

HAMILTON COUNTY TOURISM, INC. BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
37 E. Main Street, Carmel, Indiana  
May 5, 2023  
Minutes of the Regular Meeting  
Held Off-Site at Conner Prairie and Virtually

Attending in Person: Chris Stice, Jimia Smith, Bob Dubois, Kayla Arnold, Mark Truett, Scott Spillman, Kelly Sujka, Andrew Newport, Adam Hoffman, Michael Balcom

Attending Virtually: Jeffrey Brown

Staff: Betsy Ekelof, Ashley Ledford, Brad Lynn, Karen Radcliff, Brenda Myers, Sarah Billman, Laura Kelner, Sarah Buckner

Guests Attending: Jocelyn Vare, Aili McGill, Ryne Raybourn, Sarah Newkirk.

I. Welcome

N. Burns started the meeting at 8:30 a.m. after a brief welcome statement as Conner Prairie host.

II. Minutes of the March 2023 Meeting

N. Burns noted the minutes had been sent to all Board members and posted in Boardable. There were no changes. S. Spillman moved to approve the meeting. K. Sujka seconded. Motion passed.

III. New Business

A. Nickel Plate Arts Presentation

B. Myers provide an historical background on the partnership between HCT and NPArts and introduced Aili McGill, its Executive Director, for a presentation and update on the non-profit's activities. There were no questions, and the Nickel Plate Arts group left the meeting to allow for Board discussion.

B. Myers noted that the presentation and related documents can all be found in Boardable. She also had provided handouts of the presentation. She then recommended the following actions to the Board based on performance by Nickel Plate Arts to provide information and do self-study as requested: (1) Release the operating grant balance of \$75,000, reminding the Board that the 2023 budget provides for \$100,000, of which \$25,000 was granted in April; (2) Support NPArts further by gifting the organization the two houses that make up its campus with a deed restriction that would allow the deed to revert back to HCT if NPArts dissolves; (3) Grant \$100,000 for building maintenance and improvements that are very much needed for the houses. N. Burns asked for a motion to release the balance of the operating grant. K. Arnold made the motion and J. Smith seconded. Motion passed.

N. Burns then asked for a motion on transferring building ownership to the non-profit. There was much discussion and many questions from Board members including how much support HCT has given NPArts. B. Lynn reported that over the past 10 years, HCT has invested over \$3 million. The building/land on the HCT books as an asset worth just under \$800,000. B. Myers referenced comparison support for the Nickel Plate Express train, which is \$1,200,000 in total investment over time which is proving to attract visitors to the county. S. Spillman asked how we determine a return on our investments and suggested we consider making investments that generate hotel overnights. B. Myers agreed and noted that the new BEST Tourism Capital Fund would do that. N. Burns suggested we measure return not only financially but also by mission. K. Radcliff reported that nationwide, the tourism industry is moving in a direction that measure's itself not only financially but also through other success measurements that seek to sustain the destination, its people, culture and environment. B. DuBois said that without NPArts's early work on the Noblesville alleys, the city's transformation would not have happened, and the city is committed to financially support NPArts in the future. He added that the intent has always been for NPArts to be independent. M. Truett asked what gifting the house to NPArts does to our financials. He also noticed that the NPArts' 2023 budget includes HCT's grant and their hit, if we choose not to grant,

is not recognized in the packet presented. C. Stice agreed and cautioned that historical buildings are very expensive to maintain. He also expressed concern that NPArts's budget may not have enough budgeted to do the actual maintenance required. He suggested we ask them to set aside for R&R because they may not understand the true need for ongoing maintenance. M. Truett asked what our continued maintenance obligation would be if we keep the building. Brenda answered that HCT only pays for any maintenance above \$5,000 and Nickel Plate Arts absorbs the rest. More concerns and low confidence was expressed about NPArts's ability to financially keep up on the maintenance. Chris noted there are grants especially for historical buildings that should be pursued, and Noblesville has façade grants.

S. Spillman moved to give the Judge Stone House and Stevenson House to NPArts along with \$100,000 for maintenance with the following stipulations expressed in a contractual agreement: (1) HCT is provided input on what that maintenance money should be used for, (2) The gifted deed includes a restriction that the property reverts back to HCT if NPArts ceases to exist, (3) Communications and agreement conveys that no future annual support should be expected, (4) Current and future use of the buildings must be used to support the arts in Hamilton County. K. Arnold seconded the motion. Motion passed.

