRTA regarding this specific item through a memorandum of understanding. Although there is general support to maintain a sport-related focus as it benefits the TPA cities and differentiates them within the region, the city staff did not reach consensus on how best to address this item.

E. Improved clarity related to the SSRTA’s use of TPA, lodging tax, and other revenues for discrete projects. This outcome relates to both items “a)” the general promotion of the TPA region and “e)” the operations and administration of the SSRTA. In recent years, it has not been apparent what work by the SSRTA is funded by TPA funds, versus work that is funded by lodging tax or other revenue sources. This has led to some issues related to various work plan items and questions about whether an item is subject to the “50 mile rule” associated with TPA funds, or simply the reporting requirements associated with the lodging tax funds. It is not clear what SSRTA work plan items are subject to oversight as “TPA funded” work by SeaTac. In addition, it is important to ensure that the SSRTA will remain financially stable. The SSRTA and cities should work together to ensure that future work plan and budget materials clearly distinguish between SSRTA work plan items that are funded by the TPA and other work plan items and to ensure long term financial stability. City staff agreed that establishing common understanding of allowable uses and limitations of both TPA funds and lodging tax funds will result in improved communication and collective outcomes.

F. The cities and the SSRTA should develop a shared approach to measuring success in achieving the purpose(s) of the TPA. This outcome relates to both items “a)” the general promotion of the TPA region and “e)” the operations and administration of the SSRTA. The ILA establishes the purpose of the Tourism Promotion Area and serves as a basis for the development of the SSRTA’s work plan and budget. As it relates to overall compliance with applicable statutes and the terms of the Interlocal Agreement, the SSRTA and the cities have primarily relied on reviews by the Office of the Washington State Auditor¹ to ensure compliance. The State Auditor does not measure the effectiveness of specific work plan items. The cities and the SSRTA should develop a shared approach and understanding around how success is measured and communicated to staff, ratepayers, and City Councils.

Recommended Next Steps

The city staff generally identified two possible approaches moving forward:

1. The creation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the three cities; and
2. Amendment(s) and/or an addendum to the ILA.

The majority of the desired outcomes above represent an improvement to communication, coordination, and transparency either between the cities, or between the cities and the SSRTA. However, creating a permanent agreement between the cities, and possibly the SSRTA, is desirable to avoid the same concerns and issues that prompted this review. Consequently, staff

¹ The Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee (JLARC) reporting primarily focuses on the use of lodging tax funds for the purposes authorized under the applicable statutory authority (RCW 67.28).

from the three cities recommend establishing some form of permanent (durable) agreement related to the above desired outcomes.

The city staff discussed both options to creating a permanent operational agreement but did not reach consensus regarding a recommended approach. Presuming the City Managers' concur, staff will meet over the next few months to achieve the outcomes described and develop the permanent agreement.

Attachment 2 - Recommended Approach

This recommended approach is based upon the 4/28/2021 memorandum and joint city / SSRTA discussions in 2021. These items are intended to provide a summary of an agreed approach between the cities and the SSRTA, with the goal of improving the current operating relationship between all organizations.

