

Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
February 18, 2026
MINUTES

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Sean Flowerday, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Todd Ogden, Riley Slezak and Aaron Stitt

Guests: Susan Weller, Adam Eakin, Renee Yost, Todd Johnson, Dani Bryant, Mike Selvage, Sam Manzitto, Jr., Ed Ring, Bill Stephan, Matt Boring, Leroy Sievers, Chad Hanson, Roger Lempke, Mike McCullough, Michelle McCullough, Liz Shea McCoy, Monique Basse, Joe Fagler, Brad Korell, Abby Squier, Maggie Griffin, Shannon Castillo, Jude Werner, Ken Dobbs, Bailey Wood, Tanner Baker, JJ Yost, Brandon Cavanaugh, Ryan Weiss, Randy Gordon, JJ Yost, Mark Zitzlsperger, Randy Hawthorne, Evan Killeen, Dan Lesoing, Sam Lesoing, Terry Payne, Dave Breetzke, Tatum Casart, Laura Reznicek, Susan Long, Kevin Sander and Tim Matthews

Absent: Dave Derbin, EK Franks, Tim Savona, Bennie Shobe, Bryan Sullivan and Rick Vest

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

Call to Order and Introductions:

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. He thanked everyone saying we appreciate your time. He then went over the plan and schedule for the day reminding the group two of the committee members will be stepping out when their grant requests are presented and discussed. Stitt 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 regular quarterly meeting in November's minutes, 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 November minutes. Jason Hoehne 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, Hoehne, Knuth, Todd Ogden, and Stitt voted yes. Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Approval of January Financials:

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for fiscal year July 2025 - January 2026. Room Tax-Operations are up he said, the budgeted number is 1/12 of the annual budget and we continue to request funding as needed. Salaries are down a bit because the intern budgeted for had not started yet and our services team is working less hours. Also, Medical & Dental Insurance is lower due to less participation than budgeted. Postage is a little high, he said, because of trade show mailer follow-up. Equipment/Maintenance is also high because of Threshold 360 software purchased. Kalkwarf said Advertising and Public Relations are up because of additional media and marketing purchases. He said Net Revenue for this timeframe is \$0. There were no questions on the financials, so Stitt asked for a motion to approve the financials. Barclay made a motion to approve them, and Knuth seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden, and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

2026 Visitor Improvement Grant Guidelines

Next, Jeff Maul and Stitt led a discussion about the preliminary work done on the grant requests being heard today. The requests were emailed to the Committee ahead of time and everyone reviewed them and rated them on a pre-determined scale to measure the project, budget and economic impact in the county. Each category rated on a 0-5 scale and the group was provided with the results. Questions they wanted to ask were shared and what amount of funds would be available in the next grant cycle. Maul said it would be less in the next cycle. Also discussed was that they will only receive up to \$500K/year and when they begin to receive the funding. Stitt thanked them all again and invited in the first applicant.

UNSM Morrill Hall

Presenters: Susan Weller and Adam Eakin

Request: \$2,000,000

Weller talked about the project saying Morrill Hall has served as the primary public tourist site for the UNSM, is listed among the top 5 cultural attractions in Lincoln by Google, and they would like to elevate it even more. She referred to the letters of support they have adding value to the project. Eakin said the redevelopment will take them into future years and serve as a generator to bring in up to 100,000 visitors a year. The proposed renovation of Elephant Hall will have it integrated into a walk through Nebraska's ancient landscapes using fossils and research stories to increase the relevance to visitors.

Q&A:

Questions were asked and Weller responded that a previous improvement grant for the Marx Center will be finished near the end of May and reopening is set for June 6, 2026. Outreach to out-of-state will increase 20%. New exhibits include a walk-through time that is bringing in national attention, Eakin said, and room nights will increase with tours and guests even increase during the College World Series. If they receive grant funding, RFP's will go out this summer and start the project in January 2027.

Discussion:

The Committee discussed outside pledges to the project, other grants and capital improvements.

YMCA Wright Park

Presenters: Renee Yost, Todd Johnson and Dani Bryant

Request: \$2,656,044

Johnson talked about Wright Park saying they are a strong supporter of the youth in Lincoln and a long-standing non-for-profit. They have eight baseball/softball fields. They are located in close proximity to other ball complexes in Lincoln and have begun to partner with them to host tournaments bringing in out-of-town teams. This project would turf the infields of those eight fields increasing the play time regardless of weather. If awarded the funding, construction will begin in August 2026 and conclude in August 2027. They said this would expand their reach and strengthen Lincoln as a destination with nine tournaments a year and over 27,000/year, they said.

