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ELKHART COUNTY INNKEEPERS TAX COMMISSION

Minutes of Public Meeting

Friday, March 11, 2022, 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. Rick Jenkins, Commission Secretary/Treasurer (via Zoom)
Mr. Scott Baker, Commission
Mr. Anant Patel, Commission
Ms. Beth Ronzone, Commission
Mr. Doug Risser, Commission

ATTENDING: Mr. Levi King, Board of Directors President
Mr. Dan Bearss, Board of Directors Vice President
Mr. Larry App, Board of Directors Secretary/Treasurer
Mr. Arvis Dawson, Board of Directors
Mr. Brian Hoffer, Board of Directors
Ms. Brittany Short, Board of Directors
Mr. Jon Hunsberger, Executive Director
Ms. Janis Logsdon, Assistant Director
Mr. Terry Mark, ECCVB Staff Recorder
Ms. Amanda Eckelbarger, ECCVB Staff (Zoom)
Ms. Cindy Ostrom, ECCVB Staff (Zoom)

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVE JANUARY MINUTES

Mr. D. Risser moved to approve the minutes of the January 14, 2022, meeting. Mr. R. Jenkins seconded. It was approved 5-0.

- Roll call vote results (Yes: Shoup, Baker, Jenkins, Risser, Ronzone; No: None; Not Voting: A. Patel, G. Patel)

FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. L. App reported that cash balances and revenues were looking good, though the budget is still being monitored closely. He said innkeepers tax revenue through two months of 2022 are 30 percent above projections, and all expenses are in line with projections. He said the balance sheet looks good and the Elkhart County CVB is having a profitable year. He said the board and commission are fortunate to have this team at the Elkhart County CVB who coordinates things and works well together.

Ms. B. Short asked how much of hotel occupancy is the result of local construction projects. Mr. A. Patel said many of his properties' bookings are coming from the Amazon site. There was general discussion on collection of innkeepers tax from third-party rentals such as Airbnb. There was also general discussion on how gas prices will impact transport drivers in the RV industry, as well as discussion on the employment situation in Elkhart County.

Ms. B. Ronzone moved to approve the financial report. Mr. D. Risser seconded. It was approved with all in favor.

- Roll call vote results (Yes: Shoup, Baker, Jenkins, A. Patel, G. Patel, Risser, Ronzone; No: None)

BUREAU UPDATE

Mr. J. Hunsberger said that the live wall in the Visitor Center has a red curtain in front of it. The Elkhart County CVB went through two businesses which specialize in live walls, but neither were able to get it to work correctly. Therefore, the decision was made to do a moss wall. There will also be a large Well Crafted sign installed as part of it. The display will be interesting to look at, but there won't be maintenance concerns.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said Ms. Mindy Engle resigned from her position as a visitor concierge in the Visitor Center. There was a search conducted for a replacement and a candidate has tentatively accepted. They are expected to start April 4, 2022.

Ms. J. Logsdon provided a schedule of April activities related to the strategic plan process. She said that surveys have been sent to the visitor market and local response market. She said response has been positive with about 250 visitor responses; the local survey just went out. She said the team will analyze that information and report back starting April 11, including reports to Elkhart County CVB staff, the strategic plan steering committee, board, commission, and public workshops in Elkhart and Goshen. Mr. J. Hunsberger said the strategic plan will help inform the business plan for 2023 and may consist of a series of tweaks and adjusting to trends. He said the Elkhart County CVB staff is continuing to execute on the current business plan. He said the staff will be meeting, conducting deep dives into programs and projects such as Quilt Gardens, Heritage Trail, Vibrant Communities.

Mr. J. Hunsberger highlighted the sports events hosted recently in Elkhart County such as the CSCAA meeting, which resulted in more than 2,000 room nights for the event.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said that one way that the Elkhart County CVB is measuring success is through the use of UM/Near to track activity at Quilt Gardens and Quilt Murals in 2021. This is implemented as part of a Community Foundation of Elkhart County grant. Mr. J. Hunsberger said Ms. A. Eckelbarger from the staff will be working to better assess what data is collected, how it is collected, and what is the most useful information for our work. There was general discussion of Quilt Gardens and Epic Art Adventures in 2022. The two start concurrently in late May with Seward Johnson sculptures being located at Quilt Gardens and the local art component lasting a full year.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said the Elkhart County Innkeepers Tax Commission requested an amount from the Elkhart County Council from what was provided in the American Rescue Plan. He said that internally the council said there was a couple million dollars set aside for tourism. The council requested information from the commission on the projects that the money would be spent on. The commission presented the request to the council, which responded that they weren't sure how to gauge the Elkhart County CVB's lost revenue from the pandemic. Mr. J. Hunsberger said that after the meeting he was contacted by Ms. Suzie Weirick from the Elkhart County Commissioners, who said that there is no support on council to move forward and grant our request. There was general discussion on the finances surrounding ARP. He said he will be working with Mr. D. Bearss on a different strategy and how to package the ECCVB request. There was general discussion on continued advocacy with local elected officials.

Mr. T. Mark provided an update on Vibrant Communities. He said the Elkhart County CVB is working with Planning Next on a public engagement process throughout March that involves in-person sessions, meeting kits that residents can conduct with their own groups, and online and virtual feedback opportunities. The quality-of-place ideas gathered in this process will be collected and reported back to Elkhart County residents in a second round of engagement. He said turnout at the sessions has been good in some areas and there has been significant interest in the meeting kits, or "meetings in a box," including a session that was facilitated with Spanish speakers. The process is on track for an end product of an action agenda in late summer.

NEXT MEETING

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Terry Mark
Staff Recorder