

**Visitors Promotion Committee**  
**Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce**  
**August 21, 2024**  
**MINUTES**

In Attendance: Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Tim Savona, Aaron Stitt, Bryan Sullivan, Dave Derbin and EK Franks

Guests: Joe Fagler

Absent: Jeff Barclay, Todd Ogden, Jeff Maul, Bennie Shobe, Riley Slezak and Rick Vest

Staff Attending: Derek Feyerherm, Ron Kalkwarf, Diane Pryor and Katie Bohlmeier

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:34 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. Stitt said new member Todd Ogden is out today in meetings with Jeff Maul and then asked new committee member, EK Franks, to introduce himself. Franks said he grew up in Texas and Kansas working as coaches for various high schools and colleges. He worked with UNL Chancellor Bennett at Ole Miss and came to Lincoln when the Chancellor did to work in his administration. Everyone welcomed him to the Committee.

**Approval of May and June Minutes:**

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the regular quarterly meeting in May's minutes or the special meeting in June's minutes, that had been sent out ahead of time in an email to the group. Derek Feyerherm mentioned the date on the June minutes should be revised to say June 5 instead of June 4. There were no other comments, so he asked for a motion to approve the May minutes. Bryan Sullivan made a motion to approve the May minutes and Jason Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Tim Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Barclay and Todd Ogden were absent. Motion carried. Stitt asked for a motion to approve the June minutes, with that one change being made. Knuth made a motion to approve the June minutes and Sullivan seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Barclay and Todd Ogden were absent. Motion carried.

**Approval of July Financials:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for July 2024. Beginning with Room Tax-Operations, he said the budget is 1/12 of the annual budget and we continue to request funding as needed, which shows it being down about \$7,000. In Other Income we are over budget \$3,910 because of a reimbursement from Lincoln Marriott for an attendance fee at a trade show. He said we see that being offset in Travel & Training in the Expense section where we are over budget there \$4,074. Kalkwarf said, Net Income is -\$1, and looks good. There were no questions, so Stitt asked for a motion to approve the financials. Knuth made a motion to approve them and Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Barclay and Todd Ogden were absent. Motion carried.

### **Sandhills Global Youth Complex Update:**

Chair Stitt introduced Joe Fagler, Executive Director of Sandhills Global Youth Complex, to give an update on the project. Fagler said he had been working with Sampson Construction on the project since it began and is excited with his new role as Director of the facility. It is a great project, he said, and is excited to play ball. He showed a rendering of the facility in its completion, which will be spring of 2025. It will include a practice and recruiting field for UNL to use in the early spring months and includes home fields for both softball and baseball for Nebraska Wesleyan University (NWU) with grandstands, turf and field lights. There is a wheel of 4 fields for all levels of youth play and a field to be designated for the Homer's Heroes league. Concession/restroom buildings will be located in the middle of the fields in open space. Triple batting cages will be next to the 680-stall concrete parking lot along the south side of the complex. Fagler said the fields and bullpens will be turf, there will be Musco LED lighting and portable mounds, all top of the line. Portable fencing will allow fields to be adjusted for different levels of play. Dugouts will be covered, backstops will be padded and there will be bullpens at every field. He said there will also be block dugouts and grandstands at the NWU fields and scoreboards at every field. Fagler's construction update showed the committee one field covered with rock and he said they want to get three rocked then begin laying turf in mid-September and be finished by Thanksgiving. All fence posts, netting poles and light poles are up, building erection is in progress and sidewalks and sod will be completed before this winter, he said. Fagler said there has been tons of interest in the facility from local, regional and even national softball and baseball teams and tournaments. They will be able to accommodate large tournaments and will bring in teams from all over the country. He said they will be able to host 50-90-team tourneys and is expecting 70,000-90,000 visitors in year 1.

There were several questions – Tim Savona asked if the fields could be used for all ages. Fagler said yes, the field sizes can be adjusted using the portable fencing and mounds. He added that seven fields can be used for ages 14 and under. Sullivan asked how he will control and manage the dates with NWU and UNL. Fagler said NWU has the rights to their fields but only play eight home games this season and UNL will only use it in the afternoons during the week in early spring so that shouldn't be a conflict. Savona asked if Lincoln would host a tournament of our own or just host others. Fagler said this first year we will host others mostly and have our own in the coming years. How many staff, Sullivan asked. Four full-time and 50-60 part-time, Joe replied. Stitt asked about the scoreboards and Fagler said NWU fields will have the larger, more detailed ones and the other will just be the simpler boards. They talked about life expectancy of the turf saying it's about ten years. EK Franks asked if they'll be using cooling pellets in the turf and he said, no. Savona asked how it will be funded going forward. Fagler explained they are a private, non-for-profit organization and will function on revenue they bring in. A phase II plan was brought up and Fagler said they've been considering options. Stitt thanked him for his time and the interesting and informative presentation. This will be good for our room nights and our entire community, he added.