Q&A:

What kind of tournaments were hosted? They said with Omaha tournaments such as SlumpBuster and East Nebraska Sports (ENS) and hoping for others. Contractors would be local they said. If not funded here, they would do the work in phases. Yost said they want to increase their service to the community.

Discussion:

The group talked about how these improvements would help the complex and the county, wondering if there would be enough economic impact. They also discussed construction costs and how well the complexes work together on tournaments. The group was concerned that Wright Park is more for the YMCA players and groups and not as "club" oriented due to that being their philosophy. It has always been an "alternate" to club sports, they said, and commented on the project being referred to as non-critical by the YMCA staff.

Lincoln Youth Football

Presenters: Mike Selvage, Sam Manzitto, Jr. and Ed Ring

Request: \$2,700,000

Selvage talked about the existing complex being the only dedicated youth football facility in Lincoln and the county with five fields home for youth football leagues, practices and community programming. They are close to other complexes and provide for expansion into a regional and national tournament destination. The goals of the project, he said, are to expand the park with three full-size football fields and increase the kinds of teams playing to include soccer and girls flag football. They believe it could have an economic impact of \$12M to the county. Manzitto would be the contractor, he said.

Q&A:

Questions were asked – how working with clubs and how working to attract new tournaments? Selvage said we are open to anyone to come in and once it's built, we will get the word out. They talked about \$1M being raised from the private sector and access from Park Blvd. When would they start with the project? Selvage said it would take a couple weeks to get the plans, and they would be ready in the fall/winter. He said the \$2.7M from this grant and the \$1M in other funding would fund the project as a whole. Do football teams travel? Selvage said boys' football doesn't travel very well, but soccer and girls' flag football do. He estimated four tournaments a year with about 180 teams.

Discussion:

Items discussed were to look at the new items they are adding like girls' flag football, lacrosse and rugby, not just retaining the current. Do they have partnerships established with other teams and organizations. Also discussed was the use of turf to bring in teams.

Lied Center

Presenters: Bill Stephan and Matt Boring

Request: \$1,200,000

Stephan said thank you all for your support. We are a flagship performing arts facility and our patrons help support hotels and restaurants. We also need the public and community's involvement. We have patrons from all over the world, he said, and we are 95% self-supporting. We are asking the county to partner with us to improve the venue and increase the economic impact in the community. He said they've been fundraising for five years for this project, their largest since the 1980's. It will increase attendance, traffic flow and programming as well as build a stronger downtown, Stephan said. They are planning to improve, enhance and enlarge the entrance, add a new studio theater and renovate the lobbies, theater and public areas to increase the appeal to their guests.

Q&A:

Questions were asked about expanding the seating in the existing theater – no, the seating will increase but a new theater will be added for local artists. What types of shows will be brought in, comedy or what genre? Stephan said they look for what is popular and comedy is for now and we are working to be competitive. Will the renovation affect your season, they asked. He said they will be open most of the time. It's an 18-month project and they will be closed just a bit the summer of 2027. They asked what part of the large project is the \$1.2M being used for. Stephan said real improvements – to help with the core project plus some additional space to come alive.

Discussion:

Hoehne said when the shows come to Lincoln, the hotels have a lot of the performers and crew staying there for 12-14 days and it's a high room count. Stitt agreed. Knuth said they've raised \$32M already so doing a good job. They discussed the rotation of performers between Lincoln and Omaha. The Committee agreed it is a great attraction that strengthens the area.

Star City Optimists Youth Foundation

Presenters: Leroy Sievers and Chad Hanson

Request: \$3,000,000

Leroy Sievers explained the project to the group saying they are requesting \$3M to expand the parking, lighting for the complex and rebuilding field 5 to include turf and new drainage. He said the lights will increase field use by 20%. Chad Hanson added that will be an economic impact of \$24M. They said their partnership with softball is great and they need more field usage, and turf is helping recruit teams and tournaments to Lincoln. Softball brings in 17 – 20 tournaments a year, he said. They also talked about an endowment fund being set up to be dedicated to future renovations.

