



Explore Lawrence

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

April 24 2024

Present: Ivan Simac (chair), Kim Anspach, Executive Director, Mike Logan, Anthea Scouffas, Tina Tourtillott, Amber Sellers (virtual), Porter Arneill, Kathy Gerstner, Andrew Holt

Absent: Drew Gaschler, Heidi Champagne, David Hayob,

Staff: Ruth DeWitt (taking notes)

Ivan called the meeting to order at 11:08.

MINUTES/FINANCIALS:

The board approved the minutes of the March meeting without changes. (Mike, Anthea)

Kim and Anthea presented the financial report. Items of note:

- Digital spending was low, caused by a late payment to the marketing agency
- Professional development spending is high as it is the time conference registrations open with early bird rates.
- The bid fund has been moved to the money market account and is growing

Annual Audit

Next week, our annual audit starts. Kim will be working with the auditors (Carlin and Long) and will be providing them with the information they request. She doesn't anticipate issues, and we should receive a certification by the end of May, which then gets forwarded to the City.

The board accepted the financials (Mike, Anthea)

STAFF REPORTS:

Marketing

Website metrics continue to improve, "event count" increased approximately 94%. "Event count" marks the engagement on our site per user – the average visitor to our site has 15 "events" (clicks, sign ups, etc) before leaving the site.

Events calendar continues to be our **most view page**, followed by dining.

Current Campaigns are focusing on the regional METL (Manhattan, Emporia, Topeka, and Lawrence) Pour passport, and live music and events in March. We are also focused on creating evergreen content like enews sign ups, visitor guide and general events page marketing.

Traffic: People came to our site mostly through Google, Facebook, Bing, stackadapt, KU, and our leisure e-news. It's encouraging to see a continuous significant increase in organic traffic compared to last year.

Social continues to perform well. Please note, this month our overall followers show a decrease of 6,000 because we are no longer tracking twitter/X in our social audience. We have not been active on that platform and while we are keeping our handle, we are not focusing on that channel and therefore removing it from our metrics.

Summer of Fun Pass

The marketing team is working on our Summer of Fun passport for 2024. This is a relaunch of our successful summer passport last year, with a refreshed look and focus. We already have 40 committed participants and expect that to grow before the official launch. We hope to launch in mid-May with a soft launch, but it will be fully operational by Busker Fest (end of May). We have ordered fans for Busker and Mid Summer Night on Mass, and other events with a QR code that takes people to the sign up page.

Graphic Design

We sent out an RFP for graphic design firms last week, Kim asked the board to share this among your professional circles. She has asked for Taylor Overton at the Department of Commerce to help us reach a more diverse pool of candidates and she is sending this out for us.

Visitors Center

The visitor center welcomed **830 walk-ins** in March, which is a large increase from last year and our highest March on record.

Our **sales** were the second highest ever, and we hosted a March final Friday event.

The new power toilet has been installed and mitigated the bathroom issue, however there is still a sewage smell coming from the basement. Kim emailed our landlord about this issue. It is in the basement and not in the visitor center.

Sales Team

It's been a busy month and Laura is **35% to goal** on leads and **36% to goal** on potential economic impact of the leads.

The team has been conducting site tours in March and April of some exciting groups we hope to be able to announce next month.

Laura and Kim met with the Spencer Museum of Art, who is bringing in a large, national conference in October.

Ruth worked with the Dietary Managers leading site tours and successfully landed on a site for that event.

Laura also was heavily involved in the [KU Relays](#) planning and tabling. She was able to get our tabling spot next to RCB Bank. which brought us out of the elements, as it's always bad weather! Next year will be working on team blocks instead of individual room blocks.

[Occupancy](#) this last Friday was 90.7% according to the weekly STR we received.

We are gearing up for [graduation week deliveries](#). We will be delivering visitors guides, maps, pens, and other items to hotels for guests. We are also working with KU marketing to ensure that programs are distributed to hotels and other watch party sites. A new partnership with the KS Turnpike Authority had us inserting information about Kansas's switch to cashless tolling this summer in graduation packets.

[EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT:](#)

STR and TGT Reports

March collections were much higher than normal, meaning the collection anomaly in January has been resolved. Ruth and Kim will work to make sure this is resolved. We still end Q1 10.5% under q1 2023, but this the second highest first quarter on record. It is \$48K off last year which was record breaking.

March occupancy was slightly lower than last year, but ADR and Revenue has slight growth.

[Professional Development](#). Allison and Ruth went to Simpleview Summit in early April. Allison was there with a CMS website marketing lens and Ruth was there to learn about CRM and how to make our Sales process more efficient. They came back with a lot of ideas, inspiration, and a lot of new connections.

Organizational Chart Change

Kim proposed a change in the org. chart, refining the sales team to reflect the strength of the team. Laura will continue as Sales Director – she continues to exceed her goals and bring business to Lawrence,

The sales process is rebuilding from the pandemic and there are infrastructure and collateral items we need to develop which will assist the Director and make her work stronger, more automated, and more efficient (for example a revamped, digital facilities guide to send inquiries). Ruth is suited for this role with her background in communications.

Ivan shared his conversation with Kim and the board and urged the acceptance of the change. He agreed that the new org chart aligns the sales team's strengths, and will work better in deploying them to bring business to Lawrence.

Ruth's title will be Manager of External Affairs and Sales Operations, and once the Sale Coordinator position is hired, that person will report to her.

Kim also raised the issue of bringing on another marketing position in the last half of 2024. This person will be responsible for special projects like restaurant week and passport campaigns which will keep the team focused on the overall marketing plan to reach annual goals and allow Allison to think strategically about new initiatives.

Tina asked about the use of interns and suggested with the special projects on the horizon (like world cup) it might be useful to get interns involved.

Amber mentioned some of the ambassadors are not able to serve as volunteers for a number of reasons, but urged us to think creatively about developing a “street team” to also bring in voices that are not often seen in the tourism sector.

The board had a brief discussion reiterating the need for connecting with diverse organizations, building relationships to bring new communities into our work as stakeholders, particularly with the World Cup coming to Lawrence. There are opportunities with Black alumni and homecoming with games moving out of Lawrence.

The board approved the organizational chart changes and growth plan. (Mike, Tina)

FUNDING AGREEMENT WITH THE CITY OF LAWRENCE

Kim reported to the board that she, Mike, and Porter met with Brandon McGuire, the assistant city manager about the multi-year funding request and bid fund. Brandon had feedback and Kim has been working with Porter to incorporate Brandon’s ideas into the revised request. The board was sent the memo to review and offer comments/feedback.

The City issued an RFI for the Economic Prosperity outcome and we used that language as a guide to align our request with the City’s strategic plan.

The request would index our budget on 70% of TGT collected, and allow our bid fund to accrue to be competitive in attracting larger events to Lawrence. It also positions eXplore Lawrence to add value and assist the City in accomplishing the following strategic outcomes:

- Unmistakable Identity 4 – eXplore Lawrence will offer Placer.AI data to report the number of residents attending City events that fit with Lawrence’s Unmistakable Identity.
- Unmistakable Identity 8 – eXplore Lawrence will use Placer.AI data to quantify non-residents to events and measure the economic impact of outside dollars in Lawrence
- Economic Prosperity – eXplore Lawrence is proposing adding a KPI under the PES outcome to increase visitor spending in Douglas County. eXplore Lawrence analyzes and generates economic impact reports, which can contribute to strategies to attract more visitors to Lawrence and increase visitor spending in various sectors (hotels, restaurants, retail, etc).

The board had a discussion about changes to the TGT process and whether it would hurt our funding possibilities. Mike pointed out that the board had already approved the request in the Spring of 2023, and this memo elaborates on that initial request. Therefore approval isn’t necessary.

The board agreed to look it over more and offer Kim and Porter comments, but gave Kim the authorization to submit the memo with Porter’s suggestions. The memo will go back to the City Manager’s Office for incorporation in the City Manager’s budget.

ADJOURNMENT:

Next meeting is May 29, 11:00 AM at the eXplore Lawrence conference room.

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

Respectfully submitted, Ruth DeWitt