



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting

September 26, 2025

Present: Drew Gaschler, Chair, Heather Shull, Emily Peterson, Mike Logan, Kirk Goodman, Commissioner Amber Sellers

Present Online: Luis Ruiz, Anthea Scouffas

Absent:, Tina Tourtillott, Heidi Champagne, Margann Bennett

Staff: Kim Anspach, Executive Director, Ruth DeWitt (notetaker)

Drew called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM

MINUTES/FINANCIALS:

Approved August minutes (Kirk, Heather)

Kim presented the financials, she and Tina did not have a chance to review them. Kim believes what's in the report is current and correct. The TGT payment is not reflected in the report, but will be in the next one. The Q3 numbers will be included in November's report and the board will do a deep dive into that financial report.

There is a correction in the line for employee anniversary gifts, which need to have payroll taxes paid. That correction has been made.

The board accepted the financials.

STAFF REPORTS:

MARKETING:

Highlights:

August was a busy month for marketing efforts. Allison has been gone a full month, and Laurel has done a terrific job of keeping up with the marketing presence through lots of live music events, creating a new game day guide for the opening of the Booth, cocktail trail, and agritourism events. She has also been committed to gathering evergreen content and other video pieces that have been getting a lot of traction.

Website:

Our website growth is 11% over August of 2024, the event count is 10 events per user, which reflects how long and how many clicks people are doing on the website. The Summer of Fun passport, the

Visitor Guide promotions, and the events calendar remain the highest traffic pages on the site. Paid views are down slightly over August last year.

Social Media:

Our social media platforms continue to grow. We increased by 1,200 followers in August! We are reaching new levels of engagement.

The e-news letter is also doing well. We have 9,000 subscribers on our distribution list, and the last newsletter had over 4,000 opens. We continue to grow the list with the IMG sports package.

We have over 40,000 cumulative followers now over all our platforms and that is in spite of dropping Twitter last year.

Performance Outcomes:

Luis congratulated the department on the metrics, but urged Kim to think more deeply about tying those metrics into performance. For example, what does an increase in web traffic mean to the visitor landscape in Lawrence? These are the kinds of questions the city will be asking of us as we come through World Cup into 2027, we'll need to tie these outcomes together in the future.

Heather asked if there is a difference between the Facebook metrics between mobile and desktop. Kim said we can get an answer for next meeting.

MOBILE VISITOR CENTER:

The team has been working on the van wrap design with Side Studio. The designs are very exciting and we're honing the concepts with consistent meetings. The interior build will start in October.

SALES:

Sales is showing a slight growth in occupancy over last month, and the ADR (average daily rate) is climbing a bit too. We are 37% to our economic impact goals and working several assists and some new leads, a few from the conferences Laura attended in the spring.

The short term rental report is showing futures tapering off with football season coming to a close, and the ADR is decreasing slightly. We will be getting close to seeing ADR for World Cup in a few months.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Hiring Report:

The hiring team will be conducting three in-person interviews for the DOS position next week. They have hotel and sales experience, and the first round of screenings went well.

Kim was excited to share she has made an offer for the marketing director position. She was unable to disclose the candidate's name as the background checks and final details have not been finalized yet. Kim thanked the hiring committee for their thorough work.

Tourism Summit:

Kim reported on the second annual successful tourism summit. The awardees were: Tourism Champion, David Ranallo, Hotel Employee of the Year, Hanna White Bull, Event of the Year, Shaboozey (3rd Annual Rock Chalk Block Party), and the Partner of the Year, Watkins Museum of History.

The programming was a great combination of inspiration and practical information with a deep dive in the works of Gordon Parks, by Ann Dean; a cultural awareness discussion and exercises with Megan Greene of the KU International Affairs Department, and finally customer service tips and tricks to welcome all, but especially international visitors by Rachel Guffey of Jungle House and Squishingtons.

We had about 75 attendees, and it was more local this year than last, which we really liked. Ruth enjoyed working with committee members and liked looping in their work to put on a great event. Maceli's did a fantastic job and the survey responses so far have all been really positive so far. If any board members have feedback, please share with Ruth.

Board vacancy:

Anthea is retiring in 2026, which leaves an open board seat. She serves is in the cultural representative seat on the board. Kim asked if any board members would be interested in working with her to gather ideas of people to serve. Emily offered to help Kim in recruiting a new member.

TGT Increase:

Luis gave an update on the TGT increase. The increased passed on second reading on September 2, 2025. It is then published consecutive Saturdays in the Journal World, and then the 60-day comment period starts (somewhere between the end of Sept and Oct 1). That will put the end of the comment period around December 1, at which time the Kansas Dept of Revenue will change it's collection rates for Lawrence, and then the new rates should be in effect January 1. We should see the first disbursements by April.

Until then, the eXplore Lawrence 2026 budget is flat-funded off 2025 amounts. Kim will present that to the board and submit the line item budget to the city.

When the increase goes through, the city will determine a budget amendment to increase our lines per the amount we projected getting and allocated for necessary World Cup activities. Luis has set up Casey at the City to work with Kim, Lindsay, and Porter to make sure there is a smooth transition as this takes place.

Ruth presented the idea of a hospitality support fund from the TGT increase in future years after World Cup. This could be a dedicated line in the eXplore Lawrence budget to be used by hotels (other hospitality partners) to attend conferences/tradeshows, travel expenses for them, or other professional development opportunities that is a direct result they can feel from the increasae in the TGT rates. More discussion is needed, but the board seemed open to that idea.

Before then, Ruth presented the idea of working with the restaurant association (or other groups) to ensure that some of the increased money and money allocated for World Cup be used to support hospitality front line workers with added expenses related to increased workload during the World Cup. For example extra shifts, extra child care expenses, household help, health care needs, or mental health needs. Commissioner Sellers said that would be a great point of advocacy and show the needs in the community for the workers. It also ties issues into the state and the recognition of TGT and how important it is to our community.

Emily shared how the Restaurant Association's system works and will help in collaborating on this idea. More to come.

ADJOURNMENT:

Drew moved the board into executive session at 1:51 pm (MSP Anthea, Emily)

The executive session adjourned at 1:58 pm, and the meeting was adjourned concurrently.

Next meeting is Friday November 7 at 1:00 pm in the Carnegie Building.

Respectfully submitted,
Ruth DeWitt