Q&A:

In questions, they were asked how they partner with the other complexes to bring in multi-state tournaments. How are they collaborating with city fields, too? They partner with YMCA and Wright Park, they said, with 12-field tournaments but turf would increase that. The Committee did say more fields with turf and lighting would benefit the city and county. They were asked how much money they had raised from the private sector for this project as it is split into five phases. Hansen said they will launch an \$8M campaign once they hear if they are awarded this grant. Knuth asked when they would be done with the construction. Hansen said 2027, depending on financing. With more donors and more funding, it could be sooner.

Discussion:

How these larger projects are financed was discussed.

Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation/Pershing

Presenters: Roger Lempke, Mike McCullough, Michelle McCullough, Liz Shea McCoy and Monique Basse Request: \$925,000

Roger Lempke explained the project saying the tile mural taken off the Pershing building downtown has been moved into Wyuka cemetery and is cleaned, organized and ready to be installed this March and April. He said the goal is to improve the area around the wall where the mural will be displayed to allow for a nice green space and meeting space for groups to hang out, have events, field trips and even weddings. They are wanting to have a stage, seating, grass plants and trees to enhance the area around the existing pond. Lempke said they are anticipating bringing in 67K people/year which would be 20K hotel rooms and \$11M in revenue per year. Professional architects have collaborated to create a site layout and structural profile, he said, that will have a festival, food truck ready site.

Q&A:

Barclay asked if the use of the space would be free and Lempke said ultimately yes, but they may charge later and the \$925,000 is for the free space. The group asked how this would increase the room nights and Lempke said with the plays, concerts, food trucks and private events. Michelle McCullough said they are going after a Guinness World Record of the largest mural ever moved and largest mural in the western hemisphere. Mike McCullough said the mural has history and he believes there is interest and that people will want to come to Lincoln to see it. When asked who will maintain the mural and the new space and schedule the events, they said Wyuka staff. McCullough added that there is a parking lot there ready for use. Stitt thanked them for their work.

Discussion:

In discussion, Hoehne said they are a not-for-profit and how would they afford to maintain it and schedule it. The room night number of 20K was also discussed wondering if that could actually be reached. The Committee talked about the \$10K grant given to them last year from this fund, for this project and how they haven't seen any hotel room nights from that.

Sandhills Global Youth Complex

Presenters: Joe Fagler, Brad Korell and Abby Squier

Request: \$3,000,000

Joe Fagler introduced his group and said they are working on Phase 2 of the complex. Last year they opened with eight fields and they outdid their expectations, he said. The demand is so great already that it exceeds their capacity. Phase 2 would be to add a 4-field complex on ground across from Oak Lake. These

would be softball-size fields and bring in an additional 27K visitors each year and 74% of softball tournaments outside 90 miles with 27% needing hotel rooms. That will be a 33% increase in room nights, he said. With that, families will spend their money on restaurants and retail. Fagler said this will bring in more national tournaments as softball teams travel well. He said they anticipate Phase 2 contributions will be more private contributions making up 85% or \$17M of the total with 15% or \$3M from public contributions and grants.

Q&A:

They were asked if they compete with the Optimists and Fagler said they do a bit but mostly work together and that SGYC has a somewhat different product. When asked about revenue and budget for the project, Fagler said revenue would increase with more fields and some of it would be used for the upkeep of the complex. Location being an issue was the next question – Fagler said the fields would be close to the existing complex and even closer to downtown which would help those hotels and restaurants even more. They asked about the economic impact – would that increase? Abby Squier said these will be softball fields and those games are shorter than baseball games, just 90 minutes; therefore, more can be played in a day and a tournament, so you are able to have more teams which increase the hotel rooms. Hoehne asked about the timeline of the project. Brad Korell said this is a one-time opportunity for this site and with this grant we would have the support of the county and then we would start a capital campaign with the community and private sector. He added they have no commitments yet. They also talked about getting the funding first so no long-term debt. Next they were asked if the fields would be in the floodplain. He said yes, but they are privately owned and the owner has been receptive. Korell added that the SGYC has proven success and believes these fields would greatly add to that success and drive even more tourism to Lincoln. Stitt thanked them.

Discussion:

The Committee talked about the number of fields and overall cost. They also discussed whether it was too soon to ask for more donations from the private sector. Some thought striking while the iron is hot may be good. The project sounds like an opportunity to keep the momentum going and it would be beneficial to have even more fields in our community available for tournaments, they said.