General items

1. These are non-binding agreements, which will be periodically reviewed. In the event this approach is not successful, the cities could consider binding agreements.
2. The cities and SSRTA will regularly review this approach and adjust as needed.
3. When the SSRTA develops an updated 5 year work plan, the cities and SSRTA will engage in a comprehensive review of how the ILA/TPA is filling cities' needs and whether the SSRTA remains aligned with the cities strategic plans
4. In its role as the legislative and administrative authority, SeaTac will:
 - a. Facilitate joint city direction to the SSRTA on prioritization of work plan items, including:
 - i. Annual review of SSRTA's proposed budget / work plan by each city
 - ii. Ensuring opportunity for clarification
 - iii. Expectation that SSRTA would reasonably adjust work plan to address concerns
 - iv. SeaTac to convey joint city direction / guidance to the SSRTA board / president
 - v. Informing SSRTA stakeholder outreach for work plan development
 - b. Work with SSRTA to share budget and board appointment information with Des Moines / Tukwila in a timely way
 - c. Seek meaningful resolution of disputes between the 3 cities and the SSRTA
 - i. The cities and the SSRTA will generally seek to reach consensus
 - ii. When the cities cannot reach consensus, SeaTac will work with the SSRTA to address the majority's concerns
5. All three cities and the SSRTA are committed to clear and open communication and improved coordination between the cities and the SSRTA. To achieve this, the three cities and SSRTA agree to:
 - d. Provide consistent information and content to the community and City Councils, regarding:
 - i. TPA funds (limitations, uses, etc.)
 - ii. Lodging tax monies (limitations, uses, etc.)
 - iii. Performance metrics
 - iv. Consistent understanding of funding limitations (e.g. 50-mile rule)
 - e. Support methods for sharing information between the three jurisdictions
 - i. Semiannual "coordination meeting", or similar
 - ii. Establish general awareness of work plan items
 - iii. Focus on sharing information that may affect other jurisdictions' work / TPA
 - iv. Avoid "surprise" council / committee briefings regarding the TPA
 - f. SSRTA Budget materials
 - i. Clearly identify TPA funds, lodging tax revenues, and other revenues
 - ii. Clearly identify expenditures as TPA, lodging tax, or other

- iii. For “other” sources of revenues / expenditures – establish process to evaluate / address impacts on TPA priorities / work plan items
 - g. Meet regularly to focus on the following topics
 - i. Work plan / budget
 - 1. Develop 5-year strategic plan
 - 2. Review annual work plan / budget
 - 3. Focus areas:
 - a. Brand identity
 - b. Marketing focus (50 mile)
 - c. Alignment between cities
 - d. Avoiding conflicts / duplication of efforts
 - 4. Determine best approach to marketing the region to recruit sporting events
 - ii. Establish a process for cities / SSRTA to collaborate on setting lobbying priorities and performing any lobbying actions
 - 1. The cities and SSRTA recognize that the SSRTA is limited by State law in its ability to lobby
- 6. The three cities and SSRTA desire clear, meaningful performance metrics for the SSRTA’s work.
 - h. The cities / SSRTA will jointly develop performance metrics relative to the use of TPA funds, which will result in:
 - i. Shared reporting
 - ii. Shared terminology
 - iii. An established level of performance
 - i. Regular meetings between the city staff and the SSRTA board / board representative
 - i. Timed to match board decision-making re: work plan and budget
 - ii. Opportunity for formal communication between cities and SSRTA board / board representative



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April 11, 2022

Hello Tukwila City Councilmember,

As the new CEO of the Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority, I am finding that my arrival in the region and joining the RTA have come at an opportune time. Tourism and visitation in our region are finally showing positive signs of emerging from COVID-19. As the RTA team prepared for 2022 and beyond, we felt that a one-year operational plan was needed as we work towards creating a new multi-year strategic plan. The plan for crafting the 2023-2027 strategic plan will involve input from you and all our regional stakeholders. I would like to share with you the RTA's plans for the upcoming year by providing you with a copy of the RTA's 2022 Work Plan.

As a steward of public funds, the RTA operates under a multi-year strategic plan. The 2009-2014 plan identified a focus on community alliances, enhancing products and services, growing visitor segments, and nurturing the brand to enhance the local economy and to enhance the perception of being a superior destination.

The 2016-2021 strategic plan identified key the areas that the RTA would provide benefit to the region and result in increasing visitation while extending the average length of stay and encouraging additional visitor spending.

The 2022 Work Plan is intended to provide the organization direction as we create a longer term post-COVID-19 strategic plan to market the region. The core objectives of increasing visitation, having guests stay longer and spend more in our region are still critical to supporting our tourism industry. For 2022, we feel that there is a need to enhance the perception and awareness of the region now more than ever before. We are going to focus on re-introducing the Seattle Southside region to travelers, groups, and corporations in this new and very different travel environment. Raising awareness of the destination by highlighting the unique identity of each of our destination cities and focusing on the needs of leisure and corporate travelers, meetings, cruise passengers, and sports participants is the foundation of our upcoming strategies.

