

**Visitors Promotion Committee**  
**Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce**  
**November 17, 2021**  
**MINUTES**

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Susan Madsen, Aaron Stitt, Michelle Waite, Tammy Ward and Roma Amundson

Absent: Jeff Cunningham, Amy Dickerson, Kate Bolz and Dave Derbin,

Staff Attending: Jeff Maul, Derek Feyerherm, Ron Kalkwarf, Todd Wiltgen, Diane Pryor, Kelsey McGreer Madsen, Kelsey Meyer, Derek Bombeck and Tracie Simpson

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. He welcomed everyone and asked the attendees to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call.

**Approval of August Minutes:**

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the August minutes that had been sent out ahead of time in an email to the group. There were no questions and he asked for a motion to approve the August minutes. Susan Madsen made a motion to approve the minutes and Tara Knuth seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Jeff Barclay, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Susan Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Dickerson were absent. Motion carried.

**Approval of October Financials:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the CVB Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for the fiscal year July through October 2021. In Income, Room Tax-CVB, he said we are under budget by \$115,306 and requesting funds from the county as needed. In Other Income we see \$58,803 of PPP loan forgiveness. Total Income was \$688,488. Moving down to Expense, Kalkwarf said, Salaries are up because of higher services team hours in July with the rodeo in town. Equipment/Maintenance was higher than budget because of our SimpleView software purchase. Total Expense is \$688,299 and we are ending with a Net Income of \$189. Maul added that we are beginning to request more from the county for event-related expenses we're incurring for state high school tournaments and the rodeo. There were no questions. Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve the financials. Hoehne moved to approve the financials as presented. The motion was seconded by Barclay. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Dickerson were absent. Motion carried.

**CVB Staff Introductions**

Stitt then said this will be fun to meet the CVB staff and Maul responded saying we want the team to show who we are and who has helped get us through the darkest times. First, Kelsey McGreer Madsen introduced herself to the group. She said she works in the SMERF – Social, Military, Education, Religious, Fraternal - markets. Her job is to recruit these organizations to Lincoln for conferences and events. Madsen has been with the CVB for 2 years and 8 months and was hired after working for the CVB as an intern. She is a member of EventLNK which she serves on the membership committee, she is a committee member of the

Lincoln Veterans Parade and a member of the Giving Spirits Rotary Club. Madsen also does work for the LNK'd in Faith and Women in Ministry groups. The education groups are starting to come back and people are wanting to get involved again, she said. Maul asked her to share more about the veteran's parade saying he and Derek Feyerherm volunteered and saw firsthand how great Madsen was in action that day. She said there were eight committee members helping organize the parade. Throughout the year she helped make it run orderly and on parade day she made sure everyone went in the proper order through the parade route. It was very successful. Madsen noted her markets looks good for the next six months. Stitt asked how things are looking for tours coming to Lincoln, which will be addressed by Kelsey Meyer, they said. Susan Madsen asked how can we, the hoteliers, help you. McGreer said it would be helpful if when she sends them requests and contracts, they would read through them carefully and send them back fully completed and in a timely manner.

Kelsey Meyer introduced herself next and said she works with state associations, group tour and hobby markets. She has been on the team for eight years and also was an intern for the CVB while she worked towards a degree in the hospitality field. She is a wife and the mother of two sons. Meyer said work started picking back up in mid-March when the COVID vaccine was made available. That's when the older community could be fully vaccinated and were ready to travel and get back on the road. The industry saw the group tours ramp back up. She has been working on new marketing materials including a *Group Tours of Lincoln* booklet to be used in the tradeshow season highlighting different attractions and venues in Lincoln that are fun on different types of group tours. She also talked about American Bus Tours, Select Traveler and Heritage Club International which are tradeshow she attends in the group tour market. The hobby market is returning, too, including collectors, car shows and the RV Travel Club. These groups stay in Lincoln and have social gatherings, vendor shows and concerts bringing in revenue to all facets of the community. The Family Motor Coach Association's Summer Convention had been postponed to August of 2022 so we will begin working on it soon. It will be up to 2,000 RVs coming in for a 5-day show with some being here for nearly a total of ten days. We are also working to recruit an International Air Stream rally in 2024. Meyer said the state associations pivoted to virtual or hybrid in the second half of 2021 and more are beginning to return with FFA and FCCLA returning next spring, so things are looking up. During discussion, Meyer said RV camping and traveling really increased during the pandemic and Feyerherm said they get very introduced into a community as they often times do a community project in the city they're visiting and then donate back to that city in different ways. Stitt asked if the tours and bus tours are coming back to which Meyer said yes, as the participants are getting vaccinated, they want to return to normal.

