

**Visitors Promotion Committee**  
**Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce**  
**May 17, 2023**  
**MINUTES**

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

Absent: Jeff Cunningham

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

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m. He welcomed everyone and said it is good to get back together. Stitt extended a special welcome to Katie Bohlmeier who joined as the Chamber's new Business Policy Advocate in place of Todd Wiltgen. He asked the attendees to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call.

**Approval of February Minutes:**

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the February 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. Bryan Sullivan made a motion to approve the minutes and Jason Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Barclay, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Cunningham was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

**Approval of April Financials:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for July 2022 through April 2023. In Other Income we are over budget, he said, due to grant income being offset by expense in advertising. On the Expense side, Medical & Dental Insurance is down. As of January 1, we switched to a more competitive price plan and will see big savings. Travel & Training is over budget because we are having more tradeshow as things continue to recover after Covid. Equipment/Maintenance is over budget because of the Visit Lincoln website being updated with Simpleview software. Public Relations is also over budget because we paid out for the Phase II of the CSL study for the Lincoln convention center, Kalkwarf said. Net Income is a net loss, 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 should have it by sometime in June. There were no questions on the financials and Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Jeff Barclay moved to approve the financials as presented. The motion was seconded by Sullivan. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Barclay, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Cunningham was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

**Visit Lincoln Fiscal 2023-24 Budget:**

Next, Jeff Maul presented the proposed July 2023 through June 2024 budget for Visit Lincoln. He explained the budget goes through a four-part approval process first going before the Chamber's Finance Committee and Board of Directors. Then this Board and on to the County Board of Commissioners. He

thanked everyone for their support of tourism and started explaining the Income section which is up 2.5% overall. Room Tax-CVB is coming in 3.5% over the last budgeted year, as we continue to use ARPA funding for another year. Maul said typically we use room taxes to fund this account and will likely return to that process next year. Room Tax-Bid Fees are very close to last year's number, and this is money we use to recruit the great events to Lincoln. Other Income (non-tax revenue) is increasing by 10.7%, reflected by advertising sales and a contribution by a local business to our NSAA bid. Next Maul went through the Expense section saying Salaries is up 8.2% as we want to stay competitive with seasoned employees. He thanked Ron Kalkwarf and Diane Pryor for their efforts in attaining a lower costing medical insurance plan for staff - Medical & Dental Insurance expense is budgeted 23.3% lower than last year. Travel & Training is up as we are doing 15 tradeshow this year, according to Maul. Garage Rental & Parking is up because of the rate increase for the Visitors Center, Maul said. In Dues & Subscriptions and Equipment/Maintenance you will see some changes as we are switching some expenditures from one account to another. Subscriptions decrease as we move Simpleview /Mint. We see a decrease in Professional Fees, Maul said, because we removed the cost for strategic planning and Single Audit. Public Relations is down because we purchased specialty items this year. Maul said we see a decrease in Event Promotion and an increase in Sports Event Promotion, which is typical for the market soon after Covid. It is an aggressive budget, he said, and we feel that is what we need to keep key people and bring in great events. Sullivan asked about the way this budget is compared to last year's budget and actual. Maul and Kalkwarf said to keep in mind the actual is just through April. There were no further questions on the proposed budget and Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Sullivan moved to approve the budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Hoehne. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Barclay, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Cunningham was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

#### **Marketing Grant Program Update:**

Dave Derbin updated the group on the status of the Grant Program which was suspended because of Covid. We looked at the budget and it was hurting because of Covid and no room tax coming in. We looked at different options and had the good fortune of ARPA dollars to use. We accomplished a lot of good still with that money by granting many \$5K marketing grants to various organizations. We will give another round in June and later in 2023 but then it is looking like we are back on track and should be able to return to normal procedures of larger improvement grants in 2024, Derbin said. Maul said the funds are exceeding our expectations and said thank you for continued support and working with us through this down time. Sullivan said from a hotel perspective we are feeling like we are getting back to normal with an increase in occupancy. Feyerherm and Maul commented on the return percentage and booking percentages for conventions.

