

**Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
February 19, 2025
MINUTES**

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Dave Derbin, Jason Hoehne, Todd Ogden, Aaron Stitt and Bennie Shobe

Guests:

Absent: Sean Flowerday, EK Franks, Tara Knuth, Tim Savona, Riley Slezak and Bryan Sullivan

Staff Attending: Derek Feyerherm, Ron Kalkwarf, Jeff Maul, Jason Ball, Diane Pryor, Clay Simpson, Derek Bombeck and Tracie Simpson

Call to Order and Introductions:

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:33 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 welcome to everyone and asked the three sales team members from Visit Lincoln to let the VPC know a little about their job and what they do. Services Coordinator Tracie Simpson went first saying she takes over for her team when their groups get to town for conventions. She does all she can to welcome them and make their convention a success, whether that be banners, welcome signs at their hotels, gift bags or anything they may need. She also oversees our Visitors Center and the staff there. Tracie has been working on bringing in group tours, recently attending a conference in Pennsylvania having 20 appointments with Motorcoach Tours, and she is going to Kentucky next month for a Select Traveler Conference. Maul said Tracie has been with Visit Lincoln for 17 years and does a fantastic job.

Clay Simpson, Sales Development Manager, talked next. He said he works with the education market and has been really connected with the University, also working with sororities and fraternities on campus. In addition, he works with military groups, social organizations and all things reunions. A recent big win, he said, is landing the National Science Olympiad for 2,500 students who won their state science tournament and qualified for the national championships. We are also working with the Central States Shrine event that we hope to lock in for 2029, he said. Maul said we brought Clay in about three years ago and he's been a great addition.

Derek Bombeck, Director of Sports, said he's been here 11 years and loves bringing sports to Lincoln with 2025 starting off strong. We booked the AVCA Volleyball tournament here August 22-24 at PBA with eight of the top teams in the country, including Nebraska and Creighton, Bombeck said. Tickets will go on sale soon, and we'll get national coverage on ESPN and Fox Sports. Our goal, Bombeck said, is to have it in Lincoln most of the time. Every other year or two another state will host to have the experience and then it will return to Lincoln. It is NSAA State Championship season, he said, with bowling last week and basketball for boys and girls coming the first half of March. We are working with the USBC Women's Open for this summer and with ATP pro tennis events to host again after their very successful events we hosted in 2024. Bombeck was just in Colorado Springs visiting the USOC National Governing Bodies with Sports NE partners.

Maul said Lindsey Bolander, one of our sales development managers, couldn't be here but will report at a meeting soon. She's been on the road already to a couple different conferences.

Approval of December Minutes:

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the regular quarterly meeting in December'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 December minutes. Todd Ogden made a motion to approve the minutes, and Jason Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Jeff Barclay, Hoehne, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Tara Knuth, 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 July through January 2025. 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 under budget at about \$27,000. Room Tax-Bid Fees is over budget, he said, about \$10,000 due to added sponsorship requests. In Other Income we are over budget \$25,607 because of new revenue from Destination Travel Network and higher Visitors Guide advertising. Total Income is over budget by 1%. In Expenses, Kalkwarf said, Equipment/Maintenance is over budget because of office equipment upgrades and Printing is over due to Visit Lincoln map pads. The Net Income is zero, Kalkwarf said. Maul asked Derek Feyerherm to unpack the Destination Travel Network. He said we partnered with them to handle website advertising for us. They sell the ads, update all the copy and put it together for us. We've had a strong partnership with them, and this really cuts down on our staff time and has served us well, he said. There were no questions on the financials, so Stitt asked for a motion to approve the financials. Hoehne made a motion to approve them, and Barclay seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Tara Knuth, Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Visit Lincoln Audit:

Stitt asked Kalkwarf to give an update on the Visit Lincoln audit for December 31, 2023. He said the audit report has been given to everyone to review and if anyone has any questions to reach out to him or Jeff Maul. He said the Report said in their opinion that the financial statements were presented fairly and were in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted. He said it is a good audit, and we keep a close eye on everything. Maul thanked Kalkwarf and his team for their efforts. There were no questions, so Stitt asked for a motion of approval of the audit. Barclay made a motion to approve, and Ogden seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Tara Knuth, Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

