



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting

July 25, 2025

Present: Drew Gaschler (chair), Heather Shull, Kirk Goodman, Emily Peterson, Tina Tourtillott, Heidi Champagne

Present online: Commissioner Amber Sellers, Anthea Scouffas

Absent: Luis Ruiz, Margann Bennett

Staff: Kim Anspach, Executive Director, Ruth DeWitt (notetaker)

Drew called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM

MINUTES/FINANCIALS:

Approved June minutes (Heather, Emily). Tina abstained because she wasn't at the last meeting.

Tina and Kim went over financials, everything in the report is correct. Allison reviewed the marketing lines and didn't report any issues. Cash flow is good. Health care costs are expected to rise next year. Kim allocated extra funding for it, but there is potential for costs to rise more given cuts to health care on a federal level. Other points of interest:

- Our travel line is down compared to last year, although we expect it to rise again with upcoming trade shows and conferences
- Technology vendor upgrade over last year, and the new vendor will bill monthly
- Rent expenses are below projections – attributed to closing the visitors center at 812 Mass.
- Cleaning costs down a bit, only cleaning one facility, not the visitors center
- We're looking at being able to get rid of the storage container, which will save admin costs in 2026 with distribution of visitors guides.
- Added mid-year report to see how pacing is going
- Ordinary income and expenses line – the TGT income comes in quarterly so left blank for this report, expect it for the next meeting.

The board accepted the financials.

STAFF REPORTS:

Marketing:

Director of Marketing

Allison resigned her position in early July; Wednesday was her last day. She is headed to Independence MO, as the executive director for their new CVB, which is a good move for her. We had a smooth hand off for us to take things over. Kim will form a hiring committee and get the job posted asap.

Website:

Our website growth is 11% over June 2024, there is an increase in event count. People are clicking through to fewer things, but the count grew. It could be interpreted that more people are coming to the website and finding what they are looking for right away, so clicking less.

Social Media:

Our social media grew followers by 1,200 followers last month. Laurel has been doing a great job we had posts that have received 695,000 impressions, 30,000 engagements, and over 2,000 video views. Board members, please interact with posts. The board comment congratulations to Laurel who is going a terrific job in a difficult space.

Crowdriff Content Creators:

We are watching this contract closely. They missed picking up our first couple of events and so far have picked up 2/7 requests. We are concerned about why or whether they do not have enough creators to handle the requests. They have promised to make up the shoots they missed, but we will keep in mind whether or not we need a contract review.

Passports:

Summer of fun pass is going strong. It continues into September. Rather than prizes for everyone who completes the check-ins, there is a sweepstakes this year. Laurel has handling that in Allison's absence. Laurel also believe it's possible to continue with the program and do the Winter Wonderpass – more to come on that.

Visitors Guide:

Kim suggested to the board we postpone creating the Fall digital Inspiration Guide Allison proposed and keeping our printed guide through the end of the year. This will ease pressure on the staff and allow the new director to drive that vision a bit more. We anticipate making the change for the Spring/Summer of 2026.

Mobile Visitor Center

Allison did a great job of handing off the van development. We're at the stage of purchasing the tech that McCollugh has recommended. We had a team meet with Side Studio (graphic designers) about our concepts for the outside wrap. They presented four options, some of which were interactive, but we're meeting next week to discuss and send our recommendations to them.

Kim will share the wrap design(s) with the board before we purchase anything.

Sales:

June is a slower month for sales, following the spring conference season and graduation workflows. The sales report reflects that and is down in June. Prospecting is on target from small market summit, but we are at 30% of the goal for the economic impact. Laura will be attending the "Going on Faith"

tradeshow in Cincinnati on August 6-8. She has appointments submitted, 20 appointments allowed and she's waiting to hear back on what is booked through those submissions.

Also reflected for June is the STR Report, shows a flat month. Demand dipped, which causes rates to dip, and the TGT goes down. We show the occupancy was up, but with the rate down, TGT collections slow. The Air DNA futures are looking strong for fall, and hopefully that will reflect with hotels too.

There was a brief discussion about plan ideas to close the economic impact gap.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

TGT Increase:

Kim shared the updated TGT collections from the state. Collections are up 8% for the year after a slow start. We are expecting this to continue to be strong, as football is back and there should be a robust season on tap for the new stadium.

The TGT increase came up in the last City Commission meeting, and the city manager's office would like to move forward (in contrast to what we believed last month) exploring options for increases at a work session in August 19.

Kim shared a document of rate comparisons for TGT, which showed the city allocation within the fund as the only growing cost center in the future. It seemed to present a situation where an increase would raise much needed World Cup marketing funding, but after 2026, the funds would go to the city's allocation and not increase with other entities who receive TGT funds, including eXplore Lawrence.

Additionally, the fund continues to show an increasing deficit in future years, drying up reserves and depleting the balance, eventually prompting drastic, if not terminal cuts to the programs funded by TGT. Rate increases to 7%, and 7.5% continue to run a fund deficit, rates at 8%, 8.5% and 9% start to recover the fund's balance over time.

The board looked over the research and discussed the city's increase in expenses and use of the fund – particularly since 2021. They shared concerns about the personnel expenses in the fund. The concern was around how they keep increasing and eating into funds allocated to the original purpose of promoting tourism.

Commissioner Sellers added that at the last commission meeting she proposed exceeding the revenue neutral budget by increasing the mill by .08, which would provide about \$500K for World Cup. She also raised the question about the discussions around the direction of DLI.

The board considered several ideas, from supporting a rate increase of 8.5% to supporting a temporary increase in the fund, to researching other community's use of funds and comparing collections and expenses.

Commissioner Sellers reminded the group this was going to be a work session and it would be helpful to show the fund expenses over time and pose questions back to the commission. Most of the board landed on supporting 8.5% with a stipulation that the increase in funds is allocated to eXplore Lawrence to promote tourism activities.

Kim asked if we needed a special board meeting to review or if it could be handled by a workgroup of fewer than three members. Some members would be out of town, but thought a workgroup is the best option. Send your interest to Kim if you want to serve.

Organization Chart:

Allison's departure prompted Kim to do a reorganization of the staff. She presented a new org. chart to the board for discussion.

She is elevating community relations to a department level. There is a change for the sales coordinator position, who will now focus on special projects and making sure data is communicated out so the community relations director can use the information for advocacy. The community relations director would oversee the mobile visitors center development and staff, and the special projects and data manager.

Part-time van support positions are still being developed.

The Marketing Director will not have communications responsibilities. They will be responsible for the Unmistakable Identity, work with travel writers, brand influencers, and execute the marketing plan. The Digital context manager stays the same.

Director of Sales will have clarified responsibilities focusing on lead generation, bid fund deployment, and strategic conference recruitment.

Sales and services manager will have the responsibilities as a lead catcher, work assists, and deployment of sales and service requests.

Executive Session:

The board adjourned to executive session to discuss personnel issues at 2:24 PM.

The board returned from executive session at 2:40 PM where no formal action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT:

Drew requested a motion to adjourn, the meeting adjourned (Tina, Emily) at 2:42 PM.

Next meeting is August 29 at 1:00 pm in the Carnegie Building.

Respectfully submitted,
Ruth DeWitt