In short, the RTA is looking at 2022 as a year of re-imagining the region through redesign of our image, messaging, and channels that we communicate to our target audiences. I hope that you are as excited as we are about what lies ahead for Seattle Southside. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have. Please feel free to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

Mark Everton, CEO

SEATTLE SOUTHSIDE



SeaTac | Tukwila | Des Moines

SEATTLE SOUTHSIDE REGIONAL TOURISM AUTHORITY 2022 WORK PLAN



These goals are the core mission of Seattle Southside RTA:

1. Increase the number of tourists and groups coming to Seattle Southside.
2. Increase the average length of stay.
3. Increase visitor spending at businesses in the cities of SeaTac, Tukwila, and Des Moines.
4. Enhance the perception and awareness of the region as a preferred travel destination.

As the Regional Tourism Authority, our staff will work together with partners, stakeholders, and community members to build toward being the destination that visitors and groups know and prefer for accessing everything the Pacific Northwest has to offer, emphasizing the experiences within Seattle Southside.

The travel environment is ever-changing and holds many new possibilities. Seattle Southside is well positioned to grow and thrive while meeting the increased demand to visit our beautiful Northwest region and exceeding visitor expectations. The strategy will be to turn the spotlight on the varied opportunities in our region and welcome people who have not been here in the past.

We are going to focus on re-introducing the Seattle Southside region to travelers, groups, and corporations in this new and very different environment. Raising awareness of the destination, highlighting the unique identity of each of our destination cities, and focusing on leveraging our sports facilities will support the foundation of our upcoming strategies.

The following objectives and tactics make up the RTA's organizational plans for 2022 and will help set the stage for developing a new long-term strategic plan.



For more information about Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority, please visit www.SeattleSouthside.com, email info@SeattleSouthside.com or call 206-575-2489.

MARKETING & COMMUNICATION DIVISION

The marketing and communications division will be heavily focused on developing new advertising campaigns and strategies, rebuilding the website, updating and creating content and revising the visual identity to increasing awareness of and visitation to the destination. With the addition of a few new key staff members, we will be able to bring some marketing programs in house to expand the reach of our services to partners and spreading our message.

Objective #1: Develop and implement leisure advertising strategy targeting prospective travelers to increase visitation to the region, spend with partner businesses and awareness of the destination.

TACTICS

- *Evaluate Agency Relationship:*
Select most qualified agency partner to help develop and execute new campaigns, programs, advertising opportunities such as remarketing social and website visitors. Target travel profiles, focus on new audience opportunities (cruise) and seasonal opportunities.
- *Refresh Visual Identity:*
Update visual identity for use in all advertising materials, website and collateral. Direct focus to the destination and less on the RTA.
- *Maximize Research Tools:*
Study points of interest throughout the region and Seattle Southside to understand the flow of visitor travel. Track occupancy and visitor length of stay and visitor spending including revenue to evaluate recovery and shape future plans.
- *Develop New Campaigns:*
Using research and agency collaboration, refine travel profiles based on motivations and assess regional perceptions to determine how best to reach and communicate with high impact travelers. Review social media advertising opportunities such as a newsletter subscription campaign and launch program. Develop strategy for in-market marketing such as SEM, in-room/hotel/shuttle/airport messaging, geo fenced messages, etc.
- *Execute Advertising Campaigns:*
While developing new campaigns, continue interim ad campaign focused on Exploring Seattle Southside that will run until new creative is launched. Continue to build awareness of Seattle Southside and increase travel consideration via search and social.

Objective #2: Increase website visits and visitor intent actions.

