MINUTES OF THE
HATTIESBURG CONVENTION COMMISSION
&
MANAGEMENT

Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at the Lake Terrace Convention Center on...

December 4, 2025

Be it remembered that on the 4th of December the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission (HCC) met. The meeting was called to order at **12:08 p.m.** by Jennifer Payne, Chair of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT	ABSENT
Jennifer Payne	
Andy Stetelman	
Clyde Bryant	
Traci Rouse	
Jerome Brown	
Jonathan Krebs	

ALSO PRESENT
Rick Taylor, Management
Carey Varnado, Legal Counsel
Salem Bunkheila, Administration
Jessica Cathey, Administration
Chad Thomas, Administration

Citizen's Forum

Minutes from Previous Board Meeting

Upon motion made by Traci Rouse and duly seconded by Jerome Brown and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to approve the Minutes as presented.

Financial Report

Rick Taylor presented the Financial Report including the Claims Docket for the Operations and Maintenance, and Revenue for ratification. A motion was made by Clyde Bryant duly seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and after a full

discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to accept the financial reports and ratify the Claims Docket as presented with the exception of the Capital Expansion payment for the Equipment Lease.

A motion was made by Clyde Bryant seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the eligible Board Members to approve the Capital Expansion YTD payments for the Equipment Lease.

Legal Report

Attorney Varnado provided the Board with an update regarding the Jones Family Trust and the transfer of cemetery ownership to HCC. The Commission awaits the family's choice on the proposed power of attorney. Attorney Varnado will meet with them to discuss the contract.

A motion was made by Jonathan Krebs, duly seconded by Clyde Bryant, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to consider going into Executive Session to discuss contractual matters.

A motion was made by Traci Rouse, duly seconded by Jerome Brown, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to enter Executive Session.

A motion was made by Traci Rouse, duly seconded by Clyde Bryant, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to exit Executive Session.

A motion was made by Clyde Bryant, duly seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to purchase a storage building at 5370 Hwy 42 pending a satisfactory appraisal in accordance with the negotiated price.

Old Business

Rick Taylor informed the Board that the proclamation was presented to Dr. Aubrey Lucas on November 13, 2025.

The Oseola McCarty Home Museum (OMHM) is nearing completion. Staff members are searching for a distinctive University of Southern Mississippi throw from the 1990s. Additionally, the Museum is set to open in early March 2026, during her birthday celebration; as a tribute to her legacy and to honor International Women's Month.

Rick reported that the Moeller Military Vehicle Museum construction is still on going with the glass curtain walls completed. The next steps are to install HVAC system and begin drywall installation.

Rick Taylor shared that the Hattiesburg Zoo plans to open a new gift shop and ticket booth in spring 2026. As part of this construction, there will also be a smaller, separate parking area entrance on Camp Street. He informed the Board about changes to the Facility Services Department, which has now been divided into two departments: Maintenance and Construction. Keith Cochran has joined the Maintenance Department, while Eddie Baca will be responsible for all construction projects.

Serengeti Springs Waterpark is being winterized. The Commission will add more shade to food areas in the offseason.

The Lake Terrace Convention Center and Saenger Theater are replacing their HVAC units in January of 2026.

New Business

Salem Bunkheila requested the Board to ratify the purchase of a property near the African American Military History Museum for $8,000. The site previously had a home that was demolished and never rebuilt.

A motion was made by Andy Stetelman, duly seconded by Jerome Brown, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to ratify the purchase of 311 E 6th Street for $8,000.

A motion was made by Clyde Byrant to adjourn the Commission meeting. This motion was seconded by Jonathan Krebs and upon receiving a unanimous favorable vote, the Commission Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Jennifer Payne, Chair

Attest:

Richard Taylor, Executive Director

MINUTES OF THE
HATTIESBURG CONVENTION COMMISSION
&
MANAGEMENT

Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at the Lake Terrace Convention Center on...

January 22, 2026

Be it remembered that on the 22nd of January the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission (HCC) met. The meeting was called to order at **12:09 p.m.** by Clyde Bryant, Vice-Chair of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT
Andy Stetelman
Clyde Bryant
Traci Rouse
Jerome Brown
Jonathan Krebs

ABSENT
Jennifer Payne

ALSO PRESENT
Rick Taylor, Management
Carey Varnado, Legal Counsel
Salem Bunkheila, Administration
Jessica Cathey, Administration
Chad Thomas, Administration

Citizen's Forum

Legal Report

Attorney Varnado advised the Board that there has been no update regarding the Jones Family Trust or the transfer of cemetery ownership to HCC. He introduced John Fletcher and Jeffery Birdsong, partners with the Jones Walker Law Firm, to discuss the process and benefits of establishing a foundation. Rick Taylor opened the discussion by outlining the growth of HCC operations and identifying key drivers for the need to form a 501(c)(3).

