



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

July 31, 2024

Present: Drew Gaschler (acting chair), Luis Ruiz, Mike Logan, Anthea Scouffas, Porter Arneill, Heidi Champagne, Andrew Holt, Kathy Gerstner, David Hayob

Absent: Amber Sellers, Tina Tourtillott, Ivan Simac

Staff: Kim Anspach, Executive Director, Ruth DeWitt, Manager of External Affairs and Sales Operations (taking notes).

Drew called the meeting to order at 11:05.

MINUTES/FINANCIALS:

The board approved the minutes of the May meeting without changes. (Heidi, Anthea)

Financials

Kim and Anthea presented the financial report. The budget is on track for the year we're about halfway through the year and tracking at that pace. Kim noted the second quarter allocation is here, and will be reflected in the July financials (start of Q3).

Luis asked about the reserve fund policy. The board has a policy to hold one quarter's worth of operating funds in reserve at all times.

Other finance issues of note are: payroll is down by 7% (due to vacancies), and insurance costs are up.

Luis also asked about the merchandise sales at the Visitor Center. Kim explained that we don't count the merchandise at the VC as a revenue stream, and we're happy if we break even. We also don't anticipate spending all of our budget on allocated for the cost of goods in there.

The board approved the financial report (Mike, David)

STAFF REPORTS:

Kim encouraged the board to read the individual staff reports – she will point out highlights, but in order to save time for the budget and operational health discussion, she won't go through every report in detail.

Sales

The sales numbers continue to be strong. We're at 51% of the leads generated goal. There are fewer leads, but the economic impact is higher, so the work is more productive and efficient.

Laura Carbrey and Laura Hamilton from Jayhawk Hospitality went to the Destinations Midwest tradeshow in Wichita from August 5-7. They had several appointments and did lots of recruiting for conferences, highlighting the new conference center. Their feedback was positive, as the planners were looking to match up with smaller meetings or regional events rather than the large national events like at Connect.

In September, the National Fishing League will be here for the Crappie and Bass tournament. This is an event we used the bid fund to recruit to Lawrence. It will be at Clinton Marina, with lots of activities, including a fishing derby for kids.

Marketing

The website continues to perform well. There has been a 19% increase in users. There were 34,000 first-time visitors to our website in June, and the event count is 13 events/per user. This symbolizes a terrific level of engagement.

Tourism Summit

Plans for the Tourism Summit are well underway. We have some sponsorships coming in. So far Jayhawk Hospitality and Bandwango are \$500 sponsors and SNAP Promotions and the KC Star Casino are \$250 sponsors. The CEO and CFO of Bandwango are planning to come to the Summit and sponsor the awards. We're thrilled they are coming to visit Lawrence, and help us launch the Burger Battle pass that is coming this fall.

Visitors Center

The visitor center is doing well under the new structure of the part-time supervisor, Richard Smalley. Even though we closed on Tuesdays because of low visitation, we have increased walk-ins in June by 881 visitors.

Gill Ortiz is a new part-time employee who is managing Final Fridays for us, doing window displays, and working 10 hours.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

STR and TGT Reports

The TGT receipts are up in Q2. The YTD collections are up .11% over last year, which were the best on record. This represents the best second quarter TGT collections in 10 years. Generally, we see that occupancy is consistent, and room demand is up and selling rooms early.

The ADR continues to be flat, but revenue overall is up about 5%.

We included a new chart in the board packet from AirDNA data, which shows future bookings. The data demonstrates high short term rental demand for the fall, with a spike around September 27&28, the weekend Shaboozy is coming to Lawrence.

Destinations International Annual Conference

We all enjoyed the DI annual conference. There were enough tracks for us all to go to different sessions. Ruth focused on advocacy and world cup sessions, Kim went to advocacy and staff development sessions, Laura went to sales sessions, and Allison focused on marketing.

There was a lot of talk about the DMO being a driver of economic development and a community asset. Kim and Ruth attended a session that focused on advocacy and economic development at the DMO. The message, by Josiah (aka the New York Sherpa) was about ways to prove the success of the DMO and how to defend budget cuts. He had an interesting summary – there are two types of DMOs – some whose funding has been threatened and others whose is about to be.

ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH/FUNDING AGREEMENT WITH THE CITY OF LAWRENCE:

Kim wanted the board to discuss how to move ahead with the city now that we are flat-funded in 2025 with no multi-year agreement, and no funding for World Cup marketing. Kim wanted to start the board discussion about whether to continue focusing on the multi-year agreement, and determine what other issues are priorities.

The board suggested continuing to advocate for the multi-year agreement even if it's not the sole focus. Mike suggested continuing with the points that:

- The work of booking conferences is future business.
- We're working on booking the conference center business, which is a year out
- In order to attract and retain talent, we need to have steady, consistent funding

Other issues of focus include:

- Exploring new/other sources of funding.
- Continue to expand on the work we did with the city memo this year, keep up the messaging about investment in EL and the return in brings back to the city
- Board expansion *
- Bylaws changes *

*Luis said that the new ordinance governing the boards and commissions does not apply to eXplore Lawrence, so he can move the board expansion and bylaws requests to the city's legal office.

TGT Grant Funding

Questions remain about the TGT fund of \$150,000 after the committee that distributed the grant program was disbanded. The board briefly discussed whether or not eXplore Lawrence would be a good candidate to take on that task, or if it would be far too much given the administrative time and effort with a small staff.

For this year, Porter is creating an application process for 2025. The economic development office of the city is experiencing staff changes, which is slowing the process. Applications will be due in the fall for the TGT grants, applications for arts commission requests will be due early next year with decisions expected in March 2025.

There are several worthy discussions about the goals of each program. The way awards are distributed, whether a request can be funded by both programs.

The board discussed whether this it is appropriate for the eXplore Lawrence board to take on this role in distributing these funds.

COMMITTEE ON WORKSPACE:

Kim is going to form a committee of the board to work on funding for the 2025 budget. The committee will address the following questions:

- Multi-year agreement with the city
- New funding source possibilities
- Bring a mixture of staff and board members together to create a collaborative approach
- World Cup funding

COMMITTEE ON WORKSPACE:

The committee on workspace is going to be meeting next week and will have items to discuss at the next month's board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

Drew requested a motion to adjourn to executive session for the purpose of the director's annual review (Anthea, Mike). The meeting adjourned after a 20 minute executive session.

Next meeting is August 31, 11:00 AM at the eXplore Lawrence conference room.

Respectfully submitted, Ruth DeWitt