

**Visitors Promotion Committee  
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce  
February 23, 2022  
MINUTES**

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

Absent: Jeff Cunningham

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

Guests: Tyler Othen, John Kaatz and Matt Olberding

**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. Following the roll call, Stitt wanted to point out that Jeff Maul is celebrating his 20-year anniversary here at the Convention and Visitors Bureau. Stitt said thank you to Jeff and that we are blessed to have him. Stitt followed up introducing Jason Ball to the group. Ball is the new president of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce and the Lincoln Partnership for Economic Development. President Ball thanked everyone and said he is one month into the job. He worked for this organization 10 years ago for about five years with the Partnership. He left to go to Hutchinson, KS, then Sioux Falls, SD and ended up in central Texas until Wendy Birdsall called him and said she was going to be retiring and asked if he'd be interested in coming back to Lincoln. Ball said he is thrilled and humbled to work with this organization again. He has been busy meeting with leaders and team members to determine what our challenges are and seeing how we can best help those in the community. We are going to be working on a strategic planning process, we will be doing some priority setting and re-evaluating to see what we can tweak and where we can improve, he said.

**CSL Feasibility Study Presentation:**

Tyler Othen and John Kaatz recently conducted a CSL feasibility study of a new convention center in Lincoln and spoke to the Committee about their findings. Kaatz began by thanking Jeff Maul and the team. He said they've done a lot of work here and will be looking at six areas in their findings. Othen began by looking at local and regional conditions they established as a baseline of the various existing facilities. A list was shown including Lancaster Event Center, Pinnacle Bank Arena, Embassy Suites and the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel. These are all good for smaller events, he said. Othen talked about the advantages of having the center in the downtown or Haymarket area listing the hotels, restaurants and attractions nearby with the nightlife in the Haymarket and plenty of fast-food restaurants in the downtown area. Several comparable facilities are in communities throughout the state including Kearney, Grand Island and Omaha. We have a number in the state and region, he said. When you're looking at events that need 30,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space though, there are only four in the eastern half of Nebraska, which really creates a market gap. When looking at comparable facilities, CSL looked at Lexington, KY, Mobile, AL, Lansing, MI and Sioux Falls, SD. They all have space with 33,600 – 100,000 sq. ft. and the Cornhusker in

Lincoln has at the most 28,000. One good thing they found is that Lincoln is very comparable in hotel inventory with the second most out of that same list of cities. We are strong as a destination, Othen said. Lincoln is also far ahead of the group when comparing walkable sites including dining and nightlife. Othen said they found Lincoln as a destination ready for a convention center. The hotels, restaurants and retail spots are here.

Next, they looked at state and regional event demand. They spent a lot of time talking to event planners in the area and found that 78% were positive about the likelihood of using a new convention center in Lincoln with 39% saying they definitely would. The strength of interest was high. They also looked into space needs in a convention center and found it to be approximately 30,000 sq. ft. in Lincoln. 85% of the need is at about 24,000 sq. ft and we also have to look at hotel rooms. We have about 50% market capacity. The national event demand in Lincoln was reviewed and Othen said if we look at the industries we want to bring in, we may get 50% of them if we have 24,000 sq. ft. of space. We could get up to 63% if we have 30,000 sq. ft. in meeting space. Looking next at the demand by segment on a ten point scale, in state and regional events, Lincoln would get 9 out of 10 rating if we had the convention space. In national events, 5 out of 10; in corporate events, 4 out of 10 and in sports, SMERF and local events, 7 out of 10. Kaatz added that we take this very seriously. We need 25-30,000 sq. ft. in exhibit hall along with 10-12K sq. ft in ballroom space and in breakout meeting space. We also need 5K sq. ft. in pre-function and outdoor event space. Different industry trends were discussed next including hybrid events, signature outdoor space, walkable districts, virtual reality and micro meetings. We want to continue looking at how it would be connected to business and entertainment districts. The effects of the Covid pandemic were discussed saying people are now beginning to come back to in person events and getting away from Zoom. The industry seems to be coming back strong.

The potential site review showed five possible sites. Cornhusker Hotel, Journal Star, Midwest Steel, the Telegraph District and the downtown Post Office were on the list. Near the Cornhusker, there are more restaurants and a walkable proximity to dining and downtown. It could use better parking and needs 250 additional hotel rooms. The Journal Star building is close to hotels and the Haymarket. There is a lack of parking; however, and some traffic congestion in the area. Midwest Steel has plenty of space but would require some environmental remediation. The Telegraph District is further removed than the others from the city's most vibrant areas; however, it is in an emerging district. The post office downtown is right next to Pinnacle Bank Arena and has access to hotels, restaurants and the nightlife of the Haymarket. The drawback of this location is that it would require negotiations with the federal government and would be very costly relative to other sites due to demolition, purchasing and construction costs.

