Marketing Council Meeting Minutes
October 8th, 2025
Meeting In MBACC Boardroom

Marketing Council Members in Attendance: Sean Bailey, Charlie Belissary, Mayur Jeram, Mark Lazarus, Tom Tse, Jordan Watkins

Staff in Attendance: Stuart Butler, Jen Brunson, Diane Charno, Bob Harris, Melissa Kavanagh

Call to Order: 11:01 AM

Minutes Approval: Mayur Jeram -Motion, Tom Tse - 2nd – All Approved

Group Sales Update: The Group Sales update, presented by Bob Harris, highlighted strong performance and continued growth across multiple market segments. As of October 6, 2025, Visit Myrtle Beach had generated 593 group leads, totaling 353,468 group lead room nights and 280,635 definite room nights—a 5% increase year-over-year despite a 7% decline in total lead volume. Myrtle Beach was confirmed as the host of the 2026 South Carolina Governor's Conference on Tourism, marking a significant win for the destination. The city also continues to attract major future events including Rendezvous South (March 2026) and Meetings Today Live (November 2028).

Recent hosted events included the Arrowhead Religious Planners retreat, which expanded exposure among key national religious meeting planners. The team also confirmed that federal per diem rates for 2026 will remain flat compared to 2025, aligning with broader national trends. The 65th anniversary of CanAm Days will be celebrated March 13–22, 2026, featuring a signature concert and a motorcoach breakfast in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism (SCPRT) and the Coastal Networking Cooperative (CNC).

The sports tourism segment continues to perform well, with Myrtle Beach successfully hosting events such as the 2025 US Open Team Table Tennis Championships, ASANA Women's Softball World Series, and SC Special Olympics Fall Games. The Boost at the Beach Esports Tournament received the 2025 Outstanding Event of the Year Award from the National Association of Collegiate Esports, highlighting the destination's growth in this emerging market. Facility investment remains a priority, with the North Myrtle Beach Park expansion nearly complete, adding multiple baseball and multi-use fields.

Ongoing lodging developments also demonstrate strong momentum. Highlights include the Compass by Margaritaville groundbreaking, Marina Inn at Grande Dunes renovations

scheduled for completion in May 2026, and new builds such as the Home2Suites at Inlet Square Mall and the Hampton Inn Cherry Grove. The Sun and Sand Resort will be redeveloped into a Fairfield by Marriott, while Hilton's Oceans 23 expansion continues to transform the Ocean Boulevard landscape. Renovations at the Myrtle Beach Convention Center are set to begin in November 2025, focusing on lighting, drainage, and functionality improvements, coordinated with concurrent Sheraton Hotel lobby and dining upgrades.

Marketing Updates: The Marketing update, presented by Diane Charno and Stuart Butler, focused on current market conditions, performance insights, and forward-looking strategies. Summer occupancy fell below the original forecast. Precipitation affected occupancy throughout summer, particularly in June. Also, Economic uncertainty and increased inflation affected travel trends and summer visitation.

The presentation also highlighted the success of the Retail Sports Marketing (RSM) initiative, which has leveraged just $1.15 million in reinvested funds to produce more than $21 million in advertising value through partnerships with brands like Kroger, Entenmann's, and Pampers. This model continues to be recognized as a best practice within the state for maximizing grant efficiency.

Looking ahead to FY26, the marketing budget will decrease by approximately $9 million following the conclusion of federal recovery funds. The team emphasized a renewed focus on efficiency, optimizing ROI, and strategic storytelling to sustain national visibility. Canadian visitation remains down by an estimated 30–40%, but Myrtle Beach continues to prioritize engagement and market retention through tailored campaigns that reinforce its accessibility and value proposition.

From a branding standpoint, the team is considering updates to the Visit Myrtle Beach brand identity, shifting from a beach-centric focus to a broader storytelling approach that highlights the destination's diverse experiences. A new "Salute to Summer" concept is being developed as a potential annual Memorial Day and Military Appreciation initiative to strengthen early summer visitation.

The meeting concluded with a discussion on accountability and transparency, emphasizing the importance of clearly communicating tourism's economic impact to residents and local leaders. Council members were encouraged to provide input on key performance indicators, assist in identifying potential new board members, and participate in upcoming strategic planning sessions as Visit Myrtle Beach prepares for FY26 implementation.

Open Discussion: N/A

Meeting Adjourned: 12:41 PM, Mark Lazarus -Motion, Jordan Watkins - 2nd – Approved – All