



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

August 28, 2024

Present: Ivan Simac, Chair, Drew Gaschler, Luis Ruiz, Mike Logan, Porter Arneill, Heidi Champagne (virtual), Kathy Gerstner, David Hayob, Tina Tourtillott, Amber Sellers

Absent: Anthea Scouffas, Andrew Holt

Staff: Kim Anspach, Executive Director, Ruth DeWitt, Manager of External Affairs and Sales Operations, Sara Harley, Office and Sales Coordinator, Allison Calvin, Director of Marketing and Communications

Ivan called the meeting to order at 11:02.

MINUTES/FINANCIALS:

The board had several corrections to the minutes as the draft version was in the packet rather than the final version. The correct version is included in this month's packet. With the noted corrections, the board approved the minutes (Amber, Mike)

Financials

Kim presented the financials in Anthea's absence. Not too much to report and the budget remains on track for the spending for the year. The board lunch was incorrectly coded as retirement fees, which has been corrected. Christina noted an error in submitting our taxes to the state. She will deduct the \$3.88 error from her accounting fees.

The guest tax collection of \$347,750 was deposited in July. It is allocated quarterly which is why the budget reflects the \$115,916 amount.

The board accepted the financial report.

STAFF REPORTS:

Sales

The sales numbers continue to be strong. Sales remain on pace with goals – we have reached 60% of goals for leads generated and 70% of revenue generated.

The National Fishing League tournament will be at Clinton Lake on September 14 & 15. This is the first event for which the board deployed the bid fund. We will report back on the September meeting how the event did.

The USSSSA has reached out about getting their baseball and softball tournaments back to town and are looking at the facilities we have to accommodate them. Laura is working on this lead.

The marketing and sales staff submitted a bid for the National Association of Travel Writers and Journalists Association (NATJa) conference for 2027. This is a bid like no other we've placed. It was

very detailed, took lots of planning with detailed itineraries for the writers while in Lawrence. It will be an expensive group to host, however, the return is several articles about Lawrence with up to 10 million impressions nationwide.

Sara Harley, the new Office and Sales Coordinator attended the meeting and introduced herself. She has a strong background in process improvement and is currently looking at the sales process and will work to operationalize ways the process works, and is the most efficient and effective as possible.

Marketing

The website continues to perform well. Over the past 90 days, traffic has increased 40% and the event count (number of actions visitors take once on our site) has increased by 23%.

The Summer of Fun pass was our most successful to date with over 1,600 sign ups, 1,300 check-ins, and over 1,000 people added to our enews subscription.

During the Summit, we will be launching the Burger Battle pass. It's a pass designed to prompt engagement during fall to make up for football traffic being in Kansas City. It is a new pass that will contain voting – it's never been done before, and Allison has been working with Bandwango to make sure it all works. It's one of the reasons Bandwango is coming to the Summit – to announce this first-in-the-country pass. The pass will be open through January and we'll announce the winner in conjunction with restaurant week.

The social and reels engagement increased in July, Activity on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok resulted in an increase of over 400 new fans, 160,000 impression, and 80,000 engagements, and over 36,000 new views.

Visitors Center

Visitor center walk-ins totaled 789 people for July. The gross retail sales were \$701. We hosted a Final Fridays artist, and Gil is committed to working on the window displays.

Tourism Summit

Ruth gave an update about the Summit, it's shaping up to be a great day, and she encouraged folks to join us for all or at least part of the day.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

STR and TGT Reports

Kim encouraged the board to look over their lodging and TGT reports so the board could focus discussion on the by-laws update and new board member issue. Overall, the TGT collections and June performance is up 13. (% year over year, We are over our best year on record, although we are anticipating a challenging fall, we have gained some ground. We are watching the STR report closely. We're seeing a dip in ADR and demand. Ivan warned that while the numbers look good now, to expect a drop in room revenue going into the fall.

The board turned to the AirDNA report showing future bookings are strong for the fall with verifiable booked room. There is no equivalent information from STR, because it's only for the whole

destination management area, which includes Topeka. STR is changing their dashboard and will look at changing our subscription level in 2025 if it has this information.

New Board Members

Mike, David, and Ivan will be rotating off the board at the end of the year. Ivan has the hotelier seat, and has someone in mind as a replacement, David occupies a tourism industry seat, and Mike is currently representing the event management industry. Kim would like to have the new members recruited to attend the board retreat in December with the current board for continuity.

Porter will check with Sherri (City Clerk) about the timeline for us to submit nominees for vacancies. If any board members have ideas of possible members, please send them to Kim.

Because the bylaws changes haven't been approved yet, Kim suggested proceeding with the current structure – ie replace Ivan with a hotelier, David with a tourism representative, and Mike with an event management seat. David mentioned that they are finishing up interviews for the conference center manager, so stay tuned for that information.

Bylaws

Kim and Luis met about moving forward with the proposed changes to the bylaws. eXplore Lawrence needs to create a summary memo for the commission explaining the changes we are asking for and then we'll be scheduled on the commission's agenda and get them approved by the commission. We hope this will be able to be on the consent agenda – Porter and Luis said it needs to go in front of Craig.

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH/BUDGET:

Kim presented a draft of the proposed 2025 budget based on the city's approval of a flat-funding. This is a draft allocation for initial feedback from the board. Of the budget presented, the decreases in allocated funds are in green.

Kim also believes we are retaining enough resources in sales and marketing to create economic impact in the area.

Highlights:

- Given the budget constraints, we will likely stay in our current office.
- The visitor center expenses will remain flat, merch expenses are expected to go down
- Kim is asking Freedom's Frontier to increase their share of services and pay their own phones
- We will increase efforts to get sponsorships for events like Summit

Allison is currently building her marketing budget and will join the board in September to present that budget.

Other items of note in the draft:

Incentives line to bring new business is being decreased, but not by much, and will continue to be backed up by the bid fund, which can also provide incentives.

Costs for Placer AI will be split between Marketing and Sales

Visitor's guides – proposed cuts to this line, which will affect the numbers of visitors guides we can distribute to travelers who are in the area for World Cup.

There is no current allocation for World Cup marketing in the budget. Is there a way to offset TGT grants to provide money for World cup efforts.

It seems clear there will be no state money to market to World Cup travelers for short trips to surrounding communities. Amber raised the question about how we are expected to fund these and other efforts – Kim commented that the TIAK executive director and marketing efforts will be at the Summit if people are interested in talking to her.

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH/WORKSPACE COMMITTEE:

Kim gave a brief update on the office move. Right now, there is no option on Mass Street that we can afford. If there is not space to move into and we don't move, we'll need to configure the current space using the current conference room as flex space. We also need to get our desks out of storage. We can use the upstairs for board meetings if we reconfigure the conference space.

ADJOURNMENT:

Ivan requested a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 11:58 (David, Mike)

Next meeting is September 25, 11:00 AM at the eXplore Lawrence conference room.

Respectfully submitted, Ruth DeWitt