

**HAMILTON COUNTY VISITOR and CONVENTION COMMISSION**  
**37 E. Main Street, Carmel, Indiana**  
**May 16, 2024**  
**5:30-7 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Meeting**  
**37 E Main Street, Carmel, IN 46032**

**Attending the Meeting in Person:** Jack Russell, Bob DuBois, Connor Sullivan, Sydnee Cseresznyes, Kelly Tabeling, Kelly Sujka, Rachael Quade, Andy Card, William Knox, Lisa Hanni, Kevin Walter and Perry Williams.

Jamie Hopwood was virtual.

**Also Attending in Person:** Brenda Myers, President/CEO, Hamilton County Tourism; Brad Lynn, VP Finance, Hamilton County Tourism; and, Karen Radcliff, Vice President/CSO, Hamilton County Tourism. Also, Chou-il Lee, Taft Law.

**Unable to Attend:** Danny Lopez

**Attending Virtually:** Jamie Hopwood.

- I. **Welcome** – C. Sullivan opened the meeting at 5:34 p.m. and welcomed everyone.
- II. **Introduction** – C. Sullivan then introduced Chou-il Lee of Taft Law, which will now represent the Hamilton County Visitor and Convention Commission. C. Lee shared a little about himself and his law firm and everyone welcomed him.
- III. **February 2024 Minutes for Review** – C. Sullivan then asked for any additions or corrections to the minutes from the February 2024 meeting. There were two sets of minutes, one for the work session and one for the actual meeting. It was decided to accept the minutes together since no action took place at the work session. J. Russell moved that the minutes be adopted as presented. K. Tabeling seconded. Motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote.
- IV. **Visitor & Financial Metrics**
  - A. **Visitor Report** – B. Myers provided several charts to demonstrate first quarter 2024 performance. Overnight visitation was actually down to 73.4% compared to 76% in 2023 but length of stay grew slightly, from 1.6 days to 1.8 days. Likewise, visitor origins shifted accordingly as did the top POIs visited. Hotel occupancy reflected that decline and stood at 55.1% for the quarter, down 2.5% with no change in inventory, which meant demand also declined 2.5%. Revenue, however, grew as ADR increased 5.8% to \$130. Short-term rentals, however, has consistently grown as has supply, up 56.7% YOY in March. Demand also was up 45.7% and has increased 45.2% for the quarter along with a significant increase in revenue of 44.9%.
    - 1) **Total Solar Eclipse Data** – B. Myers provided an info sheet on the Total Solar Eclipse impact on the community. While visitation was high and hotels were full, as were vacation rentals, the impact was minimal because the county is spread out, used to handling big events and was prepared, and most locals stayed home. This meant disappointing results to local venues who had planned special events.

**B. 2024 Tax Report** – B. Lynn reviewed tax remittances for the year which are significantly over budget. Through the May deposit, taxes received from the county for the 5% pool of funds is \$4,889,911.22, which includes a carryover from 2023 in January. January-May deposits have been over every month despite the decrease in hotel demand, driven in part by more short-term rental revenue. B. Myers then noted that HCT had followed up with the county on whether or not the Tourism Commission could capture interest at the county level for the BEST Fund given it will accumulate all year long. Interest earned could cover most of the operating costs for the fund, allowing more to be distributed. HCT attended a Council work session, and no one objected but asked that C. Sullivan, the county treasurer and the council’s legal counsel meet to discuss. No further action has been taken on this that HCT is aware of. B. Myers said she would follow up.

**C. Tourism Commission Budget Report** – B. Lynn provided a budget report for the Tourism Commission, noting that the budget needs to be amended and that is later in the agenda. Activity included the deposit of \$3,704,659.37 in innkeepers’ taxes through March and an additional \$2,125.43 in interest income. Expenses included \$2,650,000 in drawdowns to HCT per the funding agreement and \$23.10 in professional fees. Total cash on hand as of March 31, 2024 was \$1,365,451.82. This included a little over \$1 million in a Money Market fund that is earning a healthy interest rate. This is a new move by HCT for the Commission to take advantage of higher interest rates.

**D. HCT Budget Report** – B. Lynn then reviewed HCT’s first quarter budget reports. Through March HCT has brought in \$2,956,014 in revenue against \$2,168,737 in expenses for a net income of \$787,277. All expense line items are on the pace for spending as they should be. On the balance sheet, cash assets in savings and checking total \$3,778,526 as of March 31, 2024. B. Lynn noted that the balance of ARPA funds would be spent this year.

J. Hopwood moved that the visitor and financial reports be accepted as presented. J. Russell seconded. Motion passed unanimously on a roll call vote.

## V. New Business

**A. 2025 Appropriations Request** – A tax forecast chart was presented to the Commissioners with explanations by B. Lynn. All total, \$9.9M total revenue is projected for the 5% Tourism Promotion Fund. \$4M for the 3% Tourism Capital Fund (only 10 months of collections).