N4VB Volleyball

Presenter: Maggie Griffin

Request: \$3,000,000

Maggie Griffin introduced herself and said volleyball has always been a part of her life and is a big part of many lives in this state. She said with volleyball being so big in Nebraska, we need a volleyball facility in Lincoln. We need it for young girls, she said, as it teaches confidence, leadership skills and gives opportunities and something to do after school. It serves as a hub and a place to grow, Griffin said. Next, she talked about the project saying they would like to build a facility with eight courts and eventually expand to 12. It would not just be for local clubs and teams, but to host regional and national tournaments as well. Griffin mentioned the facility offering low and no-cost programming, possibly partnering with the Malone Center, schools and the community as well as offering \$200K a year in scholarships. Griffin said the grant would help with the construction and land purchase.

Q&A:

The first question was are they planning for the expansion to 12 courts. She said yes, it will probably be 5-6 years before they expand. Next they asked her about rent and paying for operations. Griffin said they would have a club team as the main operators, partner with John Goodwin, have open gyms and after school programs. The Committee asked what kind of budget she has, and she said land and building of \$16M with plans to add on four courts later. It was brought up that they had applied for turnback tax, and she added that they do not have any private funding yet. The group asked how they compare in size to Kinetic and Speedway and she said they would be smaller, but they will have volleyball flooring and not hardwood like the others. She said the facility could also be used for STEM and classroom space. She said this facility will bring in groups of people that will shop and dine out in Lincoln. They could host large

tournaments, Griffin said, and would host practices during the week. Stitt asked about the bleachers and concessions for the spectators, and she said yes they'd have both. Next, the group asked about the organization and leadership of the facility. She said they'd have a staff of five with Diane Mendanhall as the president and that they are a 501(c)(3). They asked her if the project was contingent on turnback tax and she said yes, if they aren't granted the turnback tax, they'd have to look at other sources but haven't yet because they're optimistic on the governor's decision.

Discussion:

The group talked about the lack of private funding and what if the turnback tax doesn't get awarded to the project. Also, there was concern over the lack of adequate seating and inadequate plan for expansion.

Meadowlane Pool

Presenters: Shannon Castillo and Jude Werner

Request: \$500,000

Jude Werner thanked the Committee for their time and said the Meadowlane Pool had been serving the community since 1960 until it closed in 2023 due to infrastructure needs. He said they would like to get the pool restored and improved to serve the community and bring visitors to Lincoln. They need to address infrastructure deficiencies and modernize the pool, Werner said, and would like to foster positive and social interaction for children and their families. They have some thoughtful, inclusive programming, aiding those with special needs, Werner said. Planned programming includes swim events and hours for reduced crowds. He said the project would cost \$870K, and they are ready to start construction that would have them ready to reopen in summer of 2026, pending sufficient funding.

Q&A:

Questions included size of the pool compared to others in community. Youth size, Werner said. They asked how many on a swim team and Castillo said 30. They talked about the facility and amenities being outside. Stitt asked how this would bring in overnight guests. Werner said it was a private pool before but now they are a 501(c)(3) and looking at how they can serve others with a new environment and new model. They are working on ways to do some cross-branding with other attractions and mentioned the Lancaster County Event Center. They asked about the schedule of the staff during the day and evening, safety and cost of admission along with size of the pool. Werner said they have experience with scheduling and will have standard safety protocols in place. The pool is 25m and six lanes, he said. Castillo said they are looking at the pool entrance cost being \$5-10/day at the gate and annual memberships. They are also looking at other avenues and special events to create revenue. It was brought up that they have just under \$200K in private funds and are submitting requests totaling \$500K to the Sunderland Foundation, Scheels and D.F. Dillon Foundation.

Discussion:

The Committee discussed whether the city provides any funding and whether this would bring in many room nights or ROI.

Lincoln Children's Museum

Presenters: Ken Dobbs and Bailey Wood

Request: \$300,000

Tara Knuth excused herself from the room for the presentation, questions and discussion.

Ken Dobbs introduced himself and thanked the group for the opportunity and for supporting them last year with the 8-12-year-old project. He said that new attraction has increased revenue by 13% and they are doing great with it. We are wanting to build on that, he said, and use this funding to purchase ten mobile, hands-on science exhibit pieces from Momentum Interactives by Boss Display to continue efforts to serve the older children with quality, hands-on STEM learning. If we are able to attain these pieces we would be positioned to pursue membership in the Association of Science and Technology Centers which would place us as one of two (Morrill Hall) science centers in Lancaster County and strengthen our uniqueness and visibility as a destination for hands-on science learning, Dobbs said. We have a proven success of

using the funds efficiently, and this funding would be used in three ways – expanding STEM learning, increasing offerings for ages 8-12 and increasing regional competitiveness and tourism appeal. Dobbs said the economic impact would be \$1.5M with effects on lodging tax, restaurants and retail.