#### **VPC Committee Renewals/Appointments:**

Stitt said we have one seat, held by Tara Knuth, to consider for renewal on the VPC. It will be for another 4-year term from June 2023 to June 2027. There were no questions or discussion and Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Hoehne moved to approve the renewal. The motion was seconded by Barclay. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Barclay, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Knuth abstained. Jeff Cunningham was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Next, Stitt said a seat remains open with the passing of Tom Lorenz. Tim Savona, from Pinnacle Bank Arena, was discussed to take that seat from July 2023 to June 2026. He would finish out Lorenz's term that had already started. There was no discussion and Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Barclay moved to approve the appointment as presented. The motion was seconded by Knuth. With no further discussion,

Stitt called for a vote. Hoehne, Barclay, Knuth, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Cunningham was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

There are two non-voting positions opening with Michelle Waite and Tammy Ward rolling off. Maul said he is waiting for a call from the Chancellor's office at the University for an appointment for Waite's and we are working with the city to see who is appointed from the City Council to fill Ward's position.

### **Directors Report:**

Chair Stitt asked for the directors' report. Maul began with a convention center update. Discussions continue in the community with developers on design concepts, and we are encouraged by legislature's proceedings in the last several days, he said. Developers have been looking at other sites from the original five, indicative of the excitement and need for a facility downtown. The existing task force has begun to assemble a selection team of experienced leaders from downtown businesses and large-project planners to work on the project's next steps in the coming months. The LB727 Omnibus Turnback Tax bill was approved with a 44-0 vote and 30% of the state sales tax collected within 600 yards is earmarked for the convention center. LB709, which would have given \$60M to a convention center, is not anticipated to make it through. Maul credited Bruce Bohrer for hours of work and the team effort. Maul talked about the Sandhills Global Youth Complex saying Sandhills gave a \$4M gift for naming rights. He said the groundbreaking is scheduled for late June or early July. The complex is planning for an opening in late 2024/early 2025 for full play in spring 2025. Maul encouraged everyone to follow the progress on Facebook and Twitter @SandhillsYC. Next, Maul told the group about the potential for Abraham Lincoln canvas on the side of a building downtown. It is a recreation of art from an original quilt at the International Quilt Museum.

Youth sports continues in Lincoln with NxtPro tournaments in Lincoln this summer at the Speedway and Kinetic complexes. First in May, 160 teams will attend a non-live recruiting event with 95% of the teams from outside Lincoln. This should make an impact on the hotel nights, he said. Maul gave kudos to Director of Sports, Derek Bombeck, in recruiting these events to Lincoln. In July, 250 teams plus D2, D3 and NAIA coaches will be here to attend a semi-live recruiting event. In addition, Visit Lincoln, along with the Lincoln Chamber, staffed the 3-mile water station in the Lincoln Marathon in early May.

National Travel and Tourism Week was last week, and we promoted new airport flights, posted staff profiles featuring favorite spots in Lincoln and shared our new food video and Visit Lincoln video on social media. The videos were played for the board, and everyone thought they were outstanding. Maul was excited saying we would be using them in other cities and communities to promote Lincoln.

NSAA State Basketball will be staying in Lincoln. There was some initial interest from Omaha to bid on moving them to Omaha, but they backed out the week of the presentation at the NSAA. Visit Lincoln, PBA, UNL Athletics and LPS were all present during the bid presentation and we won it for tournaments returning for the next five years. Maul told the group we would have a good radio presence in the upcoming months with the usual appearances on KFOR, KLIN, B107.3 and The Ticket. A new program we will have a regular spot on is the new Dan Parsons Show. This will be the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month. In closing, he said we will have a new meeting planners guide coming in June 2023, beer week will be in fall of 2023 and Bella's Best is live now on our website, Facebook and Twitter. Bella is an employee's dog who is "visiting" dog-friendly attractions around Lincoln and posting the visits on social media. Tracie Simpson will be going on a brochure swap this week to Kearney and back to Omaha to get our information out across the state.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. Visit Lincoln has issued 82 sales leads for 64,735 room nights. Of that, 9% of the leads are for new events, 10% of the leads are for national events and 15% are for regional events. This is below where we like to be but should see an increase throughout the year. In definite bookings, we had 69 events booked for 69,682 room nights. Of that, 12% of the booked rooms are for new events, 8% were national and 3% were regional, Feyerherm said the impact of a five-year contract with NSAA for Girls and Boys State Basketball will have an impact on new business and regional/national business percentages due to how large of events they are. 2024 business is starting to pick up. Feyerherm said we are partnering with 2 Synergize & Simpleview to receive comparison reports on leads and bookings. There is participation from 213 DMO's, 77 without convention centers, like us. We have been invited to participate and serve on the data panel. Live data is being pulled and reported on quarterly and annually. Trends are reported based on convention center size and by US region. The first trend compared from 2022 vs 2019 was the number of leads issued. There was an increase of 6.6% nationwide, Visit Lincoln showed an increase of 7.9% and the Midwest had a decrease of 20.5%. The next comparison was on the number of hotel rooms in leads issued. Nationwide showed a 1% increase, Visit Lincoln a decrease of 3.6% and Midwest was not reported. In the number of booked events there was a 24.9% nationwide decrease. Visit Lincoln had a 6.0% decrease and the Midwest with no convention center had a 28.8% decrease and with a convention center showed a 12% decrease. In number of hotel rooms booked there was a 26.3% decrease nationwide, in Lincoln we had a 14.75% increase and the Midwest with no convention center had 25.6% decrease and with a convention center we saw a 21% decrease. Our numbers were strong, and we are excited to be collaborating with Simpleview on this.