2025 Visitors Improvement Fund Grant Update:

Next, Maul gave an update on the Improvement Fund Grant process. The applications for 2025 grants, once approved, will be open until the end of April and we will hear grant requests at the May VPC meeting. He also said he, Dave Derbin, Aaron Stitt and Tara Knuth have reviewed and updated the grant guidelines and have a plan to streamline the process. Highlights of the new guidelines are the total of funding is \$750,000 for this grant cycle, grant awards shall not exceed \$100,000 per and attractions receiving an award of \$10,000 or more this cycle shall be eligible for future cycles after 2025 grant funds for awarded project are paid out, he said. Maul next talked about the impacts of the attraction saying we are looking for as much supporting data as possible including number of visitors to the attraction during the prior year, estimated number of visitors expected during the current year and estimated additional annual visitors because of the project. All of this is reviewed to attempt to determine the revenue that could be brought in. Annual local economic activity will also be considered, he said, looking at national, regional and in-state visitors to the project and using the multipliers of \$375 or \$350/night to determine economic impact. Maul said national and local numbers were separated before the multiplier was used because the

multiplier for local is \$120/night. They looked at many aspects in the analysis and Maul next presented a grant scoring tool the group has developed. It will judge or score outside of economic impact and will help guide the request through discussions, he said. The tool rates the project on a scale of 0 – 5 points and looks at how it's aligned with VPC priorities, the budget of the project in addition to the impact. Hoehne asked if the scale should be bigger like 0 – 10 or 20. Maul said they did talk about that but thought it would be simpler with a smaller scale; less variables and not as diverse of ratings. Stitt agreed with Maul and said this helps to support local events, some are also yearlong and have high value over time. Derbin added that they looked at the impact for local events and this should reflect that. Hoehne asked if we would be receiving any of the smaller marketing grant requests during this cycle and Maul said not at this time. This cycle will be for improvements. He then asked if there were any restrictions set for those receiving grants in the past. Derbin said the restriction language didn't change from before. Stitt said this system will be helpful and help us see if the project is eligible. There were no further questions, so Stitt asked for a motion of approval of first the grant guidelines. Hoehne made a motion to approve, and Barclay seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Tara Knuth, Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent. Motion carried. Stitt next asked for a motion to approve the grant scoring tool. Barclay made a motion to approve, and Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Ogden and Stitt voted yes. Tara Knuth, Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan were absent. Motion carried.

Directors Report:

Jeff Maul next gave a report on the Visit Lincoln projects and marketing. He began with a convention center update. We remain on hold for now waiting for information on the downtown post office site, he said. We are waiting for the cost to acquire and the timeline of when it will be available. Once we have the information, Maul said Assemble Lincoln will make their recommendations and send them to the County Board for their final recommendation, with the application for turnback tax following that to the Governor. Derbin agreed and said once the site is selected, they are ready to move forward. Barclay asked for confirmation of other potential sites. Block east of the Cornhusker and Golds, they told him. Derbin said there will be a lot of opportunities for additional community involvement, and everyone agreed the community will have a lot of comments and input. Stitt asked who we were waiting on from the U.S. Post Office? Ogden said he would think it is the Postmaster General or someone in that leadership position.

Maul said in a Sandhills Global Youth Complex (SGYC) update there are 16 youth baseball and softball tournaments scheduled already in April-July with over 2,500 games on 7 fields in the books. Maul said the Special Olympics Nebraska will host their softball event there in August, Wesleyan is already practicing there and Washburn asked to host their season opener there. This complex was a necessity, Maul said and will be put to great use! There will be free youth camps in June, partnering with CLC's and the Malone Center. The fall schedule is already being built out with showcase tournaments. The grounds director and concessions manager have been hired, and the grand opening will be on April 26, he said.