### **Zartico Software Introduction/Update:**

Derek Feyerherm talked next about a new software program Visit Lincoln is using called Zartico. Zartico provides us with information about who is coming to Lincoln showing us origin market and visitor and resident flow. The data is pulled from cell phones and credit cards used in Lancaster County. They partner with major hotel brands and Google to give us accommodation information and marketing performance data, he said. Feyerherm gave some preliminary stats and said the data still needs to be fine-tuned. Sullivan asked how they determine where someone lives. Feyerherm said the primary residence is where they show the majority use of their phone and the zip code of the credit card. Some of the great things we can see from the data, he said, is the top 10 markets visitors come from and how much they are spending here. This will help us with marketing in those areas. He said we also can use the information to see demographics of event attendees. A good discussion followed with questions on demographics and how the committee members could help. Derek said as this evolves, we would let them know and at this point we are planning

to use it for marketing, to see where ours is strong and where we need to improve and to see if what we are doing is working. On the sales side, it can help us pinpoint big weekends and slower weekends and help us with bid fees. The group had many ideas of uses and Feyerherm agreed, it will be very helpful to all of them including follow up after a grant request to see if the event met its goals in room nights, etc. Stitt agreed this is an excellent product that will be very useful.

### **Sales Report:**

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. Visit Lincoln has issued 126 sales leads for 69,358 room nights. Of that, 36% of the leads are for new events, 66% of the leads are for national events and 17% are for regional events. In definite bookings, we had 95 events booked for 42,199 room nights. Of that, 25% of the booked rooms are for new events, 76% were national and 14% were regional.

Looking next at the 2 Synergize & Simpleview comparison reports on leads and bookings. There is participation from 230 DMO's, 82 without convention centers, comparable to us. The first trend compared from 2024 vs. 2023 & 2019 trends was the number of leads issued vs 2019. There was an increase of 16.4% nationwide, Visit Lincoln showed an increase of 29% and the Midwest had an increase of just 2.9%. The second trend compared from 2024 vs 2023 and the number of leads issued. There was a decrease of 2.1% nationwide, Visit Lincoln stayed the same and the Midwest had an increase of 6.4%. To show number of hotel room nights getting booked trending for 2024 vs. 2019 was an increase of 4.2% nationwide, Visit Lincoln showed an increase of 67% and the Midwest had an increase of 16.1%. The number of events booked showed an increase nationwide of 6.5%, Visit Lincoln had an increase of 33% and the Midwest had a decrease of 16.4%. 2024 vs. 2023 year-end trends in number of booked events shows an increase of 9% nationwide, Visit Lincoln shows an increase of 5% and the Midwest shows a 2.9% increase.

Next, Feyerherm gave an update on summer sports events and tradeshow the staff has been attending with the USARS's numbers being up in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year on July 6-August 3. The NXT Pro Basketball Tournament was held in Lincoln and Omaha on July 26-29 with 800 teams attending. We held the ATP Tennis tournament in Lincoln on the UNL courts on August 4-11. Feyerherm gave a shout out to Derek Bombeck for pulling that together quickly when they reached out needing a venue. There were 75 pro players from 16 countries and spectators from all over. It was a great event, he said. Gravel Worlds, the bike "race" on a 300-mile course from Lincoln up to Columbus, is back August 21-25. We also will be hosting SCCA at the Airpark September 3-6 and will have 1,300 competitors this year.

Feyerherm said the team will be going to Milwaukee, WI August 27-29 for the Connect Marketplace tradeshow. Kelsey Meyer will take appointments from associations, Clay Simpson from the specialty markets and Derek Bombeck in the sports market. Julie Campbell with the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel is also attending for the corporate market. Bombeck also will attend the TEAMS tradeshow in Anaheim, CA on September 23-26 with eight counterparts from across the state as part of Sports Nebraska.

We now have 100% participation in our Cities of the Big Ten, Feyerherm said next. The Passport Program launched around the first of August as a digital passport, and we hope some folks will try to visit all 18 cities. We've learned media around the country have been covering this, he said. We are also moving to a digital passport program called Bandwango for our coffee week and beer week, as well as organizations like FFA. It will be fun to use it for various opportunities throughout the year. Another concept we are working on, Feyerherm said, is microsites for events. We are creating these sites for groups coming to Lincoln as an additional service to them.

There was a discussion about hotel rooms for the baseball tournaments during home Husker football game weekends. Sullivan said it would be challenging and Hoehne said it depends on our opponent, game time and which day the game is on, but definitely worth checking in with the hotel managers each time.

**New Business:**

There was no new business.

**Adjourn:**

Stitt thanked everyone again for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 2:50 p.m.