Fundraising and Contracting: He noted that potential donors are often reluctant to contribute directly to governmental entities. Additionally, Attorney General opinions indicate that due to the Tort Claims Act, government bodies should not indemnify or hold harmless private or government parties. Further, naming such clients as "Additionally Insured" is restricted due to this Act. While the need for a better mechanism to receive sponsorships and donations has long been identified by the Commission, this new information makes it imperative to address the contract language and general contracting of the Commission. Indemnification, Hold Harmless, and Additionally Insured are common elements in a contract. Virtually all theatrical, musical, or show productions require all three of these items, without which they will not contract with the Commission (Saenger, Convention Center, etc.). The provision of contractable meeting space and performance venues is the prime mission of the Commission, so evaluation of solutions is paramount.

Attorney Fletcher shared his experience with entities seeking a 501(c)(3) status in the Jackson, MS area. Attorney Birdsong also gave a brief background on his experience in Louisiana and several projects in the New Orleans, LA area, including the creation of a City Park Foundation to oversee operations of that park for the City of New Orleans. During the discussion they addressed ideas for the overall structure of a foundation and explained that a foundation could act as a private agency to manage and operate government assets such as is the case at the Jackson Convention Center, Vicksburg and Natchez Convention Centers, Brandon Amphitheater and others in the state and in the United States. Important stipulations for a successful foundation are:

1. **Independence:** To qualify as a 501(c)(3), the foundation must be a distinct legal entity and not an "alter ego" of the commission.
2. **Governance:** The board structure remains a critical consideration. The speakers recommended a manageable board size, potentially including designated seats for commission representatives and rotating terms for at-large members.
3. **Transparency:** While the foundation would be a private entity, the speakers emphasized that adopting best practices such as posting financial statements online would ensure transparency and accountability to the public. Discussion of IRS Form 990 showed that 501(c)(3) organizations report substantial financial information that would insure transparency.
4. **Financial Integrity:** The foundation would need its own audit, although utilizing the same firm as the commission might provide efficiencies. The attorneys clarified that public tax revenue would still be handled appropriately to ensure it remains dedicated to public purposes, even if channeled through a foundation.

The Board then addressed a range of questions to the attorneys. Attorney Fletcher said the Commission should create a name, mission, and narrative for the foundation as its next steps. This is for the Board to consider and allow it to evaluate a more in-depth perspective. After substantial discussion, Clyde Bryant noted that the Chair requested tabling the issue to allow time to evaluate the concept and to call for a special meeting of the Board if needed prior to the next meeting.

A motion was made by Andy Stetelman seconded by Jerome Brown, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board Members to ratify the engagement letter of Jones Walker Law Firm and the Hattiesburg Convention Commission to receive legal counsel to evaluate and consider the efficacy of creating a 501(c)(3) foundation.

Minutes from Previous Board Meeting

Upon motion made by Andy Stetelman and duly seconded by Jerome Brown and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to approve the Minutes as presented.

Financial Report

Rick Taylor presented the Financial Report including the Claims Docket for the Operations and Maintenance, and Revenue for ratification. A motion was made by Jonathan Krebs duly seconded by Jerome Brown, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to accept the financial reports and ratify the Claims Docket as presented with the exception of the payment to London Stetelman.

There were no Capital Expansion payments for the Equipment Lease to approve at this meeting.

A motion was made by Jonathan Krebs duly seconded by Jerome Brown, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to ratify the payment to London Stetelman for the newly purchased warehouse.

Old Business

Cleaning is underway at the new warehouse. There may be the potential for lessees soon.

The Saenger theater is performing well financially, with recent improvements including the installation of new air conditioning units for the main auditorium.

The Hattiesburg Zoo is undergoing an expansion to move the front entrance south to the edge of the parking lot. This new area will include offices, an education area, and a new gift shop. In addition, the new petting zoo is expected to open soon, while work continues on the new serval exhibit and lemur exhibit. The staff reported a unique partnership with the USFWS, USDA and FBI to house spider monkeys recovered from wildlife smuggling investigations. The result is that the Zoo is now home to four 1-year old spider monkeys.

The opening of the Oseola McCarty house is scheduled for March 7th with a VIP event on March 5, 2026.