Next addressing the group was Derek Bombeck saying he has been with the CVB for eight years and works on all the leads for sports in Lincoln. The sports market, especially youth sports, is recession and pandemic proof, he said. People never stopped wanting to participate in sports or watch their children participate in sports. Bombeck said they never stopped wanting to travel for events and tournaments either. He said we had a phenomenal 2021 with two world-qualifying events in Lincoln, one national and one international. He watched the televised events on the sports channels and said Lincoln was mentioned numerous times during the programming. Also, we hosted the National High School Finals Rodeo and the NSAA volleyball championship which were very successful. Another fun event coming back next summer is Gravel Worlds where bicyclists race on the gravel roads – on 100-150 miles - around Lancaster County. We have been looking at Kinetic and Speedway venues to host huge baseball and volleyball tournaments and have begun to promote Lincoln Sports Foundation as they've improved their facilities. Bombeck told the group that in 2021 they started traveling to tradeshow again, with trips in September, October and one coming up in December, to rebuild relationships and connections. He serves as the president of Sports Nebraska, working to support tourism promotion in the state and is also on the board of the Sports Events & Tourism Association. Roma

Amundson made the comment that it's great we have so many gravel roads in the county for the bicycling events mentioned. Susan Madsen asked how pickle ball is doing. Bombeck said it is growing very fast and we have three facilities being used for local competitions and we want more regional events, too, so we can qualify for national competitions. Maul said it's a sport everyone can play indoor and out. Michelle Waite asked about disc golf. We are working to increase the awareness of our courses in Lincoln – we are equipped to host mid-tier events.

Last to be introduced to the committee was Tracie Simpson, our services coordinator. Simpson has been with the CVB for 14 years and said when the rest of the team gets the group, tour or event to Lincoln, she takes over. She works as the liaison contacting the event coordinator and helping them with nametags, banners, welcome gifts/baskets, scheduling dignitaries and anything else that may be needed. Simpson said she will ask anyone for anything that is needed and do her best to accommodate those coming into the city. When the high school tournaments come to town, we work to feed the team and coaches on their first night and even get team ambassadors for each team to help them navigate their stay in Lincoln during the tournament, she said. They also host the first water station during the marathons. Simpson has a team of eight to help with the events and she also oversees our Visitors Center downtown in the Haymarket where they welcome people to the city. Maul said we promise and Tracie delivers; she is the liaison between the attraction and the CVB.

Susan Madsen said we appreciate you all and Waite wanted to be in touch with McGreer for an upcoming event. Stitt added the hotels have a good relationship with each one of you and thank you for all you do.

### **Directors Report:**

Maul gave a VPC director's report saying we have lots of good things going on. He explained how the ARPA funds are going to work. There will be program funding in the amount of \$23 million over multiple years. \$6 million of that will be used for event recruiting and attractions. \$17 million will go through the competitive grant program. Tammy Ward thanked Maul for clarifying and asked the group to spread the word that this is how it will be distributed. She said we need to create some collaboration. Next, Maul gave HRTM updates. November 2 was the 15-year anniversary celebration of the program at the Sheldon Museum of Art, and as chair we are excited about the program. 256 students have completed internships inside the State of Nebraska and students are currently seeking additional internships, so keep that in mind, he said. The Scarlet Hotel pushed back their opening to February or March and a lot of their look mimics The Graduate Hotel. The current delays in the supply chain have slowed down their opening unfortunately. The hotel will help with tourism in Lincoln and will have an attached classroom space that is seeking a donor to complete the connection between the hotel and students. He continued saying we have had a lot of staff involvement in event production, including the 2021 Veterans Parade on November 7 with Kelsey Madsen being key in the parade operations, adding it was an amazing event. Kelsey Meyer is ramping up site/client visits as we head into winter; the Family Motor Coach Association is planning an August 2022 event at the Lancaster Event Center with over 1,000 RV's and families spending the majority of their time in our community. The Visitors Center traffic and interest have now reached pre-pandemic numbers and we have seen the numbers higher on Husker football game days.

