



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting

February 27, 2026

Present: Heidi Champagne, Chair, Margann Bennett, Mike Logan, Heather Shull, Tina Tourtillott, Marlo Angell, Katie VanderVelde, Drew Gaschler, Lindsay Hart

Absent: Mayor Brad Finkeldei, Emily Peterson

Staff: Kim Anspach, Executive Director, Ruth DeWitt, Director of Community Relations (notes)

Heidi called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm

MINUTES/FINANCIALS

The board approved the minutes from the January retreat (MSP Marlo, Margann).

Kim and Heather met for onboarding around financials in advance of the meeting.

Jennie requested a reallocation in the advertising budget. The total stays the same, but some lines are changed.

The 2026 budget is not built out yet, and we will continue discuss it as it changes and World Cup spending gets underway.

There is no World Cup-specific funding in our 2026 budget, which is currently flat from last year. Lindsay, Kim, and Ruth are working together on the city budget amendment on April 7.

The board had a brief discussion about the possibility of using reserve funds, running negative in lines, and other issues that might arise if payments are due to vendors before the budget amendment is completed by the City. The board understands the timing, and hopefully it won't be necessary, but Kim wanted to prepare the board for the possibility. We'll continue to discuss at the March meeting, and as the year progresses.

Kim shared there were a couple of issues of scam credit cards being issued. It's all been taken care of, but she wanted the board to know.

The board accepted the financial report.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Sales:

- The sales department continues to focus on prospecting and building a process to follow up on getting new business in town.
- Jennie joined Visit KCMO with a marketing sponsorship, which included a convention calendar. Chris and Laura have been working to research and prospect those conventions and send Lawrence information to them with the possibility of booking their events in the future.
- The sales department offered a human trafficking training at the 1st Quarter Director of Sales meeting. That training has been made into a 30-minute online training and we are circulating that to the hospitality industry and encouraging people to take it.
- The future AirDNA report is in the sales packets, and shows there is not yet pickup on future short-term rentals. We will continue to watch the bookings closely.

Marketing:

- Jennie is currently at the Destinations International marketing summit in Cleveland. She has sent in a great report that she's meeting our vendor contacts and making decisions on vendor updates or changes.
- She is working on influencer campaign ideas and is also researching a new asset management platform to help organize our photos and media assets.

Community Relations:

- Ruth and Sara have developed a new report for the board based on some of the retreat discussions. Three talking points for community messaging are at the top of the report. We're also tracking stakeholder activity and portal usage.
- Sara has been working tirelessly to clean up the database and ensure that contacts are correct and people who have access are supposed to and they are trained in making updates.
- Ruth provided an update on World Cup planning from the Lawrence 2026 group, and mentioned work to create an 8th Street blocked area for use as a welcome plaza. The space will provide a spot near the bus stop and allow for volunteers, food trucks, musicians and other programming during World Cup.
- Work continues proofing and preparations for the Mobile Visitor Center. We believe we are on track to make the St. Patrick's Day parade.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:

Board Training:

- Kim, Marlo, Katie, and Heather all attended two sessions of a United Way board training in Topeka. They all found it very valuable and it had an immediate impact on Kim's retreat agenda format.
- They offer the training twice a year, if any board member is interested in attending future trainings, please let her know.

City Budget Agreement:

- We have received the 2026 use agreement for TGT funds from the city. There was one change in the bid fund amount that wasn't reflected in the proposed city agreement.
- Kim requested authorization from the board to enter into the agreement with the City for the 2026 budget. The board approved a general operating budget of \$1.4 million, with \$55,000 in the bid fund and authorized Kim to sign the agreement with those changes made. (MSP Tina, Heather).

Coalition Involvement:

- Kim had two appointments to report. She renewed her seat on the Governor's Council on Travel and Tourism and has been appointed to the board of the Black Jack Battlefield advisory committee.

Staff Retreat Work:

- Kim reported on the staff retreat and thanked the board for the guidance they provided the staff in forming priorities and goals as the staff got to work on planning the next year. Staff aligned goals for leveraging growth, building advocacy, and storytelling.
- During the retreat, we had a guest visitor – Dr. Amal El Haimeur from the African and African American studies department at KU. She also connected with an Algerian national. We learned a great deal in a short time about Algeria and will continue to educate ourselves on cultural and visitor aspects of the country.

- We also used our retreat to reach across departments and outline ways that departments need each other, can support one another, and keep us on track to reach our goals.

TGT Report:

The year-end TGT report showed the highest TGT collections on record. \$2.5 million collected over \$2.2 million in 2024. This is before the new rate takes effect.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 2:10 PM

The next meeting of the board is scheduled for March 27 at 1:00 PM at the Carnegie Building.

Respectfully submitted,
Ruth DeWitt