#### B. 2024 Appropriations Request & Draft Budget

N. Burns then asked B. Myers to present the 2024 Appropriations Request. She noted that an information packet had been provided. Walking through the materials, she reported feeling confident on revenue projections because we are outpacing the nation and state. The HCT staff suggests the HCT Board recommend to the Tourism Commission a 2024 request of \$7 million in anticipated lodging taxes from County Council. The early draft 2024 budget also includes the remaining approximately \$500,000 in ARPA funds. Next year's budget will look like a deficit budget because ARPA money was booked in 2022 but available to use through 2024. In addition, the Nickel Plate Arts Campus basset will need to be written off. No one was concerned with the request, which is still \$400,000 higher than the proposed draft budget, with the goal being not to have to come back to the County Council for additional appropriations in 2024. A. Newport moved to accept the staff's recommendation of \$7 million in appropriations for 2024. S. Spillman seconded. Motion passed.

#### IV. Financials & Metrics (Consent Agenda)

##### A. 2023 Visitor & Lodging Reports

##### B. 2023 Tax Remittance Report

##### C. 2023 HCT Budget Report

B. Lynn noted that he had included a financial summary in the packet, which Board members said they appreciated and asked that it be included for each meeting, especially if a consent agenda was designated. There were no questions or discussion. B. Dubois moved to accept the financial packet. A. Newport seconded. Motion passed.

#### V. Old Business

A. Legislation Updates — B. Myers reported that an effort to get the White River project included as a technical committee inside of Central Indiana Regional Development Authority for greater stability and possible access to other funding at the last minute was unsuccessful. HCT's work with Market Street Strategy along with the efforts of Senator Scott Baldwin successfully passed legislation to allow Hamilton County to build a capital fund with a 3% increase to innkeepers tax. HCT considers this model legislation in that it provides for distribution of funds to support significant tourism projects throughout a county and not just for special projects. The next step is to build a local ordinance. HCT meets with the Hamilton County Board of Commissioners in a work session on Monday and conversations with the Hamilton County Council are beginning as well.

B. BEST Updates — The next phase of work on the BEST Master Plan includes feasibility studies on three concepts ranked as high priority by the BEST Committee. Those studies include (1) an indoor winter sports facility for ice and other sports, (2) a conference center/hotel, (3) best use for emerging entertainment districts. Hunden Partners is contracted for those studies plus less detailed analysis on smaller capital projects uncovered and in need of financial support. These will lead to a vetting process that can be operationalized when the BEST capital fund begins to invest in projects.

C. Affirmation of 2023 DEAI Grants—The 2023 budget was approved last fall and included grants for two special projects: a \$100,000 gift to the Roberts Settlement non-profit to install a Legacy Walk at its chapel to celebrate the story of the early black pioneers to Hamilton County and a \$125,000 two-year gift to Conner Prairie to help fund the Promised Land as Proving Ground exhibit which tells the story of slavery and African American history. Both had been included in the 2023 budget and noted at the time of budget adoption, but B. Ekelof asked for the audit record that these grants be reaffirmed by the HCT Board as is policy and also given their size. B. Myers asked the board for to vote individually on each award. C. Stice moved to award Roberts Settlement \$100,000. K. Arnold seconded. Motion passed. C. Stice moved to award Conner Prairie \$125,000. M. Truett seconded. Motion passed. N. Burns abstained on the vote out of a conflict of interest.

D. Office Renovation Updates —T. Rodgers is on vacation so B. Lynn reported that the renovation project is proceeding as planned with a slight 4-6 week delay due to the need for necessary approvals from the state. Phase 1 is close to completion with paint and flooring in the Visitor Center and the third floor leased suite known as “the annex.” Phase 2 includes all three floors of HCT’s owned space but will not start until the construction design is released and approved by the state. The guaranteed price also came in under the \$1.15 budget.

E. Reserves Investment—At the Board’s direction. B. Lynn reported that HCT has purchased a short-term CD and plans to open a high-yield Money Market account which will allow flexible access to the cash in lieu of a CD right now. Both are getting above 4% interest rate. At some point, a second short-term CD could be purchased. Each will be at a different bank to help protect the assets, although bank deposits definitely exceed the \$250,000 FDIC-insured amount.

VI. Adjournment — N. Burns asked for a motion to adjourn. K. Sujka made the motion and J. Smith seconded. He noted that the June meeting will be hosted by the Embassy Suites in Noblesville. The meeting adjourned at 10:13 a.m.