New Business

The HCC staff requested the authorization of Hotel Warehouse, 4729 Dwight Evans Road, Charlotte NC 29217 for provision of 70 Orange Plastic Wood and Silver Aluminum Seating with Back (park benches), as a sole source provider based on them being the only provider of orange composite wood six-foot park benches in the U.S. And, based upon the fact that they are substantially lower in price than alternative park benches (Hotel Warehouse bench price is $359-$399 vs. The Park Catalog Newport Recycled Plastic Bench is $717). Due to these reasons, the staff asks that the Board of Commissioners authorize the selection of Hotel Warehouse as a sole source vendor with a projected completion estimate of no more than $28,000 plus shipping for 70 benches to the Hattiesburg Zoo.

Jerome Brown made a motion to authorize purchase of said benches from Hotel Warehouse as a sole source vendor based on the details provided and noted herein. Said motion was seconded by Andy Stetelman and upon a unanimous vote of the Board of Commissioners, the motion was approved.

A motion was made by Andy Stetelman to adjourn the Commission meeting. This motion was seconded by Jerome Brown and upon receiving a unanimous favorable vote, the Commission Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Jennifer Payne, Chair

Attest:

Richard Taylor, Executive Director

MINUTES OF THE
HATTIESBURG CONVENTION COMMISSION
&
MANAGEMENT

Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at the Eureka School Museum on...

March 26, 2026

Be it remembered that on the 26th of March the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission (HCC) met. The meeting was called to order at **12:09 p.m.** by Jennifer Payne, Chair of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT
Jennifer Payne
Andy Stetelman
Clyde Bryant
Traci Rouse
Jonathan Krebs
Jerome Brown via Zoom

ABSENT

ALSO PRESENT
Rick Taylor, Management
Carey Varnado, Legal Counsel
Salem Bunkheila, Administration
Jessica Cathey, Administration
Chad Thomas, Administration

Citizen's Forum

Minutes from Previous Board Meeting

Upon motion made by Andy Stetelman and duly seconded by Clyde Bryant and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to approve the Minutes as presented.

Financial Report

Rick Taylor presented the Financial Report including the Claims Docket for the Operations and Maintenance, and Revenue for ratification. A motion was made by Clyde Bryant duly seconded by Traci Rouse, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to accept the financial reports and ratify the Claims Docket as presented with the exception of the payment to London Stetelman.

Jerome Brown assigned his voting privileges by proxy to Jennifer Payne, Chair, due to technical difficulties.

After recusal by Andy Stetelman, a motion was made by Traci Rouse duly seconded by Clyde Bryant, and after a full discussion, there was a favorable vote of all eligible Board Members to accept the payment to London Stetelman.

A motion was made by Andy Stetelman duly seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and after a full discussion, there was a favorable vote of all eligible Board Members to accept the Capital Expansion payment for the Equipment Lease.

Legal Report

Attorney Varnado reported to the Board that we are in a holding pattern awaiting delivery of a signed deed from the Trustee of the Jones family cemetery trust. Until such time, the family will continue to maintain the property.

Old Business

Rick Taylor provided an update on the Commission's ongoing exploration of establishing a Foundation. He noted that some obstacles have emerged, and he is working through them with guidance from legal counsel. He emphasized that indemnification requirements within current contracts used across HCC facilities present a significant challenge. He added that other publicly-run entities in the state may be encountering similar issues, though they may be unaware that state law prohibits a government entity from providing indemnification to another party. He referenced multiple Attorney General opinions affirming this restriction.

Jessica Cathey, Director of Human Resources, presented the first-quarter 2026 HR update. She reviewed the current departmental structure and staffing roster, highlighted vacant positions, and outlined the plan to hire approximately 150 additional employees as the Commission prepares to reopen Serengeti Springs Waterpark.

Attorney Varnado commended the Commission's staff, noting that the organization has faced very little employment-related litigation for an entity of its size. He attributed this success to the thoroughness and diligence of the Human Resources team.

Rick Taylor then provided a brief update on the status of Commission facilities. He reported that the opening of the Oseola McCarty House was successful and well received by the public.

He noted that the Saenger Theater recently hosted a highly attended show and remarked on the large number of "Vote for Pedro" shirts worn by attendees.

At the Hattiesburg Zoo, construction of the new education area is underway, along with repairs of the Bug Hub Playground. In addition to several new exhibits for Lemurs, Servals and Macaws, he reported that the Zoo has received four additional spider monkeys as part of an FBI-assisted illegal pet trade action.

