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ELKHART COUNTY INNKEEPERS TAX COMMISSION

Minutes of Public Meeting

Friday, January 10, 2020, at Elkhart County Visitors Center, 3421 Cassopolis Street, Elkhart, IN

PRESENT: Mr. Dan Shoup, Commission President and Board of Directors
Ms. Gita Patel, Commission Vice President
Mr. Scott Baker, Commission
Mr. Kurt Janowsky, Commission
Mr. Anant Patel, Commission
Ms. Beth Ronzone, Commission

ATTENDING: Ms. Eleanor Billey, Board of Directors Vice President
Mr. Larry App, Board of Directors Secretary/Treasurer
Mr. Arvis Dawson, Board of Directors
Ms. Diana Lawson, Chief Executive Officer
Mr. Terry Mark, Staff Recorder

ABSENT: Mr. Rick Jenkins, Commission Secretary/Treasurer

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. D. Shoup called the meeting to order at 8:07 a.m.

APPROVE NOVEMBER MINUTES

Mr. K. Janowsky moved to approve the minutes of the November 2019 meeting. Mr. A. Patel seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all in favor.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. L. App said that the year-end numbers for 2019 are in. He said the current ratio of assets to liabilities is 185 to 1; 1 to 1 is considered great. Innkeepers tax collections as of the end of 2019 was \$55,000 short because of three hotels. He said for two of them it is more of a timing issue and not of real concern. The third one is a concern because they are six months behind on deposits. There was general discussion about

this situation. Ms. D. Lawson said the ECCVB staff makes an oath not to disclose the status of a lodging property that is in arrears and staff members are committed to maintaining confidentiality. Mr. S. Baker said that his property is one of the properties in arrears and said he is taking steps to correct this. Ms. D. Lawson said the annual budget includes a projection on what we expect innkeepers tax collection to be. There are rarely delinquencies.

General discussion ensued on the 2020 outlook for lodging properties. Ms. D. Lawson said there has been disruption in reporting because third-party bookings send collections to the state of Indiana, which is unprepared to manage this. She said it is difficult to know the true collections situation, and it may be two years before we can discern a trend. Ms. D. Lawson also said the state is preparing to add to the lodging tax statewide.

Ms. D. Lawson said 2019 performance on revenue was pretty flat compared with 2018. In 2021 the budget will be less than 2020.

General discussion ensued on the furniture and fixtures section of the balance sheet.

Ms. G. Patel moved to accept the financial report. Ms. B. Ronzone seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all in favor.

Ms. D. Lawson said that an audit process is underway and should be complete in March.

2020 OFFICERS

Mr. D. Shoup presented the slate of officers that was preliminarily approved in the November 2019 meeting: Mr. D. Shoup for president, Ms. G. Patel for vice president, and Mr. R. Jenkins for secretary-treasurer. There were no other nominations from the floor.

Ms. B. Ronzone moved to accept the slate of officers for 2020. Mr. A. Patel seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all in favor.

BUREAU UPDATE

Ms. D. Lawson presented the 2019 year-end report, which was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. She said that 2019 had a tremendous number of projects. The ECCVB is honored by all the ways we serve the community and can make a difference. Tourism is an interconnected industry – hotels and restaurants need a strong environment, collaboration and connection to be successful. The ECCVB provides the destination management, brand management, and marketing services to attract people to Elkhart County. Tourism economic impact numbers came from the same research firm used since 1998. The economic impact is now a half billion dollars, meaning that in less than 20 years it doubled. Performance measures in 2019 included on \$35 million in visitor spending, \$5.09 million in group travel

spending, and \$4.65 million in advertising value equivalent. There was a \$1.03 million economic impact from Heritage Trail audio tour, and 16,176 visitors to the Visitor Center.

Ms. D. Lawson listed major projects carried out in 2019: a new visitor center, new corporate brand, new destination brand, Vibrant Communities, digital marketing initiatives with Nappanee, Middlebury and Bristol, Exit 92, and Quilt Gardens.

Ms. D. Lawson said the ECCVB is committed to responding to a changing world. In 2015, the commission and board decided that ECCVB needed to focus on quality of place, which led to Vibrant Communities bringing together thousands of people to champion placemaking through a variety of programs such as Little Big Idea Grant, Vibrant People, Community Champion Roundtables, arts leadership, youth engagement, and resident sentiment. The growth in engagement has been tremendous, particularly from younger residents and companies .

Ms. D. Lawson said 2019 was a year of discovery, working with communities to more deeply understand who the community and its residents thought they were. If Elkhart County residents agree on one thing, it is the essence of their DNA: We are a community of makers. The next step is to build teams to pull together and share our story. The ECCVB will provide leadership and resources to help Elkhart County to share their story to increase online conversations. The Tourism Sentiment Score as measured by Destination Think is 33. Our goal is to grow the positive conversations and keep the negative conversations at the same level.

Ms. D. Lawson said the Well Crafted destination brand will be rolled out on Jan. 22 at the Lerner Theatre.

Ms. D. Lawson said that with Amish Acres closing, the ECCVB will be putting together a positive public relations program. The property auction will be Feb. 5, and the ECCVB campaign will let everyone know that we're OK while also having local business leaders congratulate the Pletchers on their contributions to Elkhart County.

Ms. D. Lawson said the ECCVB is collaborating with the Economic Development Corp. and Elkhart County Commissioners on the Coolest Thing Made in Elkhart County. This will tell the stories of these businesses and their products, creating content that will build on the reputation of Elkhart County and create more positive attention.

Ms. D. Lawson said the Elkhart Aquatics Center is experiencing growing pains with parking and the availability of food. There was general discussion on the Aquatics Center's relationship to the community.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was general discussion about the Wellfield Gardens holiday lights event, the upcoming Elkhart Jazz Festival, and the possibility of a Restaurant Week in Elkhart.

SET NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be 8 a.m. Friday, March 13.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:42 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Mark
Staff Recorder

WE