



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting

April 24, 2026

Members Present: Drew Gaschler (Acting Chair), Heather Shull, Marlo Angell, Katie VanderVelde, Lindsay Hart, Mayor Brad Finkeldei, Emily Peterson, Tina Tourtillott

Absent: Heidi Champagne (chair), Mike Logan, Margann Bennett

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

Drew called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm

Celebrations: Congratulations to Chris on the birth of their second boy, Silas.

Kim is celebrating her 12-year anniversary at eXplore Lawrence.

MINUTES/FINANCIALS

The board approved the minutes from the March meeting (MSP Marlo, Heather).

Heather noted the February minutes were not in the packet. She received the March minutes only the day before so reviewed quickly. The Mobile Visitor Center line needs to be adjusted in how it's tracked as an asset. Kim will be making sure to complete those adjustments.

The marketing lines are also in transition now that we have specific World Cup budget lines to track WC expenses. Kim is currently adjusting prior billing lines to the World Cup to reflect more accurately our spending on World Cup efforts. April reports in marketing lines will look very different from this March report.

Emily noted LRA has not been invoiced for Restaurant Week. She urged that be done and included in the April reallocations.

The Q1 payment of the Transient Guest Tax was on the city commission's agenda last week. That payment will be reflected in the April report. All other items are tracking as projected and look good.

The board had a discussion about the timeliness of the financial reports. The board again urged Kim to look into changing accountants.

The board accepted the March financial report. (Note: the February report was not included and therefore not accepted).

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

As we went into the department reports Kim asked the board to take in the information through the lens of the new structure of the three departments working together.

Sales:

Kim handled the sales report in Chris's absence.

- The sales department continues to focus on prospecting and building a process to follow up on getting new business in town.
- Two new businesses leads in March (business that hasn't been booked in Lawrence before).
- The department is reporting 11 leads for the month, lower than the 14 leads from this time last year. (World Cup is likely a factor in slower bookings for the summer).
- Current economic impact is \$79,000, with 60 bookings on the year.
- Chris will be working on protocols and procedures as he phases back into work after paternity leave in a hybrid format.
- Materials and services supported 6 SWAG packets to conferences and meetings.
- Laura hosted three site visits for prospective meetings.
- We will continue to watch the World Cup bookings closely; we are not seeing room pick up yet. This is a nationwide issue, and extends to short-term rentals too.
- The STR report shows bookings are down 5.6%, and the average daily rate is up slightly. Overall, room revenue was down YoY. The travel industry is projecting rising prices in airlines and gas is affecting travel.
- Chris and Jennie are auditing the eXplore Lawrence website for sales information that is out of date or contains broken QR codes.
- Laura, Chris, and Jennie completed the "services menu" collateral that also explains the benefits of working with us. Kim passed the piece out to the board.

Marketing:

- Jennie presented the marketing report, which shows YoY growth over all channels even with a flat budget.

- Laurel made a post about the prairie dogs Pip and Squeak at Prairie Park Nature Center that caught fire and ended up with 50k Instagram views and 45K on TikTok.
- Jennie started a “Book Your Room in Lawrence” digital campaign on April 1, a pivot to reach Algerians living in US pockets and people who have a profile of live sports, Algeria, and World Cup online to get ads from us and direct them to our hotel listings page. Jennie will be able to report an update on the campaign next month.
- Our Lawrence ad started on the KC Streetcar plaza stop on May 15.
- The Summer of Soccer digital passport will launch for business sign up next week. The passport will highlight World Cup and annual activities around Lawrence this summer.
- Jennie shared a proof of our re-imagined Visitors Guide, which is a map/guide combination and will be completed for World Cup distribution.

Community Relations:

- The Community Resource Fair was a success. We had about 75 people come through with over almost 20 exhibitors. We offered food from Mediterranean Market and Shwarma Press, and had donated cookies from Eileen's cookies.
- Ruth provided a World Cup update. The 8th Street Plaza project seems to be cut for now, citing the barriers and traffic signage needed to corral off a small footprint, and issues around programming capacity. Ruth continues to present to community groups. The media attention has been really positive, and the Stan Herd project has been getting national press. Hotel bookings continue to lag, and there is not a clear, comprehensive explanation as to why, but we are continuing to plan as we have been all along.
- The City Commission passed the eXplore Lawrence portion of the TGT budget for our portion of the World Cup commitments. They also approved the city's portion of funding for arts and culture events for World Cup. There was no public comment on the TGT budget at the public hearing.
- We are monitoring the renovations at the former Einstein's bagel property to serve as a volunteer/visitor pop up space for June and July. We are planning hours, activities, and merch for the spot.

- Mobile Visitor Center. The van has been wrapped in Kansas City and ready for pick up in mid-April. The plan is to debut the van for National Travel and Tourism Week (May 3-9). We have invited Bridgette Jobe, Director of Kansas Tourism to launch the van and receive the proclamations with us.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:

- Kim reminded the board about the amended funding agreement that went before the commission on April 7. eXplore Lawrence will receive an additional \$230,000 for marketing, signage, and collateral, volunteer, and operational expenses. Most of the funding has already been allocated to our activities.
- Kim asked the board to approve her signing the amended funding agreement with the city for the World Cup scope of work, the board authorized her to do so on a motion moved by Marlo, seconded by Heather.
- Kim provided a legislative update from Topeka on the 23/7 bar sales bill, which was moving through the legislative process quickly. There is another piece of legislation about adding short-term rentals with only one bedroom to required TGT collections. There is a sports tourism bill also moving through the legislature.
- Finally, Kim and Jennie are compiling final numbers for the Annual Report. Numbers take longer because we are an accrual-based organization. That will be available by the next meeting.
- Kim found a new auditor, Russell Shipley, who came from a contact after the United Way training this year. She checked his references and he comes highly recommended. The first audit will be more time-consuming but he knows the timeline is tight to get the numbers to the city. The city is aware of the situation and knows our audit will be delayed. Now that the 2025 financials are in, all of this can be completed quickly. We will be paying more for audits.
- The board again expressed frustrations with the accountant, and Kim was hoping to wait until Q4 to go through changing accountants, but it might need to happen in the Q3. She asked the board for suggestions. Other board members raised questions about late payments and tax issues, and again reminded Kim of the 3rd Wednesday deadline for financials. Kim will begin drafting RFPs, and mentioned to the board there will likely be an increased cost to switching to another firm.

The board engaged in general discussions about bookings for World Cup and, updates around graduation and graduation plans in town.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 1:56 PM (MSP Heather, Emily)

The next meeting of the board is scheduled for May 29 at 1:00 PM at the Carnegie Building.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth DeWitt