Serengeti Springs is currently being de-winterized in preparation for its reopening in May. Staff are investigating methods to keep the Lazy River cooler during peak temperatures. An air-conditioning unit is being added to the Taco Truck, and additional shade structures are being installed in various food and beverage locations to improve dining conditions as well as addressing cold beverage production machines efficiency.

At the Lake Terrace Convention Center, the auxiliary parking lot has been completed. Underway is a revamping of the main parking lot including the removal of the perimeter hedges and the reworking of most parking lot and roadway islands.

New Business

Rick Taylor reported that Mayor Toby Barker approached him regarding participation in the City's acquisition of certain downtown buildings. These buildings will be used to increase downtown visitor traffic, with one of the buildings as a proposed site for a new science, children's, or other type of civic museum. Commissioner Johnathan Krebs provided additional context on the Mayor's intentions for the building, including prospective investors and planned renovations. Taylor noted that the Commission's participation in the City's acquisition is the first step of renovation and rehabilitation of the structures. More work and funds will be needed to realize the value of the buildings to Hattiesburg, a commitment the Mayor has indicated he understands and is already working on in terms of next steps.

A motion was made by Traci Rouse duly seconded by Clyde Bryant, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to participate with the City by making a $500,000 investment as a partner in this endeavor with the ultimate goal of increasing tourism and adding attraction value for Hattiesburg.

A motion was made by Traci Rouse to adjourn the Commission meeting. This motion was seconded by Clyde Bryant and upon receiving a unanimous favorable vote, the Commission Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Jennifer Payne, Chair

Attest:

Richard Taylor, Executive Director

MINUTES OF THE
HATTIESBURG CONVENTION COMMISSION
&
MANAGEMENT

Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at the Lake Terrace Convention Center on...

June 25, 2026

Be it remembered that on the 25th of June the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission (HCC) met. The meeting was called to order at **12:13 p.m.** by Jennifer Payne, Chair of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT
Jennifer Payne
Clyde Bryant
Traci Rouse
Jonathan Krebs

ABSENT
Andy Stetelman
Jerome Brown

ALSO PRESENT
Rick Taylor, Management
Carey Varnado, Legal Counsel
Salem Bunkheila, Administration
Jessica Cathey, Administration
Danielle Herrington, Administration
Chad Thomas, Administration

Citizen's Forum

Minutes from Previous Board Meeting

Upon motion made by Traci Rouse and duly seconded by Clyde Bryant and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to approve the Minutes as presented.

Financial Report

Rick Taylor presented the Financial Report, including the Claims Docket for Operations and Maintenance and the Revenue Docket for ratification. He noted that a settlement was reached on March 20, 2026 related to the previously discussed waterpark incident involving an injury to a patron's foot. A motion was made by Jonathan Krebs duly seconded by Clyde Bryant, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to accept the financial reports and ratify the Claims Docket as presented with the exception of the equipment lease payment.

favorable vote of all eligible Board Members to accept the Capital Expansion payment for the Equipment Lease.

During the budget discussions, Rick Taylor informed the Board that he has directed managers to reduce labor hours at Serengeti Springs Waterpark due to the increased number of weather-related closures. As an alternative, managers have been instructed to reassign employees to other HCC facilities to ensure the organization continues to utilize its labor resources efficiently.

Legal Report

Attorney Varnado reported to the Board that he is monitoring the ongoing litigation related to a waterpark incident involving an alleged leg injury. He stated that he is satisfied with the attorney assigned to the matter by the insurance carrier and reminded the Board that the Commission maintains full coverage; therefore, in the event of a settlement, the Commission would not be at financial risk. He added that cases of this nature typically progress slowly.

Old Business

Rick Taylor provided a brief update on the status of Commission facilities. At the Convention Center, landscape renovations are underway. He reported damage to creek-side of the weir from the recent heavy rains which has resulted in lowering of the lake level until repairs can be complete. The Commission has engaged a contractor to complete the necessary dirt work, a more cost-effective approach than the mud-jacking method required in previous years.

At Serengeti Springs, Taylor noted ongoing concerns from guests regarding golf cart parking. A new designated golf cart parking area was established this season to improve utilization of available parking spaces. He reiterated that attendance remains lower than expected due to frequent weather-related closures.

At the Hattiesburg Zoo, construction of the new gift shop is underway adding the shop, new staff offices and an education space. He reported that the Zoo's hyena recently had a cub, with the gender yet to be determined. The Zoo is also planning to receive a male giraffe in the fall. He also informed the Board that the Zoo received a $380,000 charitable bequest which will be put towards a new exhibit or improvement to an existing one.

