

Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
June 21, 2023
MINUTES

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Jeff Cunningham, Jason Hoehne, Tim Savona, Aaron Stitt, Bryan Sullivan and Bennie Shobe

Absent: Tara Knuth, Dave Derbin, Mairead Safranek, Rick Vest and Saige Walker

Staff Attending: Jeff Maul, Derek Feyerherm, Diane Pryor and Katie Bohlmeyer

Call to Order, Introductions and Welcome to New Appointees:

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 12:32 p.m. He welcomed everyone saying we appreciate you taking time for these meetings. Stitt extended a special welcome to Tim Savona from Pinnacle Bank Arena and Bennie Shobe from the Lincoln City Council and thanked them for agreeing to serve and share their talents with the Committee. Tim Savona said it is a pleasure and nice to meet everyone. He took the job in early February at Pinnacle Bank Arena and Pinewood Bowl, he said. He has been in the business for about 15 years and worked in minor league baseball before that. He has a wife and two children. His wife is from the Des Moines, IA area and he took the job in Lincoln to move back closer to family and friends.

Bennie Shobe introduced himself and said he just finished his sixth year on the Lincoln City Council. He grew up in Kentucky, came to Lincoln for graduate school and stayed because there is a lot to do here, he said. He is excited about this opportunity and the chance to help people in Lincoln and promote the many activities and events Lincoln offers. Jeff Maul said thank you, welcome and we are happy to have you both join the Committee.

Stitt asked the attendees to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call.

Before beginning the marketing grant reviews and recommendations, Chair Stitt let everyone know all the grants will be covered by the budget. The money can't be spent anywhere else; it is just for these \$5,000 marketing grants.

Branched Oak Observatory

The first grant reviewed was for the Branched Oak Observatory. They are requesting \$5,000 for their 9th Annual StarBQ. Maul said their facility is expanding and will be one of the biggest. They will use \$2,500 for digital media and \$2,500 for print media. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Jeff Barclay made a motion to approve. Jason Hoehne seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Stitt, Barclay, Jeff Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Bryan Sullivan voted yes. Tara Knuth was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Flatwater Shakespeare Company

The next grant reviewed was for the Flatwater Shakespeare Company. They requested \$5,000 but after reviewing a lot of that wasn't for marketing so they were asked to provide a breakdown of just marketing expenses. The resulted amount being requested is \$493. There are two dates of the event – August 24-27

and August 31-September 3, 2023. Maul added the event will be at the Wyuka Stables. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Hoehne made a motion to approve. Barclay seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Stitt, Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Knuth was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Lincoln Community Playhouse

Lincoln Community Playhouse requested a grant for \$4,564 for marketing purposes to be used July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024. They will use the funds to promote shows at the Playhouse to folks outside of the county. 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, Stitt called for a vote. Stitt, Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Knuth was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Nebraska Communities Playhouse

Next, the Nebraska Communities Playhouse had a grant request for \$5,000 for marketing. Their event has two dates: September 15-17 and September 21-24, 2023. When asked if anyone had ever attended an event at this Playhouse, Sullivan said he has seen it but never attended an event there. He added that it is well-received in the community. Maul commented that they have done a lot with the facility. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Barclay made a motion to approve. Sullivan seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Stitt, Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Knuth was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Nebraska Sports Council

The Nebraska Sports Council's grant request was reviewed next. They requested \$5,000 for marketing for their Heartland Havoc Digital/Social Media Advertising Campaign. They are having a 3rd annual Heartland Havoc Wrestling Tournament on November 11-12, 2023, and will use the funds to market the tournament through both digital and social media platforms. They are looking to bring in guests from other states. LSF has been a recipient of these grants in the past as they continue to come to us for support. This brought up several questions from the group. Barclay asked how people get on the list to receive notifications about the grants. Derek Feyerherm said we send out notices to hotels, attractions, and other venues. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Hoehne made a motion to approve. Sullivan seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Stitt, Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Knuth was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Nebraska Statewide Arboretum

The final grant request came from the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum. They are requesting \$5,000 for the advertising and promoting of their Spring Affair on April 25-27, 2024. This is similar to a home or garden show. It is at the Lancaster Event Center in Lincoln, and they are expecting more than 3,300 visitors. Maul added this is their first time applying. Sullivan asked if we know how they heard about it and Feyerherm said likely from the notice we sent to attractions, and Maul said, or they may have heard about it from the Event Center. There were no further questions or comments, so Stitt asked for a motion. Barclay made a motion to approve. Cunningham seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Stitt, Barclay, Cunningham, Hoehne, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Knuth was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

A follow-up discussion about the grant process and marketing ensued. Maul said this was a special meeting of the VPC and a special ask by Lancaster County Board of Commissioners to give one extra round of marketing grants this year. We will have one more meeting in November to review and give recommendations on another set of requests. Following that meeting, a discussion will take place with the County as to whether we will return to the larger grant process from the improvement fund and/or marketing grants. There is a group that will be assembled to improve the system and will limit the maximum amount granted and the pay out period. They will meet and finalize the process for requests made in 2024-2025. Maul said he also will meet with Shobe and Savona to review the Visitors Promotion Committee in more depth. Stitt asked what is left to be paid out from the past larger grant program. Maul replied, Lancaster Event Center and the Lincoln Children's Zoo. He said the County will continue to work towards paying those out. Sullivan asked who looked at the process and what brought it about. We began the grant system to bring in events to Lincoln and we believe through hotel nights from these events the fund funds itself, Maul said. A follow-up question was asked by Sullivan, does the county back the needed to make modifications to the previous grant process? Yes, absolutely, he said, because the re-set is perfect. Hoehne asked if the marketing grants will stay and Maul said he hopes and plan is to keep them and have both kinds in the future because the non-matching, \$5,000 grants are a great deal for the non-profits.

Stitt said he looks forward to the restructuring of the grant requirements. It will be good to see what we will bring back and help improve Lincoln and what we will be able to allocate money to. This is an amazing Board, he said, and we do important work here. Savona asked what the process is to receive a grant in Lincoln for for-profit events. Maul and Feyerherm said this Committee doesn't grant them, but at times Visit Lincoln can assist in finding funds for these requests from the promotion fund.

Stitt told everyone to have a wonderful summer and a nice vacation with your family, if you're traveling. Thank you again to Shobe and Savona as we appreciate your time and commitment.

Adjourn:

Stitt thanked everyone for their attendance. He adjourned the meeting at 12:58 p.m.