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ELKHART COUNTY INNKEEPERS TAX COMMISSION

Minutes of Public Meeting

Friday, May 14, 2021, 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 (via Zoom)
Mr. Rick Jenkins, Commission Secretary/Treasurer
Mr. Scott Baker, Commission
Mr. Doug Risser, Commission

ATTENDING: Mr. Levi King, Board of Directors President
Mr. Dan Bearss, Board of Directors Vice President (via Zoom)
Mr. Larry App, Board of Directors Secretary/Treasurer (via Zoom)
Mr. Arvis Dawson, Board of Directors
Mr. Brian Hoffer, Board of Directors (via Zoom)
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
Ms. Cindy Ostrom, ECCVB Staff (via Zoom)

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

CALL TO ORDER

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

APPROVE MARCH MINUTES

Ms. G. Patel moved to approve the minutes of the March 12, 2021, meeting. Mr. R. Jenkins seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all in favor.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Mr. L. App referred everyone's attention to the April financial report provided in advance of the meeting. He said cash flow was looking like it would be a good year as things are opening up. He said it's difficult to make comparisons to 2020 because of the pandemic. He said all of the 2020 Payroll Protection Program loans have been forgiven or in process of being forgiven. The ECCVB will start repayment of the Small Business Association loan in June. He said innkeepers tax revenue has been higher than projected through five months. There was no 2021 travel guide but staff are planning to ramp up for 2022. He said the Quilt Gardens are off to a good start in 2021, with the Community Foundation of Elkhart County granting us \$15,00 to help repair and replace Quilt Murals. He said ECCVB staff continue to monitor expenses and look for new revenue opportunities.

There was general discussion about revenue from third-party rentals. Mr. L. King asked if it could be determined how much revenue resulted from Airbnb in Middlebury. Ms. G. Patel noted that collections through third parties such as Expedia also will be included. Mr. L. App said he will consult with ECCVB staff to research that topic.

Mr. R. Jenkins moved to accept the financial report. Mr. D. Risser seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all in favor.

BUREAU UPDATE

Mr. J. Hunsberger said that people are feeling good about getting out and traveling, and that the ECCVB's financials reflect that. He said staff is prepared to have our messaging ready, and the website is getting more traffic as travelers research where they can go now and in the future.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said that events are coming back, such as the Elkhart Jazz Festival, though it will be a little different. Staff have been working with applicants to understand that we may not be able to sponsor at the same level, but also working them to integrate the Well Crafted brand.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said the second class of Champion Placemakers will be finishing up in the next week. In 2020, ECCVB led two cohorts in working on storytelling. The conversations

happening in the workshop have been good in building a community that is deeper than we've had in the past.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said the Quilt Gardens will be launching on May 20 at Ruthmere. There is much excitement this year, as Quilt Gardens partners stepped up in 2020 and allowed it to continue and now in 2021 will be returning to normalcy. He said ECCVB has been trying new initiatives such as partnership with the Community Foundation of Elkhart County to fund Quilt Murals.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said ECCVB staff are pushing our boundaries with a Well Crafted podcast. He said this idea came from a desire to connect with our audience in a different way. The People and Places along the Heritage Trail podcast is a 2021 pilot project that will highlight and capture the stories of our makers. There will be audio content that will enable other opportunities to re-purpose that content and continue to share on other platforms. He said that Sonya Nash will be the host of the podcast series. He said ECCVB staff has spent a lot of time on preparation, including rehearsals to ensure the highest quality.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said the group travel is picking up. Many partners were impacted by the pandemic, but a substantial number of visitors are coming back, with a "silver wave" of older Americans who are vaccinated and making plans to travel in large numbers. He said micro-groups are a segment that we haven't focused on as they are smaller than a traditional group. He said ECCVB staff are trying to research through test emails to better understand this audience's preferences.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said specialty groups such as sports events are really rising to the top. He said the aquatics center in downtown Elkhart has changed the conversation and elevated the view of other sports in Elkhart County. The ECCVB is engaging more with swimming events and teams, also learning about these groups' needs and preferences and how to manage. In response to a question by Mr. S. Baker, Mr. J. Hunsberger said sports events have their own associations that work to identify venues. The Great Lakes Valley Conference brought its event to Elkhart because they had a relationship with the aquatics center director. He said the business relationships and partnerships are complex in this area, and the ECCVB is working to be aware of what's going on and facilitate conversation with hotels.

Mr. J. Hunsberger said that Vibrant Communities has moved to working on "Action Agenda 2.0," a working name on the continuing work on quality of place. ECCVB staff is working with Planning Next to identify a process to generate community engagement on quality of place and community priorities. He said there is ongoing work on a vibrancy survey of resident sentiment survey. The survey has been sent to 5,000 randomly selected recipients

in Elkhart County, with the expectation to have results by September to be shown on website dashboard. He said Vibrant Neighborhoods provides micro-grants of \$500 for neighborhoods to do fun activities or beautification actions. He said one neighborhood has had three events, including a neighborhood barbecue and beautification of a public area. There was general consensus that is good to see rural neighborhoods also getting involved.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was general discussion about the Heritage Trail audio driving tour after Mr. S. Baker asked if it had been updated. The ECCVB staff worked with Big Idea Company and updated audio with enhanced stories and unique voices was made available last year.

Mr. D. Shoup noted that there was a board and commission meeting in July 2020 because of financial situation caused by COVID-19. This year, he said the next meeting will be in September. Mr. L. App said he will create a financial report to be sent out in July and Mr. J. Hunsberger will send a bureau update.

There was general discussion led by Mr. D. Bearss about the role of the Northern Indiana Tourism Development Commission and its Northern Indiana Advocates initiative launched two years ago. NIA is a government affairs and advocacy initiative that works to amplify the voice of northern Indiana in state leadership.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be Friday, Sept. 10, 2021.

ADJOURN

The meeting adjourned at 9:06 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Terry Mark
Staff Recorder