Taylor informed the Board that a new HVAC unit has been installed at the Saenger Theater for the stack dressing room. He also shared that the Oseola McCarty Museum continues to experience strong attendance. However, due to the facility's low-lying location, moisture from recent rainfall has caused some flooring issues within the Museum.

Taylor further reported that the Commission contributed $488,000 toward the purchase of 130 Front Street in partnership with the City of Hattiesburg for future downtown visitor attraction development.

Jessica Cathey, Director of Human Resources, presented the second-quarter 2026 HR update. She reviewed the staffing roster, highlighted vacant positions, and informed the Board that 33 international students were hired through the J-1 Visa Work and Travel program.

The FYE 2025 Audit was presented by Jabe Mills and Timothy Hicks of Topp McWhorter Harvey, PLLC. Jabe expressed appreciation to the Administration Department for thoroughly monitoring spending last year. He further discussed the complete audit with the Commission and advised that it was an "unmodified" audit, which accurately represented the financial operations for the past fiscal year and conducted the Commission's business in compliance with relevant laws and governmental accounting standards.
A motion was made by Traci Rouse, duly seconded by Clyde Bryant, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous

favorable vote of the Board to consider going into Executive Session for the purposes of discussing the FYE 2025 Audit. A motion was made by Traci Rouse, duly seconded by Clyde Bryant, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to enter Executive Session.

Upon exiting the Executive Session, a motion was made by Traci Rouse, duly seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to receive the audit as presented.

New Business

The HCC staff requested ratification of Paul Johnson of Covington County, Mississippi for the provision of window glazing services (painting and caulking) at the Historic Eureka School as a sole source provider based on him being the only provider willing to quote on the glazing of 768 individual panes of glass. Due to this reason, the staff asks that the Board of Commissioners ratify the selection of Paul Johnson as a sole source vendor with a projected completion estimate of no more than $7,050.

Traci Rouse made a motion to ratify Paul Johnson as a sole source vendor based on the details provided and noted herein. Said motion was seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and upon a unanimous vote of the Board of Commissioners, the motion was approved.

A motion was made by Traci Rouse duly seconded by Jonathan Krebs and upon unanimous approval of the Board to authorize the purchase of a replacement Trane RTAC 250-ton air-cooled screw chiller for the Lake Terrace Convention Center under a repair and installation contract from Terry Services of Hattiesburg, that includes a full 36-month warranty, installation and integration into the existing Trane DOS-based operating software system. The Board certifies that due to the existing installed system (two 240-ton Trane chillers) the replacement of one of the units requires the proprietary product of a Trane replacement unit in order to mesh with the existing system (wiring, pipes, electrical) and the Trane DOS-based HVAC software control system currently in use within the facility and is a component unit of the $4 million HVAC system in the building. This repair is estimated as 3% of total system replacement cost.

Rick Taylor informed the Board that the Commission has purchased several parcels of land adjacent to the Longleaf Trace Museum extension. He explained that this acquisition will provide an important buffer for the museums, enhancing the overall campus footprint and supporting future development, preservation, and visitor-experience improvements within the district.

A motion to adjourn was made by Traci Rouse, duly seconded by Clyde Bryant and upon receiving a unanimous favorable vote, the Commission Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Jennifer Payne, Chair

Attest:

Richard Taylor, Executive Director

MINUTES OF THE
HATTIESBURG CONVENTION COMMISSION
&
MANAGEMENT

Minutes of a regularly scheduled meeting of the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission of the City of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, held at the Lake Terrace Convention Center on...

August 27, 2026

Be it remembered that on the 27th of August the Board Members of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission (HCC) met. The meeting was called to order at **12:15 p.m.** by Jennifer Payne, Chair of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission. The following Members of the Board were found to be present:

PRESENT
Jennifer Payne
Andy Stetelman
Traci Rouse
Jerome Brown
Jonathan Krebs

ABSENT
Clyde Bryant

ALSO PRESENT
Kent Oliver - Guest
Samone Wilson - Guest
Rick Taylor, Management
Carey Varnado, Legal Counsel
Salem Bunkheila, Administration
Jessica Cathey, Administration
Danielle Herrington, Administration
Chad Thomas, Administration

Jennifer Payne, Chair of the Hattiesburg Convention Commission, welcomed Kent Oliver and Samone Wilson as incoming Board Members, effective September 1, 2026.

