

**Visitors Promotion Committee  
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce  
February 15, 2023  
MINUTES**

In Attendance: Jeff Cunningham, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Bryan Sullivan, Aaron Stitt, Dave Derbin, Mairead Safranek, Rick Vest and Tammy Ward

Absent: Jeff Barclay and Saige Walker

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

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. He said it's good to see everyone and asked the attendees to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call.

**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 comments and he asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Jason Hoehne made a motion to approve the minutes and Jeff Cunningham seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

**Approval of January Financials:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for July 2022 through January 2023. Total Income is higher than budget, he said, with Room Tax-CVB budget number over by \$15,000, being split 1/12 each month and we are asking for the funds as needed. On the Expense side, Equipment/Maintenance is over budget and that is because of the Visit Lincoln website being updated with Simpleview software. Public Relations is high because we paid out for the Phase II of the CSL study for the Lincoln convention center. Advertising-CVB is over budget by \$69,305, Kalkwarf said. Net Income is a loss of \$57,651, Kalkwarf added, because we are waiting for approval of an ARPA grant from the State for a Visit Lincoln promotional video. Jeff Maul added we have \$57,000 coming through a State ARPA grant and we are following procedures and waiting for reimbursement. It is just a matter of timing, he said. There were no other questions on the financials and Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Hoehne moved to approve the financials as presented. The motion was seconded by Tara Knuth. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

**Visitors Promotion Marketing Grant Review:**

The Committee began reviewing the various grants different entities applied for. The first one presented was for the Board of Regents/Nebraska State Museum. They requested \$5,000 for a Morrill Hall summer staycation promotion that is geared locally and outside of the county. Maul added that this request does follow the guidelines and is asking for print and digital media funding. Bryan Sullivan asked if they have requested a grant in the past. Maul said yes for a similar project. There were no further questions or

comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Hoehne made a motion to approve. Knuth seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Next grant request being reviewed was from Great Plains Gaming Project for \$5,000. They will be hosting a game festival in March 2023 centered around board gaming featuring a gaming library of over 1,000+ games. Maul said gaming is getting big and this is a fun event. Dave Derbin said this is a repeat request. The first grant request was submitted just at the deadline. Sullivan asked if overnight stays for this event are tracked and Maul said yes.. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Sullivan made a motion to approve. Hoehne seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

History Nebraska (Nebraska State Historical Society) is asking for \$5,000 for marketing for their “Righting a Wrong: Japanese Americans and WWII” exhibit. It is a traveling exhibit by the Smithsonian being hosted here and on display April 22-July 2, 2023. At this point, Sullivan asked Maul if there is a list of funds that we have available. Maul said our account exceeds the requests. Derbin said we are fine. Stitt added that these projects do bring in business and good things to do. Maul said the goal is to allocate approximately 20 grants per year. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Sullivan made a motion to approve. Cunningham seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

The fourth grant request came from the Lincoln Arts Council. They are planning their Lincoln Arts Festival 2023 for June 17 and 18 and request \$5,000 for marketing. Hoehne said there is a lot of good information on their application. Maul said he likes the idea of a live stream from their event and that it’s in the Haymarket. Derek Feyerherm added that it is a good weekend and cross promotes other events going on at that time. The Downtown Lincoln Association (DLA) works well with them. Sullivan asked if they’ve asked for a grant before. Maul said yes, they have. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Hoehne made a motion to approve. Knuth seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, so Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Next, Jeff Cunningham excused himself due to a conflict of interest for the next grant. The Lincoln Haymarket Development Corporation requested a \$5,000 marketing grant. They have a walking tour booklet on historic properties in the Haymarket District and want to create a self-guided historic walking tour app. Maul added this started as a print version and posters are being done, too. Feyerherm said the visitors center is asked frequently about a digital version of it. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Knuth made a motion to approve. Sullivan seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, so Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Cunningham abstained. Motion carried. When Cunningham returned to the room, he said the number of tours has been scaled back a little but this will help get back on track.