Lincoln's economic return seems to be in a good place, Maul said. There has been great success in the expansion and construction of youth sports complexes in the city and the interest in Lincoln as a destination for these events is growing. NSAA volleyball was a success in 2021 with the new 4-day format being accepted and applauded by many. Unofficially, we had the 2<sup>nd</sup> best attendance ever with over 39,000 attendees. CVB staff attended the 2021 Nebraska Travel Conference in Grand Island last month where they talked about pandemic bounce back, statewide tourism trends and other emerging trends. Sports Nebraska

received the Crystal Compass Award for their work to brand the state. Also, Lincoln Sports Foundation received another anonymous gift to install field turf on their championship soccer field. Maul said Dan Lesoing is doing great things with improvements out there including the signage, indoor facility, entryway and tennis courts. Everyone is doing better and the future is bright. We have a lot of staff involvement in the community and regional/national tourism organizations where we are incredibly impactful. We hold seats on the Board of 12 organizations and are respected and sought after. Our staff is changing things on a national scale. Maul passed around some marketing material we have created and began using – the Lincoln Craft Beer Tour booklet, a “Favorite Things” gift box with several small items chosen by each staff member and the Lincoln Guidebook, a product of a State Tourism Marketing Grant, showcasing Lincoln’s many great attractions.

CVB will have a new website in 2022 and we are very excited. It will feel more user friendly, have vibrant photography and video and will keep us more connected. Maul let everyone know the Holiday Social is on December 14 at 4 p.m. with the location to be determined. Also included in the packets is a list of meeting dates for 2022. The February and August meetings will be when we review marketing grants. Lastly, Maul presented a table showing the lodging tax comparison from 2019 – 2021 by month. He said you will see that things are coming back. 2021 was just 5% below 2019 as September, July and August saw record breaking lodging tax collections. He said things are bouncing back and we are happy with the numbers.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. The CVB issued 116 sales leads for 35,453 room nights. 54% of those leads are for new events to Lincoln and Lancaster County. 48% of the leads are national events and 32% are regional events. The regional and national are numbers that are a little higher than normal as state associations are coming back a little slower. In 2019 there were 140 sales leads for 74,789. We are tracking at 50% of a normal year, he said. We are beginning to see University events coming back and Kelsey Madsen is going after a lot there. We have noticed the RFPs are for fewer room nights than in previous years and the number of rooms needed is down as well. We think the group planners are starting back smaller to see how it goes. Maul added that national analysis says a return of convention industry at 75-100% by fall of 2022 and a full return by 2023.

In booked business, we have 71 events booked for 21,988 room nights. 60% of booked rooms are new events and 46% are national events with 36% being regional events. In 2019 there were 109 events booked for 40,894 room nights. We anticipate a couple of larger citywide events to book by the end of the year and we are excited that we are at this point. In tradeshows attended, Feyerherm attended the Small Market meetings, geared towards the association market, held in September in Cheyenne. He had 34 appointments come out of that tradeshow. Also, Derek Bombeck went to the TEAMS show in September in Atlantic City, NJ, as part of Sports Nebraska and had 36 appointments as a result. There was also a Sports ETA Symposium in October in Birmingham that Bombeck attended resulting in 16 appointments and was very favorable. Looking at upcoming tradeshows, we have Bombeck scheduled to attend an Esports Travel Summit in December in Pittsburgh, PA. Kelsey Meyer will attend the ABA Marketplace in January in Grapevine, TX and Madsen is attending the RCMA Emerge tradeshow in February in Sacramento. Feyerherm and Maul said esports are gaining momentum and with Lincoln being a GIG city we are looked at favorably by the different event planners.

Lastly, Feyerherm talked about CVB sales saying in about 60 days we will begin to utilize new sales proposal software to work with existing systems to create very professional proposals and easily allows meeting planners to share the proposals with board members and their staff. We have seen increased activity from Sports Nebraska and we are taking it to the next level to reach sports planners. We have created

committee structure and are formalizing the organization. We are going after grants and getting more buy-in throughout the state. We have also expanded the use of email marketing platform to reach event planners. The open rates of our posts have been strong and this allows us to clean up our contact database because we can see what they are opening and reading.

Feyerherm asked if anyone had questions. Madsen said it is nice to have all this activity.

**New Business:**

In other and new business, Madsen congratulated Todd Wiltgen on his new baby and Maul said everyone has been helpful and great to work with. Stitt said to please put the December 14<sup>th</sup> CVB holiday party on your calendar and the next VPC meeting will be February 16, 2022. Thank you and have an amazing holiday.

**Adjourn:**

Aaron Stitt adjourned the meeting at 2:55 p.m.