TACTICS

- *Audit and Redesign Website:*
Audit website content to streamline experiences and remove or update underperforming or irrelevant content. Rebuild website using a new software that is more robust, user friendly and open source. Incorporate updated visual identity, research

and content strategies. Develop custom maps and itineraries and create more digital experiences to convert potential travelers. Review data capture processes and update or add to various sections of the website to secure more opportunities for targeted marketing.

- **Enhance SEO and SEM:**
Refine SEO strategy to ensure current and new content is targeting the intended audience. Continue content audit of website ensuring all elements are updated and created with the most effective SEO content. Bring Search Engine Marketing initiatives in house based on agency strategy guidance to reduce third party costs and maintain flexibility and control.
- **Monitor and Boost Website Health:**
Monitor website health and performance by fixing errors, tracking CMS backend configuration and ensuring third party service providers are working properly. Identify

landing pages or microsites to build to capture search traffic or advertising campaign traffic and provide a more robust experience resulting in conversions.

- **Develop Robust Content:**
Optimize content and meta data to meet best industry standards. A/B test content to ensure the best experience. Based on editorial calendar, update home page, landing pages, menus, content, etc. to enhance seasonal campaigns. Modify event calendar to generate interest and awareness about upcoming events and make it easier for new events to be added. Coordinate photo and video shoots for partners, events and activities to ensure current content and support partners with their advertising efforts. Optimize content for use on all platforms to extend the length and reach of everything produced. Determine new video and photo assets needed vs. what can be edited to create new content.

Objective #3: Enhance regional awareness and perception of Seattle Southside including tourism partners.

TACTICS

- **Continue Influencer Campaign:**
Review successes and opportunities from 2021 Influencer campaign and develop and launch 2022 campaign.
- **Bring Public Relations Initiatives in House:**
Determine best program to track and report activities. Develop media pitching calendar based on target publications editorial calendars, seasonal events, RTA activities, partner updates, etc.
- **Strengthen Media Connections:**
Maintain CRM database of media outlets to receive pitches. Connect with relevant industry groups such as PRSA to network and learn best practices. Send out monthly Calls

for Content to partners to develop and enhance pitches, website and social content. Develop monthly newsletters targeting audiences to increase engagement with web content. Coordinate TBEX travel show including booth and fam tour to generate positive publicity and build contact database. Redesign the layout and content of the Media section on the website to be more informative to all media including potential social media influencers, travel writers, fact checkers, etc.

- **Enhance Media Services:**
Develop partner editorial calendar to share schedule of distribution. Build out custom fam

tours and corresponding web experience/ tour/savings pass. Update media kit to include latest destination information. Conduct PR perception study with regional and national media.

- *Bring Social Media Initiatives in house:*
Ensure content and voice are consistent with the brand strategy. Use editorial calendar to

determine cadence and message of social media posts and ensure interactions are monitored on regular basis on all accounts. Revise social media policy to ensure best practices for public agencies are being met. Monitor user generated content to share on web, social, newsletters, collateral, etc.

Objective #4: Enhance and develop new visitor experiences to support tourism partners and increase length of stay and visitor spend.

TACTICS

- *Strengthen Scenes Program:*
Develop new strategy for Scenes program including new locations and Trail experience. Create marketing plan to support the program.
- *Develop New Passes:*
Explore additional passes for development such as ale trails, happy hour, short term itineraries, media fams, etc.
- *Enhance Collateral:*
Revise the travel planner and other collateral for a digital experience. Print a limited number for mail requests.
- *Expand Outreach to Non-Hotel Partners:*
Create awareness about services provided by RTA and enhance participation in programs. Maintain the monthly Insider newsletter.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

The RTA business development strategy for the meetings, sports, and tour/travel market is based on a partner-centric approach with sales and marketing efforts focused on steering business directly to partners. The strategy combines content marketing tactics with traditional sales efforts, partner sales support initiatives, and programs to connect partners directly to planners. Messaging to planners will highlight the assets within the destination, branding the region of Seattle Southside as an ideal destination for meetings, sporting events, tour groups, and packaged travel and the RTA as a resource for supporting and enhancing events. Equally as important, focus will be placed on developing tools, collateral, trainings, events, and opportunities that will support partners' ability to access, acquire, and close business.