There were two grant requests considered next and Stitt said they should be looked at together because they actually are for the same project. One from Lincoln Sports Foundation (LSF) and the other from Nebraska Sports Council, which is a tenant of LSF. The applications were identical and both asking for \$4,750 for staff training of two programmable 85” x 36” LED signs to place at the complex’s entrance. The

group discussed that the grant does not qualify as they are asking for staff reimbursement and they both cannot submit for the same project as guidelines state one application per facility/project. Vest agreed it is for staff time reimbursement which is ineligible. Hoehne made a motion to dismiss because it is not eligible and for them to review rules again for future applications. Knuth seconded the motion. Stitt asked for a vote and Hoehne, Knuth, Stitt, Cunningham and Sullivan voted to dismiss these two requests. Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Next up was the LUX Center for the Arts requesting a \$5,000 marketing grant to promote the EMERGE LNK Street Arts & Mural Festival. This area is located in northeast Lincoln near Nebraska Wesleyan University. They have created murals on the sides of several buildings to beautify and draw people into the neighborhood. Maul said it is a neat place and everyone agreed. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Hoehne made a motion to approve. Knuth seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, so Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

The next grant request being considered was from the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation for \$5,000 to be used to market the Tunnel to Towers 5K Run and Walk in Lincoln in August 2023. This event pays for mortgages for fallen firefighters' families and takes place around Holmes Lake. They are trying to get more runners from outside of Lincoln this year and are wanting printed marketing materials. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Knuth made a motion to approve. Sullivan seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, so Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Lastly, the Committee reviewed a grant request from Nebraska Crossroads Music Festival. They are requesting a marketing grant for \$5,000. Their event will be August 5 and 6, 2023. Sullivan asked where this will take place and Feyerherm said they use multiple venues, including the south of downtown area, over five days. Maul said it is a local event but has an impact for international efforts as well. It's a good event, he said, and we are happy with where it's gone. Stitt asked if they are seeking one for Omaha and Maul said no. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Hoehne made a motion to approve. Knuth seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, so Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Cunningham, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

### **Vacant Committee Seats:**

Stitt said we have two open seats to consider filling on the VPC. One is for a voting member, Tom Lorenz's seat. We had discussed holding off for the new general manager of Pinnacle Bank Arena (PBA). Tim Savona was hired for that role and Maul and Stitt want to meet with him and tell him about the Committee and see if he would be interested at all, Stitt said. We think that he would be impactful and good to have on the board. It would also get him focused on hotel nights when he's thinking about shows he's bringing to Lincoln. Stitt asked if there were any questions or concerns. Maul added that we keep this one seat for someone from an event facility. Lorenz served in the seat for eight years in the past then stepped down for a term that was filled by Amy Dickerson from the Lancaster Event Center. Lorenz had just come back on for a new term right before he passed away. We think Savona would be good and support thoughts and discussion. Tammy Ward said she thinks this is a great idea because he is new to Lincoln, and it would be a great way to include him. Mairead Safranek said she has heard amazing things about him. She suggested keeping in mind the future P Street Music Corridor. Ward said that might be a good thought for when she goes off eventually and thought it would be a good thing for Stitt and Maul to

meet with Savona and have a conversation. Stitt thanked Ward for her support now and going forward. Next Stitt welcomed Rick Vest as he joins to fill Roma Amundson's seat. We appreciate you serving on the board, he said. Vest said he appreciates the board and what we do. Stitt added we are honored to have him. Maul said the other non-voting seat that needs to be filled is that of Michelle Waite who recently retired from the UNL Chancellor's office. In conversation with Waite, she informed Maul that UNL will have a replacement for her at the conclusion of this year's school year. Waite thought it may be better suited to have someone from UNL events on the committee.