Discussion took place about the importance of keeping separate not only the fund accounting (legislated) but also the bank accounts. All agreed that separate bank accounts for each fund will be cleaner and easier to communicate fund activity. Since the Tourism Commission would like HCT to manage the financials and tracking, HCT has proposed to hire a grant officer/bookkeeper. The Commissioners accepted that idea but suggested seeking proposals from larger accounting firms such as KSM to manage the grant contracts due to the complexity of the contracts.

Given how involved the county appropriation process is and the fact that additional revenues tend to sit at the county for several months until they can be rolled over the following year, there was discussion of a need for a strategic plan that might serve the process better in addition to charting a future for the Commission.

K. Walter suggested that having a proposed list of specific uses for funds if revenues were generated might serve to help. In this manner the staff could budget confidently, yet also have stretch projects if additional funds were earned.

It was discussed that perhaps beginning with a Financial Policy would be helpful and all agreed. There is a desire among Commissioners to distribute 100% of the Capital Fund for BEST grants rather than expense management fees from that fund. The management fees could be absorbed by HCT in the annual HCT agreement. B. Lynn will retool the budget to reflect that direction in time for the appropriations submittal to the County.

B. Myers noted that the Destination Development budget is \$2.6M for 2025. This provides an opportunity to fund research and incentivize events and other tourism development opportunities in addition to researching proposed BEST projects. It will also ensure a robust research and data program in addition to marketing and sales. There was a motion by S. Cseresznyes to approve the 2025 appropriations request with acknowledgement of changes to the budget that HCT needs to cover management costs related to the BEST Fund. L. Hanni seconded. Motion passed on a roll call vote.

**B. 2024 Budget Amendments** – B. Lynn provided a document to clarify the need for an amended 2024 Tourism Commission Budget. The original appropriation from the county is for \$7.7M as is the contract agreement with HCT. The Tourism Commission budget needs to be amended to account for higher legal fees and use more of the bond reserves. The new budget is as follows:

**Revenue - \$7,767,500** (\$7.5M from taxes, \$25,000 from interest income and utilization of \$242,500 in bond reserves)

**Expenses -- \$7,754,750** (\$7.7M funding agreement with HCT, \$50,000 in legal fees, \$1,750 in accounting fees and \$3,000 in accounting software)

**Net -- \$12,750**

J. Russell moved that the budget be amended as presented. S. Cseresznyes seconded. Motion passed on a roll call vote.

**C. Money market Signature Resolution** – This item was removed from the agenda as it was not needed.

**D. Hamilton County Sports Authority Brand** A three-year strategic plan for HCSA includes new branding, event support/activation, and advocacy. The new brand will be unveiled in August with the new website. K. Radcliff shared a sneak preview with the Tourism Commissioners. Reactions were positive.

## VI. Old Business

**A. CEO Search Update** – C. Sullivan reported that the Search Committee is looking for a Tourism Commission member who is also a hotelier. K. Tabeling volunteered to join him on the committee. W. Knox moved that both C. Sullivan and K. Tabeling represent. K. Sujka seconded. Motion passed on a roll call vote.

**B. PSDA Updates** – B. Myers introduced initial thinking for the Professional Sports Development Areas (PSDAs) sought by Noblesville and Westfield are moving forward. HCT will provide data and market findings to inform potential financial outcomes of new PSDAs for each city and its legislative counsel will serve as back-up support to the other teams. S. Cseresznyes updated on her recent conversations with key legislative representatives who indicated there is no interest in retooling the statute. B. Myers noted that she had heard there would be interest in entertaining a solid plan for a special exception and that the cities want to try. A meeting will be held in June to discuss next steps.

**C. BEST Fund Updates** – K. Radcliff noted that presentations would be completed from Carmel, Hamilton County Fairgrounds, Forest Park Aquatic Center, City of Fishers, City of Noblesville, and Hamilton County Parks Strawtown Koteewi. The Review Committee is on pace to provide a recommendation to the Tourism Commission for the August meeting. A work session will be scheduled right before the Commission meeting for project Q&A. Tourism Commissioners will be given project summaries, project presentation decks, etc. in advance so that time in the work session can be spent mainly on Q&A.

**D. Community Research Updates** – K. Radcliff let the Commissioners know that the funds set aside by HCT for Westfield as part of its agreement would be used for a phase two plan of the Westfield Sports

and Entertainment District. Located on the southern edge of the park, this has long been a desire by the city to develop and the time is now. HCT will support this study which will help transform this area into a more walkable and enjoyable place for residents and visitors. This is a direct result from BEST and has been identified HCT feels is a good investment in tourism dollars.

**VII. Adjournment** – There being no other business, S. Cseresznyes moved that the meeting be adjourned at 7:28 p.m. L. Hanni seconded. Motion passed.