

Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
August 16, 2023
MINUTES

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Jeff Cunningham, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Aaron Stitt, Dave Derbin and Bennie Shobe

Absent: Bryan Sullivan, Mairead Safranek, Tim Savona and Rick Vest

Staff Attending: Jeff Maul, Derek Feyerherm, Jason Ball, Ron Kalkwarf, Diane Pryor and Katie Bohlmeier

Call to Order and Introductions:

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

Approval of May and June Minutes:

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the May minutes, from our regular quarterly meeting, that had been sent out ahead of time in an email to the group. There were no comments, so he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Jeff Barclay made a motion to approve the minutes and Jason Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Next, Stitt said we have minutes from our special June meeting we held on June 21st to approve. Those, too, were sent out ahead of time and he asked if there were any comments or questions on them. There were not, and he asked for a motion of approval. Tara Knuth made a motion to approve the minutes and Jason Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Approval of July Financials:

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for July 2023. Total Income, he said, is \$303,447 and under budget. The budget of \$331,726 is 1/12 of the annual budget and we continue to request funding as needed. On the Expense side, Salaries are a little low because we have one budgeted position open. Net Income is at zero, Kalkwarf said. Maul added that the open position is a shared position in marketing and communication. Stitt commented on Advertising being low and Maul said that is timing on Firespring expenses and will catch up over the next few months. There were no other questions, and Stitt asked for a motion of approval. Jeff Barclay made a motion to approve the minutes and Tara Knuth seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Visitors Promotion Marketing Grant Review:

Next, Jeff Maul said we just have one marketing grant to review and will again at our next regular meeting in November. We only had one additional request come in since the June meeting, the Lincoln Rose Society. He said we will hopefully have more in November, and we are working with Dave Derbin on those. The Rose Society is requesting a grant for \$480 to get the word out and grow attention. The funding is for signage from Sign Pro and printing from Augstums Printing. Stitt asked if we know what their usual attendance is, and Derek Feyerherm said a few hundred. There were no other comments or questions, and Stitt asked for a motion of approval. Tara Knuth made a motion to approve the \$480 grant request and Jeff Barclay seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Directors Report:

Chair Stitt asked for the directors' report. Maul began with a convention center update. Maul has heard that additional sites are possible for consideration in addition to the original five. The LB727 Omnibus Turnback Tax bill was approved with a 44-0 vote and has already established state sales tax on meals, drinks and other retail within 600 yards of the convention center which could result in funding up to \$100M. Stitt asked when might RFPs come out and Maul explained what an RFP is and said they are working on that and trying to get everyone on the same page before extending them. Barclay said a lot of that stems from deciding on the location and Maul agreed. He said yes, who owns the land and who will be responsible and manage it. Derbin added that a lot of people are vested so it's a good thing.

Maul talked about the Sandhills Global Youth Complex saying the groundbreaking is scheduled for August 22nd at 9am and you all are invited. The complex is planning for an opening in early 2025 for full play and hosted tournaments in spring 2025. Maul encouraged everyone to follow the progress on Facebook and Twitter @SandhillsYC saying Jim Hansen and the Peed family are very excited. Negotiations are being done on an operating agreement with a local team to manage, market and operate the complex on the day to day. NWU is taking ownership of providing opportunities for youth in our community who can't afford to play baseball and we are very happy to see NWU taking that step and taking their involvement and commitment to that level.

August will end with an incredible lineup of events including Gravel World Championships, the Airshow, concerts and UNL Volleyball. Gravel World will be August 25-26 with over 1,500 competitors from across the world. Maul had a representative from the race on the radio with him and it will be a great competition. Our Guardians of Freedom Air Show is scheduled for August 26-27 and Maul thanked Feyerherm for all his work on the show. Feyerherm said we think we will be right on the quarter million number in attendance over the two-day show. We will have around 100 city/county individuals working on this. LFR and LPD is planning and working on this to be a safe event. We are hoping for nice weather and hoping the heat moves out before next weekend. One thing we need are volunteers, he said, to work in the concessions. Fundraiser groups are welcome. He said they need to be at least 14 years old, will be paid \$65/day and we are offering an incentive of a \$1,000 bonus to the organization or person bringing in the most volunteers. We also have a sold-out Zach Bryan concert at PBA on August 29. We hope you are feeling this in your hotels, Maul added. To end the month, we will have UNL volleyball at Memorial Stadium on August 30th. Another bonus coming in September, he said, is Morgan Wallen on September 9 making up for his cancelled concert a couple months back.