### **Directors Report:**

Chair Stitt asked for the directors' report. Maul began with Phase 1 and 2 Feasibility Study updates. As you know, we partnered with DLA and Rotary #14 to have the study done. The media and the mayor have been on board with this, and he thanked them. A summary of Phase 1 shows the current square footage under one roof in downtown Lincoln ranks toward the bottom of the market, only 30% of the market demand is being met by the Cornhusker and Lincoln ranks towards the top when it comes to amenities to support hotels and restaurants, he said. People are leaving to go to Kearney and LaVista based on more meeting space under one roof. Five sites were identified including east of the Cornhusker, the post office by PBA, a site by Midwest Steel, a site between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Street downtown and another in the Telegraph District. In Phase 2 of the study cost and size were looked at. We are looking at \$111-\$120M when complete and a 129,700 sq. ft. facility. Within that, they came up with a 30K sq. ft. exhibit hall for convention space, a 12K sq. ft. breakout space, 12K sq. ft. ballroom, 5K sq. ft. pre-function space, 5K sq. ft. outdoor event space and a back of house, loading area and support space. During construction it will support 440 jobs, \$37M in net new direct spending and \$62M in total output. Continuing in Phase 2, Maul said a stable year would have 200 events, 112,600 attended days and 25,800 hotel room nights. We're looking at 230 jobs per year, which will be challenge to fill, he said. Stitt said that number of room nights seems low, and Maul replied CSL was being conservative. Next steps are location and funding. We are doing an analysis including bonds, tax increment financing and naming rights. We aren't the end group that has the decision on this. The city, county and many others are involved. We are looking for support of LB803 (turnback tax) and LB709 which requests \$71M in state cash reserves. Sen. Wishart has earmarked \$60M for the convention center and we appreciate the support. We are setting priorities and doing our due diligence. We assembled an action team to work on this and manage the process moving forward. We asked representatives from both the public and private sectors. Stitt asked about the turnback tax on PBA and Ward said she thought it would be in the year 2040. Feyerherm agreed. Maul said if we don't get the turnback bill to pass this year, we will try again next year. We know the downtown post office is owned by the US Postal Service and the federal government so there will be a lot of layers to work through to get that site. Senators and lobbyists are trying to prioritize this, and we will all need to come together.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. Visit Lincoln has issued 30 sales leads for 4,703 room nights. Of that, 33% of the leads are for new events, 4% of the leads are for national events and 26% are for regional events. We try to have 50% new events and a 75% threshold for national and regional events. In definite bookings, we had 15 events booked for 4,795 room nights. Of that, 10% of the booked rooms are for new events, 29% were national and 26% were regional, Feyerherm said. We have had ongoing conversations with signature events, and we currently are in extended contracts with them.

Next, Feyerherm said things are going well with tradeshows for his team. Derek Bombeck went with Sports NE to Colorado Springs on January 18-19. He had 13 appointments there and has received RFPs. Kelsey Meyer attended RCMA Emerge in Tennessee January 24-26 along with Dan Jones from the Cornhusker. She also attended the ABA Convention February 4-8. Meyer attended with nine partners and

worked in the state's booth. We hosted a breakfast, and it went well. We sent Clay Simpson to Connect Midwest January 30-February 1 in Illinois and he got strong appointments from this one.

Next, Feyerherm said in upcoming tradeshow, Meyer will go to Select Traveler in Branson March 27-29 and Bombeck will attend Sports ETA May 8-11 in Kansas City.

Lastly, Feyerherm said, we have a new website for Lincoln.org. It was launched right before Thanksgiving, and we already have a 16% increase in page views. We have expanded content and blogs and our marketing and communications team has been working hard to have consistent new content. He said thank you to the VPC; the investment is paying off. Stitt said he loves the website and thinks it's a huge improvement.

