

**SPORTS AUTHORITY OF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE
& DAVIDSON COUNTY**

**Minutes of January 12, 2022, Meeting of the Women’s Professional Sports Ad Hoc
Committee**

**Howard Office Building – Sonny West Conference Room
9:00 a.m.**

Committee Members: Margaret Behm (Chair), Kim Adkins, Melvin Gill, Emmett Wynn

Board Members: Cathy Bender (Chair), Frank Harrison

Staff: Monica Fawknorton, Quinton Herring, Melissa Wells, Joshua Thomas (Legal)

Advisory Committee Members: Council Member Nancy VanReece

Visitors: Dan Barrett-by phone (CAA ICON), Jessica Davis (Tennessee Business Roundtable),
Jamie Sullivan (CAA ICON), Lexie Ward (Metro Legal), Nate Rau, Sandy Mazza

Chair Behm called the meeting of the Women’s Professional Sports Ad Hoc Committee to order at 9:00 a.m.

Chair Behm recognized Board Chair Cathy Bender who shared that she has made two additional appointments to the Ad Hoc Committee—Director Emmett Wynn and Director Melvin Gill.

Consider Approval of Minutes from June 3, 2021, and October 6, 2021, Meetings.

Upon a motion mad by Director Adkins and seconded by Director Gill, the committee approved the minutes from the June 3 and October 6 meetings.

CAA ICON Report and Update

Chair Behm introduced Bryan Slater, CAA ICON, to give the “Preliminary Progress Presentation” of the Women’s Sports Initiative. Mr. Slater also introduced Dan Barrett (CAA ICON Strategy President) and Jamie Sullivan (CAA ICON). CAA ICON was originally engaged by the Sports Authority in 2019 to complete a Strategic Assessment related to the Women’s Professional Sports Initiative. The Phase I report included a preliminary market analysis and a series of next steps for the Sports Authority to consider. Phase II advances the previously completed Strategic Assessment into a detailed assessment, with an emphasis on completing primary research to identify Nashville-specific market preferences.

Mr. Slater reported that approximately 4,400 responses were received from a web-based survey launched in early December. More than ten local Nashville organizations and sports teams assisted in the distribution of the survey. The survey results indicated that while only 32% of the respondents were previously aware of the initiative, over half of the respondents support the initiative. The National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL) and Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) were the preferred leagues. The new Nashville SC stadium was the preferred venue for soccer and Bridgestone Arena was the preferred venue for basketball.

Mr. Slater provided an overview of the survey results. About 44% of the respondents live in Davidson County. Slightly over half were male, approximately 66% were at least moderately interested in the women's professional sports. 53% of respondents either currently support or would support the initiative while another 26% may support the initiative. Female role models (33%) was the leading reason to support the initiative. Among the 14% of respondents who do not or may not support the initiative, 38% indicated that they are not interested in women's professional sports. The types of tickets to be purchased indicated that 57% would potentially be interested in purchasing single game tickets. The most important venue characteristics were game atmosphere, sightlines, and parking availability.

Mr. Slater additionally reported that CAA ICON conducted three focus groups with 41 total participants. A summary of these groups indicated that: (1) participants expressed support for the Women's Sports Initiative and the need for further development of women's sports in Nashville, (2) local entertainment options were generally characterized as being plentiful; but lacking in variety, (3) participants preferred that ownership contain a mix of local, female, and/or racially diverse individuals, and (4) participants expressed interested in soccer (NWSL) and basketball (WNBA).

Mr. Slater shared corporate interviews are being conducted with representatives of regional companies to assess potential support levels for a women's professional sports franchise. Approximately 20 interviews will be completed as part of the process. A summary of the findings to-date indicate that interviewees generally supported the initiative and were aware of it due to media coverage. Numerous comments were made regarding Nashville's momentum (population growth, business expansion, etc.), and while most were optimistic regarding the market's ability to support a team, corporate executives believe the quality and that the composition of the ownership group will have a direct impact on the market's reception to a franchise. Executives also commented that a women's team would be in alignment with their firm-wide DEI initiatives, made mention of the wide array of existing and future entertainment options (Nashville SC and possibly MLB). Interest in potential commitments was frequently limited to tickets or smaller sponsorships and the executives gravitated towards soccer (NWSL) and basketball (WNBA).

The noted next steps included discussion of potential opportunities with NWSL and WNBA, the development of attendance estimates for two franchises at selected venues, completion of an economic impact study for both options, evaluation of pros and cons of WNBA and NWSL franchises, issue a preliminary draft report, incorporate feedback from the Sports Authority, issue a final report, and engage potential local ownership groups in discussions (if any).

Chair Behm recognized Dan Barrett for additional comments. Mr. Barrett shared that the response to the survey and the corporate interviews was unprecedented and that the results were very encouraging. Director Adkins asked how Nashville compared to other cities. Mr. Slater explained that each city is different and hard to compare; but, the level of response was outstanding comparatively. Mr. Barret also shared that it is difficult to compare with other markets, but that Nashville was unique in that the responses were almost uniformly optimistic.

Director Bender shared that Nashville has proven itself to be a sports city and that she is excited about the enthusiasm. Director Gill asked if the corporate interviews could be put together as a focus group. Mr. Slater explained that typically the corporate interviews are a function of the availability of the representatives of the corporations.

Chair Behm asked that the next steps be completed by the end of the month or the next meeting in February 2022.

Monica Fawknatson provided an update on the celebration of Title IX. There have been several events over the last year including the Ed Temple Tennessee State University Indoor Track and Field meeting which was January 9, 2022, and the 2022 Toyota U. S. figure skating Championships which were at Bridgestone Arena January 8-9, 2022. The SEC women's basketball tournament is March 2-6, 2022 will include celebrations of Title IX throughout the tournament. November 26-27, 2021 was the Smashville Women's Collegiate Hockey Showcase at Ford Ice Center Bellevue. More events are still in development.

Council Member VanReece provided an update on Metro Council's celebration of Title IX. A survey was conducted to determine council members interested in participating. They have been able to mirror all the accolades that the Sports Authority has sponsored. This will archive each of the Resolutions and they will become part of the public record.

Chair Behm shared that the Ohio Valley Conference will be sponsoring a walking tour during the SEC Women's basket tournament recognizing women in sports.

Ms. Fawknatson provided an update on the Title IX spotlights. The next spotlight will be Teresa Phillips with the following as tentative for upcoming meetings: Beth DeBauche, Candace Lee, Sarah Ingram, Harpeth Hall Olympians/Hall of Fame.

The next Women's Sports Ad Hoc Committee meeting will be February 10, 2022.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