Maul thanked John and Tyler for all they have done and told the Committee they have pulled it all together. They really do a thorough job and have gone over and above to gather the information for us. Maul opened it up for questions and discussion. Todd Wiltgen asked if air service was factored in at all. Kaatz said yes it did with local and regional events. We are looking good with both of those because they usually have a lot of equipment and often times choose to drive to the convention center rather than fly. When looking at national events, the distance from the Omaha airport to downtown Lincoln is not that much different when compared to other cities airport/center commute. Stitt asked the gentlemen what is the time span from here to completing a convention center. They replied saying it would take about a year to identify the funding, a year to issue and collect RFPs and 2-3 years for construction. So, we are looking at about five years without a lot of hiccups, they said. Barclay asked if they considered Nebraska Innovation Campus as a potential site. Kaatz said their space was a question, but they did look at it. Waite said they have a lot of sq. ft. and Derek Feyerherm said they could hold 400 people, but the Scarlet Hotel doesn't

have the space we are talking about. There were no further questions. Maul did add, though, that we have been in partnership with Rotary 14 and Downtown Lincoln Association and we have been doing small group discussions about the study. We will be releasing it soon to the public. Wiltgen let everyone know we will also have this same presentation at the March 16th Growth & Development forum. Stitt thanked everyone for their work on the study and the project.

#### **Approval of November Minutes:**

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the November 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 November minutes. Jason Hoehne made a motion to approve the minutes and Susan Madsen 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 was absent. Dickerson abstained. Motion carried.

#### **Approval of January Financials:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the CVB Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for the time period July 2021 through January 2022. Total Income was a little under budget at \$1,254,483. In Room Tax-CVB, he said, we are under budget because we budgeted at 1/12 each month but have been requesting funds from the county as needed. In Other Income we are over by \$55,721 and that is because of the PPP loan forgiveness. Moving down to Expense, Kalkwarf said, Total Expense was \$1,254,511. Equipment/Maintenance was a little bit over budget because of our SimpleView software purchase. Public Relations was over because of the convention center study and promotional items purchased. Net Income was flat showing a loss of \$28. There were no questions. Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve the financials. Dickerson moved to approve the financials as presented. The motion was seconded by Hoehne. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

#### **Visitors Promotion Marketing Grant Review:**

The Committee began reviewing the various grants different entities applied for. Maul reminded everyone these are for grants up to \$5,000 for the sole purpose of marketing for different projects that benefit our city and county. The first one presented was for the Branched Oak Observatory. They applied for a \$2,500 grant for marketing their September 24<sup>th</sup> Fall StarBQ event. There was no discussion and Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Barclay made a motion to approve. Knuth seconded the motion. There was no further discussion so Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

The next grant discussed was from the Great Plains Gaming Project. They requested \$5,000 for marketing of their Game Fest on April 29-May 1 and another event they plan to hold also in 2022, Meeples at the Mansion. The game fest is a 3-day convention and Feyerherm said it is growing in size each year. It's mostly board games and definitely growing in popularity. It's held at the Lancaster Event Center and hosts approximately 500 attendees. Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Knuth made a motion to approve the grant. Barclay seconded the motion. There was no further discussion so Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

Next up was the History Nebraska \$5,000 grant request for marketing of a new exhibit. This is a BISON exhibit at the Nebraska History Museum and will run from February through May. That was all of the discussion so Stitt asked for a motion of approval. Dickerson made a motion to approve the grant and

Knuth seconded it. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

A grant was requested for the Lincoln Arts Council in the amount of \$5,000 for marketing of their two-day event featuring live performers and showcasing over 90 artists from around the country. Stitt pointed out that the nonprofit arts and culture sector generates \$99M in total economic activity in the city of Lincoln. He said it is a fun event for that area. Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Barclay made a motion to approve the grant. Madsen seconded the motion. There was no further discussion so Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

Next up was Lincoln Calling asking for \$5,000 for marketing of the music and art festival. It is going to be September 22-24 and will be its 19th year. It is something different but something known and very successful. Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Hoehne made a motion to approve the grant. Barclay seconded the motion. There was no further discussion so Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