Q&A:

Questions were asked about moving the units off-site and Dobbs said yes they are mobile and could be moved to schools or other venues if needed. What do they look like and how do they work? Dobbs said they work with electricity, water, air and more. They rate among the best and will take about four hours for the visitors to go through and try everything on them. They will be the best in the area, including Omaha and Gretna, he said. The Committee asked what will happen if you don't get all the funding requested. Dobbs said the project would lose momentum and be delayed.

Discussion:

The group discussed that they did receive funding from previous grants out of this fund, how they've used the prior grant funding and if they have private funding. Also, they said the Museum does keep tourists in town longer and the hoteliers in the room said they do send guests to the Museum when they're looking for things to do in Lincoln.

After the discussion, Knuth rejoined the meeting.

Pinewood Bowl-City of Lincoln

Presenters: Tanner Baker, JJ Yost, Brandon Cavanaugh and Ryan Weiss

Request: \$3,000,000

JJ Yost thanked the Committee for their support of past projects and said they are requesting assistance in the final stage in the master plan to improve the rigging structure that supports stage production and lighting required by many artists. As a result, we are unable to compete for certain types of shows, they said. This project will have two phases, the first, believed to cost \$100,000, is assessment where architects and engineers will assess and develop cost estimates, In phase two they will develop construction documents and engage a contractor in the implementation of either the renovation or retrofit option.

Q&A:

In questions they were asked what they think the outcome of the assessment will be. Yost said probably to replace it. Next, they asked which artists and how many have passed on Lincoln due to this. Cavanaugh said we've already lost two in 2026; both the number and quality has been affected. What if it's determined to cost more than \$3M, they asked. Yost said they'd need to do more fundraising. They asked who is making the grant request and it was determined it was the City of Lincoln. When asked what the maximum amount is of shows you can offer, Cavanaugh said 10-14 shows with 3,000 – 3,500 attendees per show. The Committee asked if this is an all or nothing request, would \$100,00 for Phase 1 help. Yost said yes. They asked about the metrics and how you know which acts to bring in. They said you know 60-70% of the time but look at the cost and income variables. How is the revenue divided. They said the landlord is the City for programming and concerts are put on by Legends Group. Some of the revenue goes back into maintenance, they said. Stitt asked when would the completion date be? Yost said it would be done in a 2-year cycle. Would it be fixed or torn down and totally redone, he asked. Yost said if retrofitting, work with what's there, if rebuilding is the option, they'd tear down and start over.

Discussion:

In discussion it was brought up that it was a big request for what they plan to use it for and how the project would bring a return in lodging. The figures on the revenue were also discussed. \$1.8M in funding has been given to them from the grant fund in the past and why was the City asking for \$3M for this project. Slezak said the city can't use City funds for this and hope to bring in additional revenue. The group discussed the possibility of raising the ticket prices to pay for it and if there has been an uptick in hotel stays due to these shows.

Midwest Radio Control/Bowling Lake – Lincoln Parks Foundation

Presenters: Randy Gordon, JJ Yost and Mark Zitzlsperger

Request: \$330,037

Randy Gordon addressed the group saying they are partnering with the Midwest Racer's Organization to raise \$431,958 to relocate the region's only radio-controlled model car racetrack, which was moved to accommodate construction of the new Sandhills Global Youth Complex in 2023. They have been looking for a new site using \$100K in cash and in-kind materials. If they receive this funding, it will provide enough to make this track the best in the United States. Zitzlsperger said they host four national championships and 7 – 8 weekend races per year, but they want to increase the size and number of events they host. Yost said execution comes through Parks & Recreation and the City. They will administer the grant. When describing the project, they said they are looking at a 30K sq. ft. site located north of Bowling Lake Park in Air Park to construct a new racetrack, amenities and facilities. The goal is to expand tourism, generate visitor spending in hotels and businesses and support youth engagement and STEM learning.

