



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting

May 29, 2026

Members Present: Heidi Champagne (chair) Heather Shull, Marlo Angell, Katie VanderVelde, Lindsay Hart, Mayor Brad Finkeldei, Emily Peterson, Tina Tourtillott, Margann Bennett

Absent: Drew Gaschler, Mike Logan

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

Heidi called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm

MINUTES/FINANCIALS

The board approved the minutes from the April meeting (MSP Heather, Katie).

The board reviewed the February financials, which were not included in the March packet.

Heather noted both the April financials and the audit were in the packet and reflected a strong financial position for Explore Lawrence. The World Cup expenses are now officially available and being tracked separately, that line is also strong. There is one correction, that the Lawrence 2026 brand expenses need to be moved to World Cup expenses and out of the eXplore Lawrence lines.

Looking ahead to the 2027 budget, health care costs are expected to increase \$4,300/year. Margann suggested looking into the program the Chamber uses for potential cost savings.

The board accepted the financial report.

Kim said that the accountant RFP process could start now that the audit is complete, and she asked board members to forward any recommendations her way.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Sales:

Chris reported a good month for sales. They booked over \$224,000 in room nights, and have been very busy with graduation deliveries on the services side. They used the new mobile visitor center to drop graduation supplies at the hotels, which was a great chance to share it with the hotel staffs.

- The YTD occupancy was slightly down over last year, and the ADR was down a bit. Overall revenue was down .01% from last year.
- Focusing on bigger meetings with the new conference center.
- The department is being careful to work leads that have a reasonable chance of booking in Lawrence, rather than spending time and resources that will never come here (due to stay patterns, size, time of year, etc.)
- There are a few issues around the use of some of KU's facilities for outside group and meeting sales. OVG and Chris will work together to clear up those challenges.
- Chris has been working: Golf Course Superintendent 100 year anniversary, National Folk Festival, SPL events (hoops and martial arts).
- Marlo mentioned she is presenting at the Arts Convention in Wichita and they are looking to move. She will connect Chris with the organizers.

Marketing:

Jennie presented the marketing reports.

Website

The website saw a 60.9% increase in users over April 2025.

The events calendar continues to be the most popular page, comprising nearly a quarter of the site's traffic (23.8%).

Social Media

Social media continues to explode. We gained 676 fans over three platforms (FB, IG, and Tik Tok). We earned over 1 million impressions, 36K post engagements, and 561,485 video views.

Book Your Room in Lawrence campaign

The campaign started on April 1, and has generated 744,997 impressions, 6,847 clicks, and a .9% click through rate. The campaign's landing page was the second most viewed page on our site with 6,743 views. We can directly attribute 2 hotel bookings and 33 flight bookings from the campaign.

Digital Passports

The Summer of Soccer passport launches next week. So far 22 businesses have added discounts. The 4 regional Douglas County historic sites are included as an America 250 experience.

Community Relations:

Ruth presented the Community Relations report. She continues to work on the World Cup organizing/planning. We have secured the former Einstein's bagel storefront for the pop up visitor and volunteer HQ during the tournament, and will have a soft opening.

Stan Herd's flag is gaining national attention. Fox 4 is planning a Zip Trip segment at the end of the month to highlight all the work happening out in Lawrence for the World Cup.

Mobile Visitor Center

The mobile visitor center is wrapped and made its debut during National Travel and Tourism week. We received a visit from Bridgette Jobe, the Director of Kansas Tourism, and a proclamation from the City of Lawrence. Ruth outlined the stops and week of activity to the board in a special presentation.

The van has a few parades this summer, and then will go in for the interior design. In the meantime, we'll be developing a rubric for deployment decisions, and a sales schedule and making sure we our use of it aligns with grant requirements.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:

Office Space Lease

The board reviewed and agreed to sign a lease for the Carnegie space. The least is a yearly lease with an automatic renewal for four years.

2027 Budget

Kim presented the board with a 2027 budget proposal, starting the process with the city. This year, eXplore Lawrence is requesting an increase in funding. Some targeted increases include:

- sales software funding
- a rebranding initiative
- a professional development fund for hotel and partner employees
- an increase in marketing operations

The board gave Kim several suggestions on revising the request. Lindsay will take the revised memo, incorporate it into the Parks, Recreation, and Culture Budget. The board voted to submit the programmatic budget of \$1.72 million to the city for the 2027 budgeting process. (Emily, Tina)

Transient Guest Tax Funds

The TGT report showed a rebound from the prior month's collections, and an overall increase of 7.25% for the year. While occupancy isn't showing an increase, the

increase in the fund seems to be attributable to the higher rate. eXplore will continue to monitor collections.

ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 2:22 PM (MSP Katie, Emily)

The next meeting of the board is scheduled for June 26 at 1:00 PM at the Carnegie Building.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth DeWitt