



March 31, 2021

Norman City Council
201 West Gray
Norman, OK 73069

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

Wow, what a year it was! This time one year ago, we watched as COVID-19 wreaked havoc on the nation and devastated the travel industry. Even through the tough times, we knew travel and tourism would bounce back and help lead the way in recovery. Visitor dollars being spent at our shops and restaurants are more important than ever.

The mission of VisitNorman is to improve the local economy by attracting overnight visitors, meetings, conventions and events to the city. This year's plan of work is a little more malleable than years past. Right now we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. The travel sentiment shows there is financial optimism and an increasingly ready-to-travel mindset. Many American travelers are saying YES to summer vacations this year. As has been demonstrated by their sentiments throughout the pandemic, vaccination has the greatest impact on American travelers' anticipated behaviors. Fully 82% say the idea of traveling is made more comfortable by receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. Two-thirds of American travelers have or will take a COVID-19 vaccine, and the majority continue to believe they will be inoculated by summer.

As travel returns safely, we see leisure travel leading the road to recovery. Right now there is a pent-up demand for travel. People are ready to start taking trips again when it is safely possible. The acceptable distance to drive has lengthened from 1-2 hours in the car to up to 10 hours or more. This puts Norman in a good spot with our location along I-35. On the other hand, it will take a bit longer for corporate and business travel to return. Because of this, VisitNorman will be taking some of the dollars we have previously allocated to attracting conferences and conventions and focusing those on leisure marketing. This campaign will include enhanced digital marketing, a targeted print campaign and billboards along the highway. In addition, we'll put more resources towards promotion of our existing events like Jazz in June, Restaurant Week, etc. These are great community events that people from around the region will be interested in attending.

Once we do return to some form of normal, the VisitNorman sales team will focus on the following:

Local Interaction

The VisitNorman team will work locally to engage our partners as we look for meeting and event prospects.



- Speaking engagements with as many local organizations as possible. Example message: Be a hometown hero and bring a meeting back to Norman.
- Being active participants in community organizations. This will be vital as we come together in recovery.
- Quarterly hotel/attraction events. Our hotels are hanging by a thread right now and we want to have open dialogue as we work to get back to pre-COVID levels.

State Associations

We will work on a state level to continue to build relationships with our Oklahoma state associations.

- With the new convention center opening in Oklahoma City, there is opportunity to attract more of our state associations to Norman as they get priced out of OKC.
- Continued involvement with the Oklahoma Travel and Recreation Department. The Lt. Governor and also Secretary of Tourism has been a great advocate for tourism, and we will work closely with him moving forward. Part of this will be a strategic plan for Lake Thunderbird looking at ways to create partnerships that will drive eco-tourism.
- Continued membership with the Oklahoma Travel Industry Association, Society of Government Meeting Planners, Oklahoma Society of Association Executives, and Meeting Planners International's Oklahoma Chapter. Staff serves on the executive leadership teams of many of these organizations.
- Sales blitzes to call on the state association meeting planners.

Youth Sports

While we always believed youth sports were recession proof, we have now seen they are also pandemic proof. Throughout this past year, sports tournaments were the one thing keeping the lights on at our hotels. The Norman Forward projects are progressing and VisitNorman is working to create a sports commission that will work with the local operators to attract tournaments, meets and events at the facilities when not being used by our local leagues.

This past year was extremely difficult for all of us, especially the travel and tourism industry. We are tough. We are strong. We are ready to bounce back and lead the way towards economic recovery. I think of the amazing rainbows after an Oklahoma thunderstorm: There will be a rainbow and VisitNorman is looking forward to working with all of our resilient partners to bring travel back to Norman.

Sincerely,

Dan Schemm
Executive Director