Objective #1: Increase Meetings Business for hotel partners within the Association, Corporate, and SMERF markets.

TACTICS

- **Rebuild Meetings Microsite:**
Revise and rebuild microsite for a meeting planner audience with a focus on optimizing usability and usefulness for the planner.
- **Media Buy:**
Strategize, develop, and manage media buy and implementation of marketing campaigns to group audiences, focused on highlighting partner hotels and venues, Seattle Southside assets, and branding Seattle Southside as an ideal location for meetings. Pursue strategic marketing partnerships with third party planners and booking agencies with a focus on strategies that steer business directly to partners.
- **Planner Newsletters:**
Produce monthly newsletter for a meeting planner audience to maintain connections with database of clients. Newsletter content will also be distributed to third party mailing lists.
- **Content Creation:**
Develop new content for the meetings microsite (web content/articles). Content will contribute to newsletter and social media strategies.
- **Social Media Engagement:**
Generate social media content relevant to business development. Connect with planners through LinkedIn, comment on posts, and look for ways to heighten engagement, such as utilizing live video.
- **Familiarization Tours & Events:**
Plan familiarization tours and events that showcase Seattle Southside facilities and assets.
- **Connect One on One with Planners:**
Through active attendance at sales conventions, sales missions, events, and tradeshows, present the benefits of bringing meetings to Seattle Southside.
- **Industry Involvement:**
Attend networking events, continue involvement with industry associations (WSAE, PCMA, etc.), volunteer and/or support industry associations (board appointments, committees, events, etc.), and pursue opportunities for stage time/sponsorships to increase Seattle Southside's visibility.

- **Launch Partner Showcase Program:**
Develop scope, launch, and manage program to enable more partners to attend approved sales conventions and tradeshow. Coordinate pre-show promotions, post-show

follow-ups, design collateral pieces, manage show activations, assist with appointment requests, and collaborate on appointment participation.

Objective #2: Increase sports events in or near Seattle Southside with an emphasis on maximizing opportunities for partner hotels to obtain room nights from participants or attendees.

TACTICS

- **Rebuild Sports Microsite:**
Revise and rebuild microsite for a sports planner audience with a focus on optimizing usability and usefulness for the planner.
- **Media Buy:**
Strategize, develop, and manage media buy and implementation of marketing campaigns to sports planner audiences, focused on sports facility assets.
- **Planner Newsletters:**
Produce newsletter for a sports planner audience to maintain connections with database of clients. Newsletter content will also be distributed to third party mailing lists.
- **Content Creation:**
Develop new content for the sports microsite (web content/articles). Content will contribute to newsletter and social media strategies.
- **Social Media Engagement:**
Submit posts for content to MarCom for distribution on social media channels. Engage with sports planners on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Playeasy.
- **Familiarization Tours & Events:**
Partner with neighboring DMOs and the Seattle Sports Commission on familiarization tours and events that showcase Seattle Southside facilities and assets.
- **Connect One on One with Planners:**
Through active attendance at sales conventions, sales missions, events, and tradeshow, present the benefits of bringing events to Seattle Southside.
- **Industry Involvement:**
Attend networking events, continue involvement with industry associations (Seattle Sports Commission, etc.) volunteer and/or support industry associations (board appointments, committees, events, etc.), and pursue opportunities for stage time/sponsorships to increase Seattle Southside's visibility.
- **Manage Housing Program for Sports:**
Work with EventConnect, Starfire Sports, and other tournament organizers in the region to increase and optimize utilization of the RTA's housing platform.
- **Connect with Regional Sports Facilities:**
Pursue connections with sports facilities in neighboring cities to collaborate on bringing sports events to the region and developing a sports infrastructure.
- **Maintain Relationships with Facility Partners:**
Connect with Seattle Southside sports facility partners to explore ways to enhance partnerships and open up sports event opportunities.