Next, Maul said NSAA Volleyball contract renewal is coming up. Other notable events this year include the AVCA volleyball tournament in August at PBA that Bombeck talked about and the National Science Olympiad in May that Clay Simpson talked about earlier. He said 2025 Coffee Week was a success again with 23 participating coffee shops and over 1,200 downloads of the passport. We know people came from out of state for this. Visit Lincoln was awarded a State Tourism Grant to be used for both the AVCA Volleyball and a new project called "27 on 27" to promote all restaurants along 27th Street north of "O" Street. We are partnering with Maly Marketing, and this project is now in the works, Maul said. The team hosted the State Travel Conference last week with the largest attendance since the pandemic. He said facilities in Lincoln are hugely in demand and we need to collaborate as a city to create and open facilities to be a better sports destination.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. Visit Lincoln has issued 19 sales leads for 3,130 room nights. Of that, 52% of the leads are for new events, 44% of the leads are for national events and 19% are for regional events. In definite bookings, we had 8 events booked for 831 room nights. Of that, 70% of the booked rooms are for new events, 47% were national and 26% were regional. Feyerherm said we are having a little harder time getting contracts signed. In pending business, we have 44 events with 18,044 room nights.

Next, Feyerherm gave an update on tradeshow and conferences. The RCMA Emerge Conference was in January and Lindsey Bolander attended in Phoenix along with a sales manager from the Cornhusker Marriott. Clay Simpson attended Connect North in Kansas City on January 27-29. He had 35 appointments with association, corporate and sports planners. He said Tracie Simpson traveled to Philadelphia for the ABA Marketplace Conference February 1-4 along with NE Tourism and other state partners. She had 20 appointments with group tour operators. Bombeck attended the USOC Olympic Training Center February 5-7 in Colorado Springs along with Sports NE Partners. He had 11 NGB meetings and hosted a reception one evening. Feyerherm said Bolander also attended the Smart Meetings in San Diego this month and had 24 appointments with corporate and association planners with a lot of ties in Nebraska. In March, she will attend the CMCA in Colorado Springs and Tracie Simpson will travel to Kentucky for the Select Traveler Conference. Bombeck is attending the Sports ETA Symposium in April in Tulsa, OK. This is the national body of sports planners. Maul added the return on these conferences has been amazing so far.

Next, Feyerherm presented information we gathered for calendar year 2024, through Zartico. Visitors represented 24.7% of all devices (cell phones) observed in Lancaster County, 66.1% of those were out-of-state. Visitors represented 14.6% of all spending activity (from credit cards) in the county, 32% of that spending was at local businesses. In spending by category, restaurants had 19% of all spending from visitors, with \$126 as the average spend. Retail had 20% of all spend from visitors, with \$218 as the average spend. Attractions had 36% of all spend from visitors with \$84 as the average spend.

Looking at Top 10 Visitor Markets next, Feyerherm reported that Lincoln/Hastings/Kearney are still the largest with those cities making up 19.7% of all visitors with 22.6% of all visitor spend. Next, Omaha makes up 10.3% of all visitors with 22.6% of all visitor spend. Then Kansas City makes up 5.6% of all visitors with 3.3% of all visitor spend. Denver is 5.3% of all visitors with 5.3% of visitor spend, followed by Des Moines, Sioux City, Sioux Falls, Minneapolis, Dallas and Chicago. The Zartico data broke down the POI by devices and Feyerherm shared the three largest venues - Memorial Stadium (47% resident/53% visitor), SGEC (56% resident/44% visitor) and PBA (60% resident/40% visitor). This information could be very helpful to our team members and help with determining grant recipients and following up after giving them. Stitt asked if we would freely give the info to those requesting grants. He said we could, but events are more difficult to track because they aren't specific enough. He gave an example that the data showed us last year 6.65 of visitors spent time in Lincoln at Bryan Health and 2.3% at CHI. With this information, we can strategize our marketing to target this.

New Business:

In other business, Maul told Todd Ogden great job to your team on snow removal this month.

Adjourn:

Stitt thanked everyone again for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 2:47 p.m.