



## Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

October 30, 2024

Present: Ivan Simac, Chair, Mike Logan, Porter Arneill, Kathy Gerstner, Andrew Holt, Heidi Champagne, Anthea Scouffas, (virtual), Tina Tourtillott (virtual), Amber Sellers (virtual)

Absent: Luis Ruiz, Drew Gaschler

Staff: Kim Anspach, Executive Director, Sara Harley, Office and Sales Coordinator

Guest: Heather Shull, General Manager, Doubletree Hotel

Ivan called the meeting to order at 11:00.

### MINUTES/FINANCIALS:

#### Minutes

The board approved the minutes from September (Heidi, Mike).

#### Financials

Kim and Tina presented the financials and provided an update on Tina's new role as Treasurer. Signatory has been updated to include Tina at US Bank, with updates still needed at Meritrust.

We are awaiting state notice of transient guest tax distribution to the city.

Kim gave an update on the expenses and sponsorship income received for the Lawrence Tourism Summit.

The board accepted the financial report.

### STAFF REPORTS:

#### Marketing

The website continues to perform well. Event count (number of actions visitors take once on our site) has increased by 21% to 12.06 average per visit, with a slight dip per user, and a nearly 35% increase in views.

In September, we had 2 active passports: Burger Battle and METL Pours Tour. We saw almost 200 Burger Battle signups in September, with check-ins continuing to come in. The event will run through January.

Socials saw an increase of over 1,100 fans overall across our channels, with almost 90,000 engagements and 400,000 video views in September. E-news is continuing to perform well with over 7,000 recipients and nearly 3,000 opens. Blog post performance did well, with Live Music, Art in the Park, and Burger Battle being our most popular posts.

The board suggested adding the new Whataburger location to Burger Battle.

## **Visitor Center**

Visitor center walk-ins totaled 550 visitors in September, with approximately \$450 in sales for the month. We have taken out a day of operations, but traffic has been slower overall.

## **Sales**

Laura attended the Small Market Meetings trade show in September, where she had 25 appointments and interacted with around 100 different entities. We are building our capacity to approach conferences more strategically, with pre-research to refine our prospecting efforts and ROI tracking using the Simpleview platform.

In October, we sponsored Taylor Martin of Sports Pavilion Lawrence to attend the SPORTS Relationship Conference with us in Wichita. It was a good chance to build relationships, and we will have more details at the next meeting.

The National Crappie League event took place in September but underperformed expectations. We have discussed a path forward with the executive team and our legal counsel.

Services are being done by Sara, and Ruth is focusing on Sales Operations and building out internal process to better deploy, track, and communicate sales in 2025.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

### **TIAK Conference**

The Travel Industry Association of Kansas (TIAK) is a statewide lobbying PAC for the Kansas tourism industry. In October, we attended their annual conference in Olathe. Kim accepted a nomination to join the organization's board, which meets quarterly and at the annual conference. Also at the conference, Kim presented as part of a panel on TGT and CVB operation models.

### **TGT Collections and STR/AirDNA Data**

Ivan raised a question about a reporting discrepancy in January 2024 TGT collections. The board discussed the numbers and came to the conclusion that the numbers were distributed into later months when collections for December/January actually took place.

September 2024 collections were down, but the current benchmark year (2023) was our highest year on record. October occupancy is on track to be slightly up from September, and our benchmark communities had a similarly slow September. We are not outliers within the state.

### **Economic Impact Report**

Kim presented the 2023 Economic Impact Report, which shows that direct visitor spending as \$296 million, which is a 6% growth over 2022 numbers. Tourism supported 3,778 jobs in Douglas County, generating \$124 million in labor income for locals and \$31 million in state and local taxes. Douglas County outpaces state and local averages, meaning we are more dependent on visitor spending and

tourism than the state as a whole and our peer communities. A press release of this data is scheduled to go out mid-November.

## **Bylaws**

eXplore Lawrence was added to the agenda for the November 19 commission meeting for a presentation of bylaw updates. Legal is reviewing the proposal, and Kim is working on a short presentation, which the Board will need to authorize before it is presented. Submissions would need to be made by November 12, which may not be a realistic deadline. Porter will connect with the city attorney's office to discuss.

## **Board Continuity Planning**

With Ivan and Mike cycling off the board at the end of the year, Heather Shull (General Manager at the DoubleTree Hotel) is being considered to fill a seat. Kim is working with the executive team to determine appointments, with Kirk Goodman (Manager of the new KU Conference Center) also being considered for a spot.

## **Visitor Center**

Kim is considering ROI and performance of the Visitor Center in its current form and has a proposal for a Mobile Visitor Center including a vendor bid and grant application submitted to the state. The executive team has discussed the tourism attraction grant, and we expect it to be announced in the next 2 weeks. We are developing an activation plan to attend events, conferences, and other markets, which will be discussed in further detail at the upcoming board retreat.

## **Annual Board Retreat**

Kim suggested several topics for the upcoming retreat, including a review of the updates to our bylaws, a review of the strategic plan, discussion of the Visitor Center, an update on World Cup activity, and committee formation for the coming year. The second week in December is being considered.

## **ADJOURNMENT:**

Ivan requested a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 12:07 (Heidi, Mike)

Next meeting will take place as part of the annual Board Retreat in December. Date and location are TBD.

Respectfully submitted, Sara Harley