Q&A:

Hoehne asked where do you market and what size are your events. They said marketing reaches all over the country and national races bring in up to 200 visitors seven or eight times a year. When it's a local race, we see folks from Kansas, South Dakota and Colorado, he said. What about security? They will have controlled access and security cameras in place. The group asked about entry fees and overhead costs. Zitzlsperger said they broke even by charging entry fees to events. Sponsorship opportunities were discussed. Would the land be bought or a long or short-term lease? Yost said they are discussing with the Lincoln Airport. Stitt asked how something like this affects businesses like Hobby Town and he said people hearing about the project and what we do drives their product sales up. They asked the group about what will happen five years down the road. Will you need capital projects? Gordon said Parks & Rec Foundation supports them, but they do the maintenance on their own. Hoehne asked what happens if you don't get the full amount of the grant. And Yost said they need to get it done, so they will need to look for other funding.

Discussion:

The group thought it was a good project and that it has a lot of potential.

Downtown Lincoln Association Visitors Center

Presenters: Randy Hawthorne

Request: \$250,000

Todd Ogden excused himself from the room for the presentation, questions and discussion.

Randy Hawthorne spoke to the Committee and said the Downtown Lincoln Association (DLA) Visitors Center is looking to relocate to the Old City Hall at 920 O Street, a historical landmark that is underutilized. It is right at the heart of the city as visitors come into downtown, he said, where they could continue to be ambassadors to welcome visitors. With the renovation, the third floor would be the new location for DLA's visitor center. Hawthorne said the 4th floor is envisioned as a coworking space that could be used by travelers, remote workers and collaborators as a place to gather and work. He said the location has the potential to enhance the tourism ecosystem because it's more centralized and visible for visitor services, programming and improving the overall experience of Lincoln's visitors. He mentioned that Visit Lincoln is considering moving in the first floor and have its Visitor Center there. Other organizations would have the opportunity to move into the building along with them to enhance the area and experience.

Q&A:

There were questions regarding ADA accessibility which will be a part of the Project O Street process for outside the building along that corridor. How would this bring in room nights, they asked Hawthorne. He said it would supplement their visit, so they have a great experience. What would be the size of the event space? He said he could seat 150-200. They would be leasing it from the City in a long-term lease. They would work this along with the O Street project and will be more central to downtown. Asked about other

tenants, Hawthorne said the existing would stay and there is a possibility of others moving in once the renovation is complete.

Discussion:

The Committee discussed how this would bring in any hotel nights and mentioned it would enhance the Lincoln visit. Comments were made that this location would be closer and more walkable to the downtown hotels.

After the discussion Todd Ogden rejoined the meeting.

Lincoln Children's Zoo

Presenter: Evan Killeen

Request: \$3,000,000

Evan Killeen said the Zoo is the 6th fastest growing zoo in the US and the 2nd largest tourist attraction in Nebraska. We are huge at bringing people into Lincoln, he said, reaching over 411,000 guests in 2025. The current economic impact is \$23M and it could go up to \$33M with this project, Killeen said. The project will expand and improve the attraction with a new, more modern and larger entrance. They will also be moving the gift shop near the exit to enhance operational efficiency and increase the retail size. The café will also be relocated to a central location, and a new play space will be added adjacent to the new cafe. The space will also serve as a meeting and gathering area for visitors. Killeen said they will also increase the administrative space.

Q&A:

Hoehne asked what the cost of the project is and where are you at with the funding. Killeen said \$18M total to start. We have \$2.2M from one donor and another donor will match 25 cents on the dollar to what we receive from this grant request. Once the funding is finalized they will move on to finalize the design and construction team, he said. They asked who this would attract and Killeen said people from outside the city will come and increase the economic impact. They are tracking the attendees with cell phone pings to see where they are coming from. Knuth asked if they planned on getting more animals and he said yes smaller ones to start. She also asked if the \$18M could be more and he said it may be a little high and they will manage the budget. He said the investment in them is great.

Discussion:

The Committee said the attendance at the zoo is high and it continues to be a great attraction for Lincoln.

Lincoln Sports Foundation

Presenters: Dan Lesoing, Sam Lesoing, Terry Payne, Dave Breetzke and Tatum Casart

Request: \$1,600,000

Lesoing said they have increased attendance greatly from 2023 to 2026 and thanked the Committee for their support. They have done \$4.1M in facility-wide upgrades since 2019, he said, and had a 300% increase in attendance from events last year. Lesoing said they are #2 in Nebraska attraction report. This grant would help eliminate capacity barriers and bring in more events. The upgrades would be to the restrooms and increase flow in open areas and around courts. It would also include finishing work on the upper mezzanine. He said we have gone through huge growth in the last several years and hope to continue that.