The Lincoln Rose Society grant was discussed next. They asked for \$1,000 and were so thrilled to find out they could even ask for funding. They want to use the \$1,000 to market their district rose show and conference on September 23-25, 2022. Madsen noted this is the third event we've seen here on that particular weekend. Feyerherm said this is a fun event. Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Knuth made a motion to approve the grant. Dickerson seconded the motion. There was no further discussion so Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

The final grant request of the meeting came from the National Museum of Roller Skating. They requested \$4,252 for marketing expansion including two billboards running from June to August in Lincoln along with social media to promote their location this summer. There was no further discussion so Stitt asked for a motion to approve the grant request. Barclay made a motion to approve and Madsen seconded it. There was no further discussion so Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth, Madsen and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

### **Directors Report:**

Maul gave a VPC director's report giving continued thanks to everyone for all their time and efforts and hard work for the community. Maul said we are happy with how last year ended and the comeback we have made. Our staff never let up and from the beginning have stressed being relevant. He said when he drove Jason Ball around Lincoln on his first visit back here after ten years it was fun to point out the changes, improvements and growth around the city.

Maul presented the CVB Marketing Plan for 2022-2023. In it we talk about our mission and our audience. Our strategy is to promote and market Lincoln and we plan to do that with better imagery and lots of videos and vibrant pictures of having fun in this great city. We are looking at other markets and consider ourselves a very drivable destination. Maul said our Communications team does an amazing job with our messaging and our partnership with the Chamber is very important. He continued on to trends and pace saying people are ready to travel and Tourism Economics predicts that this year's group demand will be at 74.5% of 2019 levels nationally. In 2023, demand will be at 94.5% of 2019 levels and 100% reached in 2024. He said the booking pace could certainly get better and he thinks it will. He is proud of his team and believes the future is bright. An indication of that is in the SMERF market where the religious industry is

moving towards smaller conventions which makes Lincoln an ideal site for future events. Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. The CVB issued 130 sales leads for 38,065 room nights in 2021. In 2022, we issued 60 leads for 25,584 room nights. In booked business in 2021, we had 84 events booked for 30,274 room nights and already in 2022, we have had 31 events booked for 4,733 room nights. In 2021, we had 20 leads bid out for 2023 and beyond and only 1 event in 2023. In 2022, we had 27 leads bid out for 2023 and beyond. We are really happy with that trend, he said. Next, Feyerherm talked about tradeshow his team would be attending this year. Kelsey Meyer was supposed to go this week to the Quad Cities in Iowa for a tradeshow, but due to weather changed it up to take all her appointments through Zoom. Kelsey McGreer-Madsen attended RCMA last month. She is finding a couple things about the religious convention market for events. It has been the slowest to come back after the pandemic; however, they are coming back in smaller groups and in smaller venues, which we are excited about and fares well for Lincoln and the facilities we have available here. Feyerherm said the IPEC is next week and he will be attending. It is for 3<sup>rd</sup> party independent planners who plan events. He talked briefly about the new marketing plan, too, saying we are going to start to do more local events and an email campaign series with meeting planners to showcase Lincoln talking about why Lincoln is such a great place and what to do after the convention ends in the evening. Knuth brought up the fact that event planners have been calling her to see if they could do some programs for the kiddos while their parents are attending conventions in town. Feyerherm said this is an interesting concept and something that could be incorporated into the new website. He said the team has been working on the new CVB website and it is scheduled to be launched on August 26. Overall, things are moving in the right direction and we are optimistic and excited as to where we're at and where we're going.

Feyerherm asked if anyone had questions. Barclay asked what is next in our pursuit of convention center space. Maul said the architects and engineers will show interest in it. The landowners around town will need to be interested and willing to part with some of their commercial property. DLA and Rotary will work together on it. It will be a lot of work but worth the efforts.

### **New Business:**

In other and new business, Madsen said she is excited to announce the Nebraska Hotel Lodging is merging with the Nebraska Restaurant Association and the Omaha Restaurant Association. It is now called the Nebraska Hospitality Association. She said this is big and has been a long time coming. Zoe Olson is the Director. Dickerson talked about the economic impact of the rodeo on the city of Lincoln. She said it brought in just under \$18 million and we had 100,000 participants and visitors in town for it. Maul congratulated her and thanked her for everything they did to make that happen.

### **Adjourn:**

Aaron Stitt adjourned the meeting at 3:09 p.m.