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ELKHART COUNTY INNKEEPERS TAX COMMISSION

Minutes of Public Meeting

Friday, January 10, 2025, 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 (Zoom)
Mr. Rick Jenkins, Commission Secretary/Treasurer
Mr. Dan Boecher, Commission
Mr. Doug Risser, Commission

ATTENDING: Mr. Larry App, Board of Directors Secretary/Treasurer
Mr. Arvis Dawson, Board of Directors (Zoom)
Ms. Brittany Short, Board of Directors
Mr. Jon Hunsberger, Executive Director
Mr. Terry Mark, ECCVB Staff
Mr. Don Anderson (Zoom)
Mr. Mitch Nichols (Zoom)

ABSENT: Mr. Anant Patel, Commission
Ms. Beth Ronzone, Commission

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:06 a.m.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Mr. D. Boecher nominated Mr. Dan Shoup for president, Ms. Gita Patel for vice president, and Mr. Rick Jenkins for secretary/treasurer for 2025. Mr. D. Risser seconded. The slate was approved with all in favor.

APPROVE NOVEMBER MINUTES

Mr. R. Jenkins moved to approve the November 8, 2024, minutes. Ms. G. Patel seconded. It was approved with all in favor.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. L. App reported on a positive financial situation, that cash balances are where they were expected to be. He said that room tax revenue exceeded projections, resulting in a carryover to 2025. He lauded an incredible process that the Elkhart County CVB staff undertakes to develop the 2025 business plan.

BUREAU UPDATE

Mr. J. Hunsberger introduced the 2025 area guide and presented everyone in attendance one copy each of the two publications, Amish Country along the Heritage Trail and People & Places along the Heritage Trail.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said the Elkhart County Restaurant Weeks is happening for the second year. The campaign has been branded Sip & Savor Elkhart County, which helps acknowledge that not all participants are restaurants. He said the dates are February 21 to March 9, which covers two weeks and three weekends.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said the Elkhart County CVB staff is rolling out a new program for partners, working with TwoSix Digital. He said earlier presentations by TwoSix Digital's Brian Matson were well received, and continuing education is still very much in need. He said the Destination Uplift program will be free for all partners and provides an educational series throughout 2025 on digital marketing. He said there is a live monthly webinar and on-demand content.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said this year's Indiana Tourism Conference will be in Fort Wayne. He invited commission and board members to participate. He said the dates are March 3-5. He said Mr. Mike Huber of the city of Elkhart will be a panelist on a session on tourism and economic development.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said the Indiana General Assembly is now in session. He highlighted House Bill 1223, which is in its third year. He said the Indiana Tourism Association has been working with a consultant to socialize legislation that would allow tourism improvement districts. He said that TIDs create a geographic area, not including residential, with at least 50 percent of businesses within the boundary consenting to be part of TID. He said proceeds could be utilized for marketing, asset development, or in support of a bond issue. He said this funding does not take away from innkeepers tax. He said that entities within a TID receive a special assessment. He said that an oversight committee would be developed to work with a non-profit organization that manages, and destination management organization would be the ideal manager of a TID.

DESTINATION CONSULTANCY

Mr. Don Anderson and Mr. Mitch Nichols joined the meeting by Zoom. He referenced the proposed program of work that has been distributed. He said the first step happened in 2024 with the enabling

legislation to increase the innkeepers tax. He said now is the time to develop a business case and justification to bringing more visitors to Elkhart County. He said it is important to create buy-in.

Mr. D. Anderson shared a PowerPoint presentation on screen and reviewed the contents. He said there is a need to develop a strategy, to develop promotional and development plan with estimated economic and related benefit results. He said he and Mr. M. Nichols will be on-site four times. He said that the week of February 17 will be personal interviews of commission and board members. He said he is planning on 60-plus interviews with ECCVB staff, county elected officials, hotel/lodging owners/managers, industry and government officials, tourism and hospitality leaders. He said he would like to also meet with commission and board in March/April to vet our work, then interviews and research will be analyzed. He said they will be prepared to present findings and a proposal in May 2025. He said deliverables will be in three parts:– tax evaluation and investment strategy; tax investment plan; tax evaluation and investment strategy and plan summary

Mr. J. Hunsberger said the interviews are important in gaining buy-in, to help the Elkhart county council really needs to understand what we do and why it's important.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said that from the May final report, there could a draft final ordinance for consideration as soon as June, but could be any time other than that. He said some council members are in support. He said they're all open to the idea but need to see concrete details. He said the response has generally been that as long as the increase can be justified. He said there were no definitive nos from county council members.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be at 8 a.m. Friday, March 14, 2025.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:08 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Mark
Elkhart County CVB staff