Q&A:

Maul thanked them and said they've done a great job out there and asked if this upgrade would bring in bigger tournaments. Lesoing said it would double the lobby space to have room for the spectators and increase the size of the restrooms. He said they need to offer at least ten more stalls. Hoehne asked if better seating brings in more tournaments. Lesoing said to some extent, they have 63 on the calendar and last year they had 31.

Discussion:

The Committee discussed the funding being used for restrooms and seating and whether this could affect the economic impact. They said it's a great facility and they need better mezzanine space and better

restrooms to avoid overcrowding and traffic flow through the concourse and hallways. It would increase the capacity and efficiency. They believe it will bring in more tournaments of higher caliber. The group has encouraged them to get sponsorships, and they have done so much already with the facility.

Sheldon Art Museum

Presenters: Laura Reznicek and Susan Long

Request: \$2,000,000

Laura Reznicek said thank you for your time and this opportunity. She talked about the building first, saying the Sheldon Museum is one of the nation's leading art museums. Its Philip Johnson building opened in 1963 and is considered to be one of the largest work of art in the museum's collection. We look at that and think how we will accommodate all we want to show, she said. Next, she talked about the art and their renowned collection of 13,000 modern and contemporary art, including Edward Hopper, O'Keeffe and many others. She then talked about the people saying they want to have a universal design and access to a gathering space. They just finished a strategic plan that prioritizes visitor and community engagement. 46% of their tourists are from out of town, she said, and come from three visitor bases. They have been looking at ways to expand, enhance the building and increase the square footage along with uses for green space. This project would increase the visitors per year by 7,125 and the economic impact by \$2M, she said.

Q&A:

There was a question of using this to kick off their project. Susan Long said they did do some fundraising and have \$89,500 but the total budget for the project is \$9M. Stitt asked when they last did a capital campaign and she said 2000-2002 and they are overdue. They asked her if she planned any special events to bring in guests for overnight stays. Any special marketing? Long said they'd plan events on Friday night into Saturday night, talking lectures and could use the space for weddings charging \$5K per wedding. When asked how often they switch out exhibits and speakers, she said twice a year with others added throughout the year.

Discussion:

They talked about the vision of the museum and said it's hard to see ROI. They discussed limited support from the University Foundation and donors. Also brought up was their traveling gallery.

Museum of American Speed

Presenters: Kevin Sander and Tim Matthews

Request: \$3,000,000

Kevin Sander began saying thank you for this opportunity. He said they are a premier tourist attraction and a must-see destination for visitors of all ages. This project will be a two-story, 33K sq/ft addition. The first floor (16.5k sq/ft) will be a dual use, open room large event space with rotating gallery. The second floor (16.5k sq/ft) will be a permanent, open exhibition space. It will include structural columns and an indoor stairwell. Three to five times a year, it will be rented for large conferences or meetings that accommodate 400-500 seated guests. He said the 2nd floor will provide the opportunity to work with some new exhibitors and give them more space. Matthews said they have worked with Speedway for many years to create exhibits that keep bringing people back to Lincoln and that is their dream for the museum. Sander talked about the rotating gallery and said it will be changed periodically and refreshed.

Q&A:

The group asked if this grant request was just for Phase 1. Sander said yes, it'll go towards the \$6M for construction cost, lights and displays. They asked Sander if he had any endowment and he said if received they would get a \$1M match from the Speedway family. They will need to start an aggressive fundraising campaign, he said. What is the mix of visitors, they asked; what brings people to Lincoln and how many do you estimate? Sander said 300 cars for three nights for just one event is a fair estimation. Matthews said BMX brings in 400 bikes for three days. Hoehne asked what kind of event space you have. Sander said it would increase from 250 people to 500 and they will have autobody and motor events. They asked who books the space and Sander said they have an event scheduler. Stitt asked what is the 15-20-year plan.

Sander said adding additional space for exhibits and Phase 3 with a new entrance, gift shop, theater and coffee shop. They asked if they had ADA and he said yes.

Discussion:

The group discussed funding from Bill Smith and how the museum is separate from the family. Discussion continued on that, donors and event space.

All the presentations were complete, and the group took a quick break before beginning the final discussion regarding all the grant requests.