### **Strategic Plan Update**

Maul asked Jason Ball to update the board on work being done on the Economic Vitality Strategic Plan for Lincoln. Maul said this plan is a part of all of us. It is in depth, he said, and we are all working together for one purpose. Then, Ball went through the plan with the Committee. He said this project has been funded by LPED, the Chamber, the Greater Lincoln Foundation and the Visit Lincoln. Economic Vitality is used to associate with new business, people coming to Lincoln, Ball said. He talked about the term vitality. The continuation of a meaningful or purposeful existence, the power to live or grow and a vital force or principle. We had a 41-person committee of business and community leaders from all corners of the city help with the plan. We partnered with two nationally recognized consulting firms, Broad Ripple and, for the tourism piece, Bill Geist at DMO Proz. The first step was engaging stakeholders. In 48 hours, we had 250+ 1on1 interviews and focus group meetings. In phase two, we rolled out the idea of the plan and collected 3,300 responses through a community survey. The committee stayed strong and continued to meet to strengthen the plan. They came up with six anchor statements leading to the six strategic areas of focus, diverse talent, distinctive destination assets, targeted economic development, vibrant and balanced growth, dynamic entrepreneurial systems and support and compelling image and awareness. These all work together to bring in the talent we need.

Ball went through the six focus areas explaining the thought behind each and how they all fit together. He said we will work to provide trained talent for businesses, help folks navigate a talent pathway, support local early childhood education and care capacity. This is something we will work with the community on, and he mentioned Lincoln Littles and other organizations to help with this.

When it comes to destination assets, the first and main thing mentioned was a Lincoln Convention Center. Maul added everyone wanted to talk about it. A surprise destination asset mentioned was to establish a music, art and entrepreneurship festival. Again, the Chamber will not lead this effort. Lincoln Calling is already set up for this and we are checking in with them. We will work with partners on this step. Sullivan interjected the comment that DLA did this for many years through July Jam and other events. He said the liability insurance just got expensive that they couldn't afford to continue. Hoehne said when he met with Geist, he said we can get 2<sup>nd</sup> tier artists for festivals that would be great.

We also need to fully leverage the Lincoln Youth Complex. Sports are big and we need to get the teams and their families here to play. Ball talked about the different activity hubs across Lincoln. We want to be more intentional on how we market the other parts and hubs of the community. Maul said think about Omaha. When you say you're going to Omaha, you talk about where in Omaha you're going, and we want to be more like that.

Ball went through the ideas behind targeting economic development. He compared the growth in Texas to us and our plans. We have been working with and watching the legislature and the funding they are giving for economic growth. A mega site between Lincoln and Omaha along I80 is important to grow and connect the two cities. It would be for a certain kind of business that will bring in visitors to our hotels and community. Ball said we're looking for manufacturing, insurance, fin tech, logistics, ag tech and/or software development. For vibrant and growth, he talked about infrastructure and ways to improve it including Water 2.0, water drainage criteria, south and east beltway and the developments along the corridors. Work is being done through the entrepreneurial ecosystem and LaunchLNK to grow our startups and new businesses. Connections are being made, coordination is improving and resources are being leveraged. When it comes to image and awareness, we talked about branding Lincoln and our community. This will likely be something we partner with a national P/R firm to come up with a new marketing plan. In closing, Ball said the plan will be launched next week at the Chamber's Annual Meeting. When he was done, Stitt and Sullivan both thanked him for the information and the work. Stitt asked him what businesses he's seen that could use the mega site. Ball said there are all kinds from automated manufacturing to start ups. Derbin asked if a tech hub is on our radar. Ball said yes, we are working on it.

**New Business:**

In new business, Stitt mentioned that Todd Wiltgen is not in attendance. He asked Ball to update the group. Wiltgen was appointed by Gov. Pillen to be the Lancaster County Election Commissioner. We are proud of him, but sorry to lose him. If anyone on the board knows of anyone that would fit into that role, Ball asked them to let us know. Bruce Bohrer will attend in Wiltgen's place in the meantime.

**Adjourn:**

Stitt thanked everyone for their attendance. He adjourned the meeting at 3:36 p.m.