



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

June 26 2024

Present: Ivan Simac (Chair), Drew Gaschler, Mike Logan, Anthea Scouffas, Porter Arneill, Heidi Champagne, Andrew Holt, Kathy Gerstner

Absent: Amber Sellers, Tina Tourtillott, David Hayob

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

Ivan called the meeting to order at 11:05.

MINUTES/FINANCIALS:

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

Financials

Kim and Anthea presented the financial report. Nothing to report on the budget, which is on track for the year.

Annual Audit

The auditors completed the annual audit; the board has the financial review in their packets. The report is good, and the organization is in good standing. Kim needs to sign an accompanying letter, and wanted to share that with the board. The board acknowledged Kim's signature. The audit will be submitted to the city.

STAFF REPORTS:

Sales

The sales review of the strategic plan has been moved to July's meeting because of the work with the city to submit our budget request. A quick update, 51% of the sales goals have been met, and 45% of the economic impact goals. Laura has been out on prospecting trips in Kansas City, and is looking at association business in Topeka. She has been building relationships with those members and has had a couple of inquiries from monthly meetings.

We are focused on updating the facilities guide and developing a bid book before Laura goes into tradeshow season in the fall.

The sales team is also involved in documenting the sales process in order to better onboard and train the new services coordinator.

Graduation deliveries took a lot of staff time in May (particularly Laura's time), we are looking forward to having more staff help with that with the new person.

Marketing

The website continues to perform well. There has been a 32% growth in users and the event count (activity on the site) has also increased over last month. On average, a user completes 14 actions on our site before signing off. That means they're digging deeper into our site and seeing more content.

Summer of Fun Pass

The Summer of Fun pass continues to out-perform expectations. As of the meeting, there were 1,193 sign ups and 269 check-ins. There have also been 1,387 new sign-ups for our newsletter and 914 click throughs. These are really good numbers to get messages to and generate activity.

Top 10 sites visited: Library, Great Blue Heron, Au Marche and Brits, Downtown Pool, Acme, Visitors Center, Squishington's, Eileens Colossal Cookies, and the Toy Store. We are happy to see a non-downtown business on the list – meaning the pass's expanse is city-wide.

Visitors Center

June is our first month under the new structure as Richard as the part-time supervisor, Sarah continues to work her schedule, and our new employee, Gill Ortiz is handling scheduling Final Fridays, and window decorations/themes while working his regular part-time hours. The goal is to get back to being open on Tuesdays.

World Cup

Kim presented to the city's executive team about the World Cup, and eXplore Lawrence's willingness to convene community conversations around Lawrence readiness. We proposed reopening the unified command structure used for COVID, and hosting monthly meetings starting in August through the World Cup. The city seemed very receptive to the presentation and Porter mentioned he'd only heard good things about the way it was done.

The city suggested we speak to the county next, and start to convene meetings after they give feedback. Ruth will set up a county meeting.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

STR and TGT Reports

The TGT receipts are slightly down for May -3/2%. While down, these numbers are still high relatively, and April was the second best April on record from 2018.

Kim shared an Air DNA report that compares Air DNA data with hotel data for the board's reaction. Ruth will continue to do the report.

FUNDING AGREEMENT WITH THE CITY OF LAWRENCE:

Mike and Kim met with Brandon McGuire (ACM), Porter, and Luis Ruiz about our second draft of the funding request. It appears as though they are not interested in tying our budget to 70% of TGT collections, and were dubious about a multi-year funding agreement.

Annual, Line Item Budget

Kim is going to submit an annual, line-item budget, with our \$200K increase with details about what the increase will be used for and showing benefits to the community. The city wants to know “what it’s buying” with the extra funding.

Mike pointed out the hard work Kim has already done putting the funding request together, and says that much of what they want, we have already put in the first drafts, so it’s a matter of pulling the right information in a concise request with exhibits to back up the details.

Mike suggested some board members come together on Friday for a workgroup to help pull the information together with a follow up meeting on Tuesday 7/2 to go over the final draft for submission by July 3.

Mike shared he is continuing to work with the city to refute the idea they don’t want to “encumber future commissions” with a long-term agreement; to demonstrate eXplore Lawrence works several years ahead to secure visitor business coming to the area, and that short-term budgeting hinders talent management and retention. He believe we can continue to ask for a multi-year agreement, but agrees with submitting the annual budget now.

City Budget Cuts

Porter shared that cuts are coming on a high-level to several programs. The sales tax number are down even beyond projections, and everyone is being held to the same standard we are. Plus the city is taking on several new programs around serving the unhoused population and that will take many new resources.

TGT Grant Funding

There are many questions around the TGT fund of \$150,000 after the committee that distributed the grant program has been 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. That discussion will continue at another time. Kim noted that Britt is retiring and Sam has left the city. The economic development department will be rebuilding and maybe TGT will be part of that discussion.

Bid Fund Request

We will continue to request an increase in the bid fund from \$99,000 to \$114,000. The request will be submitted as a separate memo. The memo will discuss how important this funding is in securing larger events, particularly when the new KU conference center opens and we are competing in a space for more people and have more regional competition to draw new events in.

World Cup Request

The board agreed to keep the funding request separate for World Cup, so that is an accompanying memo for \$150,000. The \$150,000 is the request for 2025, and is for marketing efforts to develop an awareness of Lawrence as an attractive day-trip from Kansas City while people are between matches during the World Cup. Ideas have included bus wraps, outdoor advertising, and a digital campaign to increase Lawrence’s profile.

Bylaws and Board Expansion

The city has not taken up the Board's request to consider these parts of the proposals. Once the funding discussion is over, the board will work with the city to pursue these goals.

COMMITTEE ON WORKSPACE:

Further discussion on the topic of moving was tabled until a future meeting, with the reminder the visitor center lease is up at the end of the year.

ADJOURNMENT:

Next meeting is August 31, 11:00 AM at the eXplore Lawrence conference room.
Ivan requested a motion to adjourn (Anthea, Mike). The meeting was adjourned at 11:58 AM.

Respectfully submitted, Ruth DeWitt