



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting

July 30, 2026

Members Present: Heidi Champagne (chair) Heather Shull, Marlo Angell, Mayor Brad Finkeldei, Emily Peterson, Tina Tourtillott, Margann Bennett, Drew Gaschler, Mike Logan

Absent: Katie VanderVelde, Lindsay Hart

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

Staff Absent: Chris Herman Director of Sales

Heidi called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm

MINUTES

The board approved the minutes from the May meeting (MSP Heather, Emily). Note: There was no June Board of Directors meeting because of World Cup obligations. May and June reports were combined for this meeting.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:

Kim shared her assessment of the team's performance during World Cup and was pleased to see the structure working as intended when the board delineated the Sales, Marketing, and Community Relations departments.

She called out the marketing department for shifting to the effective marketing "book your room in Lawrence" campaign, and for their work in keeping up with social media, and how they stayed ahead of the articles and mentions we were getting in both traditional media and new media.

Kim also recognized the sales department for "keeping the wheels on" and getting new business as all other team members were in the thick of the immediate need to respond to World Cup demands. The sales department handled the street team work and provided resources to businesses.

Kim sees this as a sign of us growing in strength as a team, and as an organization. We will be approaching our work from an impact standpoint and not things that are time-consuming without results.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Community Relations:

Ruth presented a report to the board on the eXplore Lawrence activity during World Cup called Welcoming Algeria. It outlined the activities focused on Arts and Culture, Fan Experience, History and Heritage, and the way eXplore Lawrence prepared businesses, hotels, and hosted a visitor headquarters during June and July. More numbers and data will be available soon and an After-Action Report will be compiled in the next two months by the Douglas County Emergency Management office.

The board had a great discussion about their experiences during our viral moment as hosts. Mayor Finkeldei said he'd done (at last count) 16 interviews on national and international outlets, and the City is STILL receiving an influx of letters and emails commenting on the outpouring of emotion from Lawrence to welcome Algeria.

Heather shared some stories of the team at the hotel. They did amazing work welcoming the team and meeting the needs of the team, the fans who came to see the team, and other guests who stayed there.

Sales:

Kim directed the board to go over the sales reports for activity.

Marketing:

Jennie provided detailed marketing reports in the board packet. In summary, the World Cup coverage lifted the entire marketing ecosystem. Whether it was website engagement, social media engagement, comments, blog posts, it was all buoyed by the media storm we found ourselves in during the tournament.

More numbers will be coming in, but preliminary numbers from Meltwater's report show we had over 9,000 mentions, and 21 billion impressions.

The sentiment recorded was about kindness, joy, love, welcome. Commenting has slowed from June, but our accounts are still receiving messages, as are the city and chamber accounts according to the board members.

We did notice an increase in international traffic on the eXplore Lawrence website, and there was a direct increase of Algerian visits to our site.

FINANCIALS:

Kim and Heather met over the financial report there were a few corrections of small line items to fix (ie staff parking permit charges). The World Cup expenses are coming in and being tracked in the World Cup lines. The insurance costs are not in at this time.

They noted there are no issues for the May numbers. June's report will continue to be updated with expenditures in flux over World Cup and other operational expenses.

August financials will look quite different than the July report. The accountant RFP will be going out in either August or September now that the audit is complete.

Transient Guest Tax Collections:

Hotel occupancy did not increase to the extent we'd hoped during June and July. The days of the matches were good ones, but time between matches were slow, and could have handled sports teams. The TGT collections are up, but that is mostly due to a higher Average Daily Rate rather than occupancy.

Anecdotally we know of rooms that were transferred from Kansas City to Lawrence after the media attention, and we know of several people who decided to drive and stop in Lawrence because of the story happening here.

We cannot define the success of World Cup only by hotel occupancy, and the numbers, reputation, and publicity that Lawrence gained could not have been purchased by any marketing spend. The team at EL, particularly the Sales Department will work on capitalizing this new identity gained from the World Cup stories to leverage conferences, teams, and meetings.

We will be part of an impact report city/county wide, but also we'll be studying our own eXplore Lawrence impact to share with stakeholders.

The board accepted the financial reports.

BOARD BUSINESS:

Board positions:

Heidi will be resigning from the board as the hotel is closing on August 28. Heidi can chair the August meeting as her last meeting. Kim thanked her for her leadership on the board for so many years. She will be sorely missed.

Heidi has been reaching out to groups who have booked with SpringHill to make sure their rooms and stays are taken care of. Football and family weekend are very difficult.

Kim noted how Lawrence is losing 105 rooms, which will definitely have an impact on TGT and sourcing rooms.

Drew Gaschler will be stepping in as chair two months early and will remain chair in 2027. Vice chair will be vacant through the end of the year.

The board accepted the motion to move Drew to chair (made by Emily, seconded by Marlo).

The executive team will meet about a vice chair for 2027 and will finalize plans and vote at the board retreat.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 2:09 PM (MSP Heather, Emily)

The next meeting of the board is scheduled for August 28 at 1:00 PM at the Carnegie Building.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth DeWitt