Next, Feyerherm said things are going well with tradeshow for his team as they have attended more during this busy spring. Kelsey Meyer and Tracie Simpson attended Select Traveler in Branson March 27-29 and had 24 appointments. He noted that Simpson will be taking over the group tour market from Meyer. Derek Bombeck attended Sports ETA May 8-11 in Kansas City and ended up having 23 appointments. May 10-11 Clay Simpson went to the Small Market Meetings Summit in Galveston, TX and had 24 appointments ending good leads and a RFP. Yet this month Kelsey Meyer will travel to Lake Conroe, TX for the CMCA Conference where she will have 45 appointments in four days.

There are some changes happening in the Cities of the Big 10 group and we are really working on getting things moving in this direction with broadening beyond sports promotion. We have a series of calls next week on changes and improvements, Feyerherm said. Invitations have been made to USC and UCLA for the upcoming year. The Midwest Bank Club Directors held their annual conference in Lincoln May 2-5 at the Graduate Hotel. We had a Fam Tour with 14 tour operators, ate with them and showed them around town. We re-engaged E-newsletters using our database. We sent them to leisure travelers in a 7-state region and had a 32% open rate. The Midwest meeting planners had a meeting/tour earlier this month and our team had a "Foreign and Domestic" day in the Haymarket with them showing them various restaurants and the meeting space offered by each venue. Kelsey Meyer is working with our communications team on a new Planners Guide.

Following Feyerherm's report, Jason Ball said he has been impressed with the activity and events in Lincoln in the last 10 days with the marathon, graduations and concerts. We have been hitting it hard, he said, and it's great the way the hotels work together to fill capacities. Sullivan commented as well and asked for a comparison of what conferences are on the books for 2024 and how that compares to what we had in 2019. Derek said we are still lower in '24 but we are cautiously optimistic. Things are filling in gradually, he said, and that 2023 at this time last year was stronger than 2024 is looking. Maul added that

pre-pandemic life was safe and predictable, but not anymore. We can't depend on the same pace year after year. Our staff is trying to build 2024 but we are wary. We are working with meeting planners to get things on the books, he said. At the end of the Directors Report, Stitt took time for a concerned citizen who requested an opportunity to speak for public comment. He had comments on Worldwide Wrestling, Elite Wrestling and big events. Stitt said once the report is finished, we would give the gentleman time to comment.

**New Business:**

In new business, Stitt asked if we have had any big wins. Feyerherm said we are working with the University to solidify some events on the national scale and our national numbers should catch up by year end.

The concerned citizen then had the floor for his comments. He said we have an economic state of concerns. Worldwide wrestling was great for Lincoln, and he feels a couple things need to be done to bring in more big events like this. His ideas included American Spirit, Lincoln functionally acting on a high level both politically and economically, AI with technical advances with senior organizations like Aging Partners and all of us working together with our law enforcement and politicians. Stitt replied thanking him for the comments and concern. He said we share a lot of commitment to bringing in large events. We both feel that is great revenue dollars for the city.

**Adjourn:**

Stitt thanked everyone for their attendance. He adjourned the meeting at 2:48 p.m.