



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting

August 28, 2026

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

Absent: Margann Bennett, Drew Gaschler, Mike Logan

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

Guest: Faith Bridges (StoneHill Lawrence, Trademark Collection by Wyndham)

Heidi called the meeting to order at 1:03 pm.

Heidi resigned her position with the board via the Mayor's office upon closing the Spring Hill Suites hotel on August 27, 2026. She introduced Faith Bridges to the board, Faith will be joining the board in the hotel board position upon approval by the Mayor.

Drew Gaschler will be moving into the Chair role, effective the September board meeting, which is a few months ahead of schedule. The vice-chair role will remain open until the new board elects the executive team in January.

Board notes: Heidi offered congratulations to Heather Shull and Katie Vandervelde on their acceptance into the Leadership Lawrence class of 2027.

Kim offered Heidi a gift of thanks and remarks marking her time as a dedicated and loyal board member, and an advocate of eXplore Lawrence.

MINUTES

Tina noted she was listed as present for the July meeting, but was in fact absent. The board approved the minutes pending the correction. MSP Marlo, Heather.

FINANCIALS:

Heather saw the financial report late, and reminded the board Kim is moving ahead with an RFP for a new accountant. Kim's alerted Christina that the RFP is going out on Monday (August 31) and will be open through September. This will be good timing with year ends and starting new at the first of the year.

There were a few lines to move – Facebook ad boosts belong in World Cup funding, incidental charges to World Cup, and SNAP promotional items belong in World Cup lines.

The dues lines look a bit off, but those are reports from Tourism Economics that are usually paid later in the year.

After a new accountant is on board, some expense lines will be adjusted to more accurately represent what the expense category is used for (subscriptions vs dues, etc.).

Emily asked about surplus funding, but Kim is still working on the allocations between World Cup expenses (that are still coming in) and general operating funds. The September budget should have most WC invoicing complete and reflect those balances.

The board wanted to know ideas Kim had for the RFP and she has a list she's compiled in working with other directors. There are a variety of firms, large and small, but we want to have someone Lawrence based.

The board accepted the financial report.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:

Kim added an addendum to the board's packet of TGT collections normalized at 6%. (Requested by Emily). The spreadsheet demonstrates that the increase in TGT amounts is a reflection of the rate increase and not increased occupancy.

Overall, looking at the normalized numbers we see lower collections, particularly in June and July due to the absence of events booked (tournaments, weddings, meetings) because of World Cup. The average daily rate (ADR) was also higher causing collections to increase, but is that sustainable in the market now?

The TGT collections drive the city's budget allocations, and given these numbers, we'll still be trailing on the city budget projections for growth in the fund.

The board approved the request to the city for \$1.7 million in funding next year. This will enable us to continue the momentum of increased marketing and sales. The landscape is difficult AND we have a hotel of 105 rooms closed. We don't want to see KU Football weekends and parent weekends going to surrounding towns.

Lindsay said staff at sports pavilion is working to get teams back that canceled over World Cup. We have a lot of momentum from the summer and need to keep it going to get groups here.

Since the summer media blitz, groups are contacting sales for information. Some inquiries are coming in for 2028 and even 2029.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Because of limited time before Executive Session, Kim asked the board to read their reports to inform themselves of the department's work. Ruth and Jennie would only be touching on highlights.

Community Relations:

Ruth shared Summit information with the board. She talked through the agenda, and asked for sponsor help if possible. She also urged people to bring friends and register to attend.

She also urged board members to attend the Lawrence Transit film on Saturday Sept 19 about the bus driver, Eddy, and the vital role his route plays in the lives of the riders of the #6 bus. Transit poet laureates will read their poetry, art from the bus shelters and sides of the busses will be on display, and the 10 minute film will be followed by a Q&A lead by Lawrence film maker, Laura Kirk. Explore Lawrence is sponsoring a reception immediately following. Festivities start at 6 pm at the Lawrence Arts Center, Sept 19.

Sales:

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

Marketing:

Jennie provided a detailed marketing report in the board packet, including a summary of the results of the "Book Your Room in Lawrence" campaign.

According to Meltwater, the Lawrence-Algeria story generated nearly 12,000 impressions and 28.5 BILLION impressions globally. We also appeared in CNN's top 10 towns to visit and had a write up in Travel and Leisure. Mayor Finkeldei added he did 18 interviews on national and international platforms.

In addition to the volume of mentions and impressions, the sentiment was overwhelmingly positive and emotions registering "joy", "love", and "sadness" (to not be there or be leaving).

Score Lawrence swag included unique QR codes Jennie was able to track. We saw over 600 scans between the hotel banners, the table tents, and the information in the clear bags. Given that response, we have started talking about seasonal banners for hotels in their lobbies and information that directs them to the eXplore Lawrence events page.

The board had a discussion about how valuable this level of media attention is to Lawrence and what will happen moving forward, particularly in sales.

We will continue to gather data and track what is available to us regionally and through KC 2026. The staff is working on an after-action report that will be available perhaps in November, and the Score Lawrence group is also compiling a report that will include safety and security costs and other county-wide impacts.

BOARD BUSINESS:

The board went into executive session at 1:43 (per the open meetings act). The board resumed its open meeting business at 2:00 pm and adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT:

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

The next meeting of the board is scheduled for September 25 at 1:00 PM at the Carnegie Building.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth DeWitt