



MEDIA ADVISORY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 25, 2002

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Purcell announces plans to boost tourism

Mayor Bill Purcell today committed to boosting Nashville's tourism marketing funds next year, naming a director of tourism for Metro, and conducting a cost/benefit study of expansion or relocation of the convention center.

Purcell announced the steps at the Mayor's Travel and Tourism Summit following a presentation of performance audits and industry views to civic and business leaders at the Country Music Hall of Fame.

"I will promise now to do whatever a mayor can do to make 2003 the year we all look to as the start of what I hope will be the strongest period of shared success in our history," Purcell said.

The performance audit of the Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau by KPMG presented at the Summit gave the organization good marks for its efforts, but recommended the creation of a new Metro board to oversee CVB operations and improve accountability.

Purcell said he would use the creation of a new Tourism Commission to provide \$2 million in one-time marketing funds that would be matched by the industry. The additional funds would represent a 50 percent increase in funds available to the CVB for the promotion of Nashville's attractions and expansion of outreach.

The mayor said he will establish a Working Group on Tourism to work through the details of the creation of the Tourism Commission. He said he wants the commission to be staffed by a new Director of Tourism.

The CVB audit was conducted in conjunction with an audit of the Nashville Convention Center. The convention center audit recommended a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis prior to considering any expansion or construction of additional space.

"Nashville's current infrastructure would be challenged to adequately accommodate a major expansion or new facility," the audit said, "and it is likely that a new convention hotel would need to be built in conjunction with any new or expanded space."

Mayor Purcell said he would accept the audit recommendations as the first steps toward boosting Nashville's travel and tourism industry for the future. He said the new Tourism Commission will lead the study of the convention center.

Purcell called for the Travel and Tourism Summit last August in response to economic concerns voiced within the industry. Following Purcell's lead, owners and operators within the industry worked to develop information and priorities to be brought to the Summit.

Sandra Fulton, former Tennessee Commissioner of Tourism and former chairman of the Travel Industry Assn. of America, now a member of the Metro Tourism and Convention Commission, chaired the Summit.

"The Mayor called for a Summit to examine the challenges, as well as the opportunities, that exist in this city regarding our ability to take advantage of the potential economic impact deliverable by this business sector," Fulton said.

The Summit included the presentation of a report gathered from the insights of more than 200 industry professionals through a series of focus groups and a day long meeting hosted January 21 by the Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Purcell promised to continue to focus on improvements to downtown Nashville and said he would look at the creation of tax incentives to promote downtown residential developments. He said a Downtown Traffic Plan and Streetscape Plan will be released in the next month. He also reiterated his desire for the construction of an Arts High School beside the Bicentennial Mall on Jefferson Street.

"This is a partnership involving the whole city," Purcell said. "Nashville is Music City, USA. It is the home of the Grand Ole Opry and the Ryman, Gaylord's Opryland Hotel and the Hermitage, the Titans, and the Predators and the Sounds, Fan Fair and the Country Music Marathon, Fort Negley and the Frist, the Country Music Hall of Fame and Tootsie's Orchid Lounge."

"Nashville is the safest and friendliest big city in the world," Purcell concluded, "and we are going to be telling people all about these and other attractions in the years ahead because Nashville has a lot to offer and they need to know it."

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