The Hattiesburg Convention Commission honored Andy Steleman for 32 years of service to the Commission, including 25 years as Chairman, and presented him with a proclamation congratulating him on his retirement.

Citizen's Forum

Minutes from Previous Board Meeting

Upon motion made by Andy Stetelman and duly seconded by Traci Rouse and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to approve the Minutes as presented.

Financial Report

Rick Taylor presented the Financial Report, including the Claims Docket for Operations and Maintenance and the Revenue Docket for ratification. A motion was made by Jerome Brown, duly seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to accept the financial reports and ratify the Claims Docket as presented with the exception of the equipment lease payment.

Rick Taylor told the Board that the Department of Revenue (DOR) may have adjusted the Commission's tax check, noting a downward trend in tax received. Referring to the tax graph in the financial documents, he highlighted similar variances in November and December 2019, when DOR adjustments were confirmed. He recommended that evaluation of next steps be considered at next month's meeting where a full fiscal year of data would be available.

A motion was made by Andy Stetelman duly seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and after a full discussion, there was a favorable vote of all eligible Board Members to accept the Capital Expansion payment for the Equipment Lease.

During the amended budget discussion, Rick Taylor reported that Salem Bunkheila is working with the Food and Beverage Department to lower labor costs. He explained that increased labor expenses account for the variance in the amended budget's *Staffing Costs (including benefits)*.

A motion was made by Traci Rouse duly seconded by Jonathan Krebs, and after a full discussion, there was a favorable vote of all eligible Board Members to accept the proposed FYE 2026 Amended Budget.

Rick Taylor presented the FYE 2027 budget to the Board. During the discussion, he explained that *Staffing Costs (including benefits)* increased because of the following factors:

- The payroll budget had remained at the same level for nearly two years.
- The number of part-time employees increased.
- The minimum wage increased to $12 per hour.
- A groundskeeping team was added to perform work that had previously been outsourced.

A motion was made by Jonathan Krebs, duly seconded by Andy Stetelman, and after a full discussion, there was a unanimous favorable vote of the Board to approve the proposed FYE 2027 Budget.

Legal Report

Attorney Varnado reported to the Board that he is still monitoring the ongoing litigation related to a waterpark incident involving an alleged leg injury. He expressed confidence in the attorney handling the matter and said he expects any claim to be minor.

Old Business

Rick Taylor provided a brief update on the status of Commission facilities.
The Saenger Theater has replaced the "stack" air conditioner in addition to the two new main auditorium systems.

The Lake Terrace Convention Center has had several landscaping updates including the weir repair, thinning of the site trees and new entryway refurbishments.

The Hattiesburg Zoo, has several small exhibits that are near completion, while work continues on the main new entry project. This project includes a new education area, new gift shop, staff offices and entry ticketing booths.

Serengeti Springs is near the completion of its season. He added that the canvas cabana tops have not lasted as long as the metal tops. The HCC has plans to replace the canvas cabanas over the off season.

Taylor asked the Oseola McCarty Home Museum developer to assist with the design of the Moeller Military Vehicle Museum. After receiving an approximately $2.8 million project quote, the Commission decided to change the design to better align with the budget. Taylor presented a military vehicle repair depot concept developed in consultation with Camp Shelby's vehicle maintenance team. The revised design is expected to reduce costs, create a visually compelling experience, conserve floor space, and make the museum one of the only facilities in the United States to offer an immersive experience with climb-in access to vehicles. He also credited Latoya Norman with the plan for the museum district to begin charging a single admission price for access to all museums once the Moeller Museum opens.

New Business

The HCC Staff requests ratification by the Board of the purchase and installation of three HVAC mini-split units for the Hattiesburg Zoo Gift Shop and the Women's Education Building restroom. The existing central air unit was planned for replacement in January of 2027, however due to continual failures and a complete collapse over the August 15 – 17 weekend, this replacement had to be expedited to address internal temperatures in excess of 95 degrees. The costs for this emergency purchase and installation will be less than $20,000. Jordan Bros. of Hattiesburg was contracted for the purchase and installation due to their ability to get the equipment and conduct the installation in less than one week's time.

A motion was made by Andy Stetelman duly seconded by Traci Rouse, and after a full discussion, there was a favorable vote of all eligible Board Members to ratify the purchase and installation of three HVAC mini-splits for the Hattiesburg Zoo.

A motion to adjourn was made by Traci Rouse, duly seconded by Andy Stetelman and upon receiving a unanimous favorable vote, the Commission Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted:

Jennifer Payne, Chair

Attest:

Richard Taylor, Executive Director