The first request discussed was the DLA Visitors Center and Ogden excused himself from the meeting. There was concern regarding the ROI but said it's not just a relocation, they see the added value in the long term being on the O Street corridor and teaming with other businesses that may potentially move into the building once it's renovated. Ogden returned to the room and Knuth left for the next discussion on the Children's Museum. They were mostly favorable and wondered if the project would enhance the museum enough to add more visitors. They felt confident the funds would go to great use in the museum and add value by increasing the use by older children when families are in town. The amount is conservative for the reinvestment it will provide to the city and its guests. Knuth returned to the meeting. The Committee then reviewed the ratings they had given ahead of the meeting on each grant request and gave their opinion and thoughts on each one. Some were determined to have too low of a return on impact (ROI) and a few were determined to be very worthy of the grant with the Committee deciding on full or partial grants. Once that was complete they discussed some in more detail.

First, they discussed the Star City Optimist Foundation and what parts of the project they could support including lighting for the parking lot and fields. Lincoln Youth Football was discussed next and whether or not they could raise private funding. The Committee questioned whether they could complete the entire project with the funding. They were also concerned there wouldn't be enough ROI.

Jeff Barclay asked to go into an executive session. Hearing no objections, non-voting members exited the room for the executive session. Upon completion of the executive session, everyone returned to the room to continue discussion.

Pinewood Bowl was discussed next saying they don't see that it would have enough ROI and felt it should be funded by the City. The next one discussed was Lincoln Sports Foundation and everyone agreed they needed the funding for larger restrooms. A partial amount was discussed. With Knuth out of the room, they decided to give the Children's Museum the full amount. And the same for DLA Visitors Center with Ogden out of the room. Others that had the Committee support after a little more discussion were MW Radio Control-Bowling Lake and the Lincoln Children's Zoo.

Knuth made a motion to deny the request for grant funding from Lincoln Youth Football due to lack of ROI and Stitt seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote to deny. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Hoehne made a motion to deny the request for grant funding from Meadowlane Pool due to lack of ROI and Barclay seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote to deny. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Hoehne made a motion to deny the request for grant funding from Pinewood Bowl-City of Lincoln due to lack of ROI and Barclay seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote to deny. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Knuth made a motion to approve the full grant request of \$2,000,000 to UNSM Elephant Hall and Stitt seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Stitt made a motion to deny the request for grant funding from YMCA Wright Park due to lack of ROI and Knuth seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote to deny. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Hoehne made a motion to approve the full grant request of \$1,200,000 to the Lied Center and Ogden seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Knuth made a motion to approve a partial amount grant request of \$1,500,000 to Star City Optimists Youth Foundation and Stitt seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Knuth made a motion to deny the request for grant funding from NE State Historical Society Foundation/Pershing due to lack of ROI and Hoehne seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote to deny. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Stitt made a motion to approve the full grant request of \$3,000,000 to the Sandhills Global Youth Complex and Barclay seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Knuth made a motion to deny the request for grant funding from N4VB Volleyball due to lack of ROI and Ogden seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote to deny. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Hoehne made a motion to approve the full grant request of \$300,000 to the Lincoln Children's Museum and Stitt seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Knuth abstained and Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Barclay made a motion to approve the full grant request of \$330,037 to the Midwest Radio Control/Bowling Lake – Lincoln Parks Foundation and Ogden seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth and Ogden voted yes. Stitt voted no and Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Knuth made a motion to approve the full grant request of \$250,000 to the Downtown Lincoln Association Visitors Center and Barclay seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Hoehne voted no and Ogden abstained. Savona and Sullivan were absent.

Barclay made a motion to approve a partial amount grant request of \$2,400,000 to the Lincoln Children's Zoo and Hoehne seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Knuth made a motion to approve a partial amount grant request of \$1,000,000 to the Lincoln Sports Foundation and Ogden seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay,

Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Hoehne made a motion to deny the request for grant funding from the Sheldon Art Museum due to lack of ROI and Stitt seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote to deny. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Knuth made a motion to deny the request for grant funding from the Museum of American Speed due to lack of ROI and Barclay seconded the motion. After no further discussion, Stitt asked for a vote to deny. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Savona and Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

New Business:

There was no new business.

Adjourn:

Stitt thanked everyone again for their attendance, willingness to serve and adjourned the meeting at 6:43 p.m.