Maul said we will have one more round of the smaller marketing grants to review in November and then

possibly/hopefully return to the larger grant cycle by year end. We have not been doing the improvement fund grants as we are growing the fund back after the pandemic. Derbin added we have \$2M in cash in the fund, however, there are commitments of \$1.125M that are taking up the budget and we need to keep paying on these.

Visit Lincoln is busy keeping a presence on local media weekly and bi-weekly through several radio outlets including Maul on the Dan Parson Show the 3rd Thursday of every month. This is a great way to tell the story of tourism in front of Lincoln residents, Maul said. He let the group know there has been a growing focus on sports at SCC-Lincoln. Since hiring Dean/Asst AD, Eric Small, they have shown much more interest in hosting sporting events in Lincoln and his goal is to provide additional JUCO opportunities in Lincoln.

In closing, he said the new meeting planners guide has been released in print and gave everyone a copy and Beer Week is scheduled for October 2-8 with great parings and activities across the community. Bella's Best is live now on our website, Facebook and Twitter talking about dog friendly venues in Lincoln. We have a couple non sales industry conferences this fall including the Upper Midwest CVB Conference in September in Brookings, SD and the Nebraska Travel Conference in October in Gering, NE where planners come together to collaborate.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. Visit Lincoln has issued 115 sales leads for 96,498 room nights. Of that, 33% of the leads are for new events, 32% of the leads are for national events and 17% are for regional events. Remember these are below where we like to be because of timing, he said. In definite bookings, we had 83 events booked for 72,338 room nights. Of that, 13% of the booked rooms are for new events, 16% were national and 16% were regional. Feyerherm and Maul told everyone how the five-year contract for girls/boys state basketball and Jehovah Witness numbers affect the numbers with their timing. 2024 business is continuing to pick up as people want to bid out and sign contracts. Our team is working hard on picking up the pace and solidifying events.

Looking next at the 2 Synergize & Simpleview comparison reports on leads and bookings. There is participation from 230 DMO's, 83 without convention centers, like us. We have been invited to participate and serve on the data panel. Live data is being pulled and reported on quarterly and annually. Trends are reported based on convention center size and by US region. The first trend compared from 2023 vs 2019 was the number of leads issued. There was an increase of 22.4% nationwide, Visit Lincoln showed an increase of 25.3% and the Midwest had a decrease of 3.8%. These are broken down by region and we are above national and way above the Midwest. In Lincoln we don't see the highs and lows and stay pretty steady. Maul said he felt we came out of the pandemic quicker than most and that's because of the efforts of all of us.

The next comparison was on the number of booked events. Nationwide showed a 0.9% increase, Visit Lincoln an increase of 27.4% and Midwest was not reported. Feyerherm said our increase was because we have an amazing sales team and timing has been in our favor. In the number of hotel rooms booked there was a 17.8% nationwide decrease. Visit Lincoln had a 11.9% increase and the Midwest with no convention center had a 2.0% increase and with a convention center showed a 26.5% decrease, some being because of a post-pandemic effect. Feyerherm added quite a few cities have expanded their convention centers and the over building is likely skewing the numbers.

Next, Feyerherm said the team will start attending more tradeshow this fall beginning with Connect

Marketplace August 21-24 in Minneapolis, MN. Kelsey Meyer will attend for national associations and Clay Simpson will do the specialty market. Derek Bombeck will be there with the sports market, and this is the show we are partnering with the Cornhusker Marriott and having Dan Jones attend with us for the corporate market. In addition, Derek Bombeck will attend the SPORTS Relationship Conference September 11-14 in South Bend, IN as part of Sports Nebraska and we will co-op with them to save on expenses. Kelsey Meyer will attend the Small Market Meetings September 27-29 in Cedar Rapids, IA and then October 2-5 Bombeck will head to Palm Beach, FL, again as part of Sports Nebraska, to the Teams Conference.