Objective #3: Increase tour and travel business for partner hotels with an emphasis on the cruise market.

TACTICS

- **Rebuild Tour Industry Microsite:**
Revise and rebuild microsite for a tour/travel planner audience with a focus on optimizing usability and usefulness for the planner.
- **Media Buy:**
Strategize, develop, and manage media buy and implementation of marketing campaigns to tour/travel planner audiences with a focus on strategies that steer business directly to partners.
- **Planner Newsletters:**
Produce newsletter for a tour/travel planner audience to maintain connections with database of clients. Newsletter content will also be distributed to third party mailing lists.
- **Content Creation:**
Develop new content for the tour/travel microsite (web content/articles). Content will contribute to newsletter and social media strategies.
- **Social Media Engagement:**
Submit posts for content to MarCom for distribution on social media channels. Engage with tour/travel planners on Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.
- **Familiarization Tours & Events:**
Partner with neighboring DMOs and the Port of Seattle on familiarization tours and events that showcase Seattle Southside facilities and assets.
- **Connect One on One with Planners:**
Through active attendance at sales conventions, sales missions, events, and tradeshow, present the benefits of Seattle Southside.
- **Industry Involvement:**
Attend networking events, continue involvement with industry associations (Skal, NTA, PSBTA, etc.) volunteer and/or support industry associations (board appointments, committees, events, etc.), and pursue opportunities for stage time/sponsorships to increase Seattle Southside's visibility.
- **Connect Partners to Cruise Market:**
Pursue ways to educate, connect, and optimize cruise business for partners through events such as a symposium/panel presentation on how to work with the cruise industry.

Objective #4: Support business partners' group sales by providing partners with impactful opportunities and marketing/sales tools.

TACTICS

- **Rebuild Partner Microsite & Extranet:**
Revise and rebuild microsite and Extranet for partners with a focus on optimizing usability and usefulness for the planner.
- **Coalesce Partner Sales Staff:**
Develop a group identity to bring together Seattle Southside partner hotel and event venue sales staff. Brand this group to create a more unified destination and a more engaged sales community.
- **Understand Partner Needs and Status:**
Meet with select hotel partners regularly to discuss business development opportunities, their objectives and roadblocks, and find ways the RTA can support them achieve their goals through marketing or partnership services.

- **Sales Bootcamp:**
Develop a professional development series to help partners at hotels and event venues maximize their sales process.
- **Partner Marketing Support:**
Provide hotel and venue partners with marketing support and/or product toolkits to assist in their sales efforts (such as video, collateral, etc.). Needs will be identified through routine communications with partners.
- **Promote Director of Sales' Collaboration:** Provide Seattle Southside Director of Sales' the opportunity to come together and discuss their challenges, solutions, and opportunities.
- **Manage SeaTac Hotels – Shopping Shuttle:**
Optimize utilization of the shuttle through communication with hotels, promotions for riders, and management of program.
- **Planner Focus Group:**
Invite planners to experience Seattle Southside during a multi-day familiarization event and participate in a focus group to review the region's assets and the RTA's marketing collateral. Involve the IMPACT Group whenever possible and share the resulting report with partners to better equip them in understanding the planner perspective.
- **Planner Advisory Group:**
Recruit planners (from Planner Focus Group) to join a Seattle Southside Planner Advisory Group. Feature this group on marketing materials providing testimonials for the destination and utilize members for review of new ads, programs, or initiatives from the RTA as well as from the IMPACT Group in order to garner the planner perspective.
- **Business Development Data Sharing:**
Using data sources such as Cvent, STR, and Zartico, regularly provide partners with data and information relevant to business development. Produce a Partner Budgeting Toolkit by Q3 to support hotel planning and budgeting for next year.



For more information about Seattle Southside Regional Tourism Authority, please visit www.SeattleSouthside.com, email info@SeattleSouthside.com or call 206-575-2489.