



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting

March 27, 2026

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

Absent: Heidi Champagne (chair), Tina Tourtillott, Mike Logan

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

Shout out to Heather Shull who became a citizen of the US last week! Congratulations, Heather.

MINUTES/FINANCIALS

The board approved the minutes from the February meeting (MSP Heather, Emily).

Kim and Heather met to discuss the January financials; Kim has not received the February report yet. The accountant is working on adding coding for World Cup spending lines, and some of the financials will be reallocated when the codes are complete.

Heather and Kim discussed changing accountants. We are in the third year of a 3-year agreement, so it is time to issue an RFP for services.

Kim mentioned our auditor retired and we are looking for a new one. The process has been challenging as we are either too small or people have not responded to the RFP. Members made some suggestions of others, Kim will follow up. The audit will be slightly delayed this year, but the city is aware of our timeline.

Kim mentioned the board training at United Way and recommended members attend. The United Way offers the training a few times a year. Members should let her know if they're interested.

The board accepted the January financial report.

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:

- The sales department continues to focus on prospecting and building a process to follow up on getting new business in town.
- Chris will be going on paternity leave in early April. He has been working with Laura on the status of leads, and Laura has what she needs to turn that business to definite.
- Chris will be working on protocols and procedures as he phases back into work after paternity leave in a hybrid format.
- Chris and Laura have been working with Jennie to develop sales collateral for trade shows and general inquires.
- Chris and Jennie are drafting a sales marketing plan.
- Chris and Laura attended the Mixmaster Conference and helped with welcoming the conference, presented about our calendar of events, and how musicians can add their events to the calendar.
- 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.
- Chris and Jennie are auditing the eXplore Lawrence website for sales information that is out of date, or contains broken QR codes.
- Laura and Chris are working on a "services menu" and a piece explaining why groups should choose to work with eXplore Lawrence rather than booking themselves.

Marketing:

- Jennie attended the Destinations International marketing summit in Cleveland. She made some great contacts and talked to new vendors.
- We are switching over to a new asset management system, Snapsee. This will allow our digital photos to be cataloged in one place, and labeled for easy search. We signed the contract for a large savings over Crowdriff.

- Jennie is working on a new visitors guide. It will have a different format than the traditional magazine. This guide will be an elevated map that people can easily carry and it will have QR codes for information.
- With information about the State Department bond requirements for Algerians to travel to the US, we will be conducting a "Book Your Room in Lawrence" digital campaigns in US cities with large Algerian populations.
- On April 1, we started to use the website impact calculator that the board approved in November. Jennie shared data from Restaurant Week (the only data we have at the moment), but we had 9,000 impressions between December 1, to January 31. We know that 30 people who saw ads came to Lawrence and 180 people came after restaurant week was over.
- One note, restaurants who had menus attached to their listing had higher traffic than those without menus.
- 2025 social impressions doubled over last year, we expect to see a similar growth in 2026.

Community Relations:

- Ruth presented the results of the portal project Sara has been working on so diligently. Account log ins YTD = 123, up from 107 in all of 2025. Account updates YTD = 42, up from 19 all of 2025. Listing updates YTD = 62, up from 31 all of 2025.
- Sara is spearheading the Community Resource fair. We have had a fantastic response from the partners we asked to come table.
- Ruth provided a World Cup update. She continues to present to groups and has been working with MSO on the 8th Street Plaza idea. We're pursuing the Einstein's location for a volunteer HQ. The city RFPs have been awarded for viewing parties. Those details will be announced soon.
- On April 7 our amended budget goes to City Commission. That will authorize spending for our scope of work proposed for World Cup. The city's portion will include the community events and other general arts and culture and general expenses. Coupled with the amended budget is a public hearing for the TGT funding. Lindsey, Ruth, and Kim will be available to answer questions from the Commissioners.
- The TGT grant review process was a bit different this year. No one from eXplore Lawrence was on the committee that reviewed the applications. Lindsay will check into who was on the committee. Kim added that we would be valuable

to the process because we have data for what events bring visitors and which align with the Unmistakable Identity.

- The initial TGT numbers look very good with the new rate. February is our first glimpse, as it reflects January activity. We have an increase of \$39,000 in TGT remits even with a January that had relatively low occupancy. This will help in setting a baseline for next year's budget, which the board may start preliminary conversations about in April.
- Mobile Visitor Center. While we did not make the St. Patrick's Day Parade goal, our work continues on the Mobile Visitor Center. Our proof for the wrap on the van itself is complete. The van is scheduled to go in for the wrap in early April. We had our first video shoot with the videographer, and, we are working with KU to get footage from Allen Fieldhouse in conjunction with the restrictions and markings for KU. We are also shooting our live music one in the next week.

The board had a discussion about hotel rooms and rates being charged for rooms. Rates have come down, but the issue is happening everywhere not only in Lawrence. We will continue to update the board on room pick up and our campaigns and responses to drive visitors to the city.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:

Legislative Update:

- Kim provided an update on measures working their way through the legislature. The first is the 23-hour liquor law. It has cleared the State Senate and heading to Conference Committee. The Mayor asked about the local interest, and Kim shared the few people we've checked with don't seem interested. More details to follow.
- The second piece of legislation concerns a sports tourism grant program to attract sports tournaments to Kansas. The bill has had some much-needed improvements since last year, to increase the incentives for smaller cities. Kim is watching and will keep an eye on the progress of that legislation.
- There is another provision that has been attached to various bills changing the TGT collections in short-term rental properties to include properties that have one bedroom. One-bedrooms were exempt from collection requirements before. A companion measure also changes the tax code to allow collections past the current 28-days during the tournament months this summer.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 2:00 PM (MSP Heather, Mayor Finkeldei)

The next meeting of the board is scheduled for April 24 at 1:00 PM at the Carnegie Building.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth DeWitt