Feyerherm gave an update on the changes happening in the Cities of the Big 10 saying we continue conversations of what the mission will be and reaching out to the new schools, UCLA, USC and now Oregon and Washington. Penn State took the lead, he said, and we appreciate that. We are increasing our connections and collaborations with these other cities and communities through this project.

Meeting planner events continue to be popular. We hosted an event at the Speedway Museum of American Speed last week and had mixology presented by Pillar. It was very well attended, and we received great feedback from the event planners in attendance. In October we will host our next event at the Branched Oak Observatory to show off their classroom setup and ways to use the venue for your events. Clay Simpson also hosted breakfasts on both UNL campuses for the event planners. 50+ department representatives attended and there was a great turnout. The goal was to talk to them about what Visit Lincoln does and the benefit it can be for faculty planning large events. Maul encouraged the VPC to visit these venues for themselves to see what they have to offer. He said we are an asset to the community and campus as the events have come a long way.

New Business:

In new business, Stitt asked if any of the Board members would like to share new projects or give an update on their businesses. He began letting everyone know they are going through a development process building a new Residence Inn by Marriott in the Haymarket. It is a power brand, he said, with 800-900 in the world. It will have 120 rooms and there is a huge need for this in the Haymarket and downtown. The rooms are like an apartment, the building will be six stories high with no basement and we are excited about this, Stitt said. He showed many pictures of the beautiful interior of the venue's lobby, bar area, courtyard and guest rooms. Residence Inns have changed a lot over the years. The design is 100% our own and similar to the Scarlet Hotel, being very modern and sleek. They are planning a groundbreaking in September and plan on an 18-month build, Stitt said.

Stitt also said August has been a stellar month so far and he expects it to continue. July was good, too, he said, with lots of special events. September looks to be stellar, as well, with Zach Brown, football, volleyball and Morgan Wallen coming up. We are excited Wallen is coming back after he cancelled a few months ago causing a big loss in revenue, Stitt added. Staffing is good and we have a new events manager who is a great addition, he said.

Tara Knuth gave an update next about her work with Lincoln Street Outreach for the homeless along the Town Square, Walgreens and the Lincoln Children's Museum. They have been working on security and with Todd Ogden of Downtown Lincoln in ways to improve safety in that area. There have been incidences of homeless men walking into the museum during the day and they are concerned of aggressiveness and the children. The attendance at the museum was affected in May and June by this and she is working to make it a safer place for everyone. Knuth and Bennie Shobe said they have received some funding from

ARPA to help with this situation along with a plain clothes officer in the area.

Jason Hoehne let everyone know they sold one hotel to a couple from Iowa, things are going well for them, and he's excited for their opportunity. He said we still have our other locations, but this is a good change.

Jeff Barclay told about a new feature from Pillar, a storefront butchery with boutique items including a bakery. The pastry chef is amazing, he said. During Covid they started selling boxed meals and came up with the idea for subscription meal packages. They've continued that, he said, with a home service where you can order meals to go from fridge to table. He said they also keep busy managing the Scottish Rite ballroom and Jasmine Room at the Grand Manse in downtown Lincoln.

Jeff Cunningham spoke next about the Farmer's Market. It's been packed every week and very successful. Bennie Shobe asked if dogs are allowed at the Farmer's Market and Cunningham said yes, they are. 90% love it and 10% don't. We are happy with the format and success. He said they've started a new app with a walking tour of the Haymarket and are busy planning Halloween in the Haymarket and Holidays in the Haymarket. They both have been successful in the past and we are looking forward to another great year of activities. Maul brought up the antique business and Cunningham said the business is booming.

Adjourn:

Stitt thanked everyone again for their attendance. He adjourned the meeting at 2:41 p.m.