

Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
May 20, 2026
MINUTES

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Tim Savona, Aaron Stitt, Bryan Sullivan and Riley Slezak

Guests:

Absent: Todd Ogden, Dave Derbin, Sean Flowerday and Bennie Shobe

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

Call to Order and Introductions:

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:35 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.

Approval of February Minutes:

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the regular quarterly meeting in February'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 February 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. Jeff Barclay, Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Tim Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

Approval of March Minutes:

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the special meeting in March'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 March minutes. Tara Knuth made a motion to approve the minutes, and Jeff Barclay seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

Approval of April Financials:

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for July 2025 through April 2026. Beginning with Room Tax-Operations, he said the budget is 1/12 of the annual budget and we continue to request funding as needed. In Expenses, Kalkwarf said, Equipment/Maintenance is up due to new Threshold 360 Software. Advertising is down about \$16K because we did not receive budgeted advertising invoices prior to month end and should catch up next month. Professional Fees is up about \$10K due to timing of the annual audit in the fiscal year. Net Revenue closes the month at \$0, he said. Maul stressed the importance of timing with the advertising invoices and said it will straighten out by FYE. 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 Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

Visit Lincoln Fiscal 2026-27 Budget:

Stitt asked Jeff Maul to present the Visit Lincoln fiscal 2026-27 budget next. Maul began with Income from the promotion fund, Room Tax-Operations showing an increase of 3.1% as well as the Room Tax-Bid Fees account, which we are budgeting a 56.8% increase for bid fees, Maul said, as this is the year we have several large events in Lincoln. Other Income is projected less at \$77,000, due to a decrease in digital ad sales from last year. Final result is Total Income will be up \$414,022. Looking at Expenses next, in Salaries, we are increasing about 5%, he said, to have Visit Lincoln and shared staff increases.

Commissions are going to be down a little due to decrease in digital ad sales mentioned earlier. Maul said we will be cutting back in Travel & Training by 32% because market conferences haven't shown a great return and this is an area where we can save some dollars. Feyerherm added we will be attending one conference or trade show per market. Maul said Public Relations will see an increase for additional client-related meetings and planner receptions. Advertising is being cut \$38K, Maul said, as we cut I-80 billboards and various advertising avenues. Events and Sports Event Promotion will get a big lift increasing by 16% and 68% as sports conferences and events really pick up this year with the USARS, USA Archery, National High School Rodeo and additional investment in the NE AG Expo. Maul said it is a clean budget with cuts that support an increase in bid fees with budget. Net Income bottom line is budgeted to increase by just \$20. Comments included good budget as we continue to attract great events to Lincoln, private sector funding to help with bid fees and a discussion regarding the process of bid fees. Bryan Sullivan made a motion to approve the proposed budget, and Knuth seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

VPC Committee Renewals/Appointments

Next, Stitt told the group we have voting member changes that will need a motion/second and roll call vote. First for Bryan Sullivan's position we are inviting Kevin Miller from Cornhusker Marriott to serve as representative from a full-service convention hotel. Miller is the general manager there and will have a term from July 2026 – June 2029, which represents the remainder of Sullivan's term. Maul said we have talked to him and he is excited to join the Committee. Hoehne said he is very active in the community and would be a great addition. Stitt asked for a first motion to nominate Kevin Miller to the Committee. Sullivan made the first motion and Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

The next committee member whose full term has ended is Aaron Stitt. Sheila Poppe, general manager from Annabell Gardens, has been invited to join for a July 2026 – June 2030 term. She will represent a limited-service hotel. Maul said she has been in the hotel industry for over a decade and would be honored to serve. Stitt asked for a motion to add Poppe to the Committee. Sullivan made the first motion and Barclay seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

Tim Savona's term was discussed next. Savona, from Pinnacle Bank Arena, serves as the event venue facility member representative. This would be an additional 4 year term for him running from July 2026 through June 2030. He has agreed to serve the additional years. Stitt asked for a motion of approval. Hoehne made a motion to approve his term and Knuth seconded the motion. There were no questions or discussion, so Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Tim Savona abstained and Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

Chair Stitt said an executive slate needs to be reviewed and voted on as well since he will be going off the Committee. Tara Knuth, currently serving as Vice Chair will move up to Chair and serve in that position until June 2027. Hoehne made a motion to approve this term and Sullivan seconded the motion.

There were no questions or discussion, so Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Knuth abstained and Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

With Knuth moving up to Chair, Jason Hoehne was added to the slate for Vice Chair serving a seat on the Committee through June 2029. Barclay made a motion to approve this and Sullivan seconded the motion. There were no questions or discussion, so Stitt asked for a vote. Barclay, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Hoehne abstained and Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

The final position to be filled was for a non-voting appointment that will be a representative from UNL, opened from EK Franks' departure. There are no term dates for this position. Brian Morrison, the Director of External Relations for UNL, was nominated. Knuth made the first motion to approve Morrison, and Hoehne seconded it. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Todd Ogden was absent. Motion carried.

Following the vote to fill vacant positions, Jeff Maul gave a token of appreciation to both outgoing members and thanked Sullivan for his service and leadership. He also said thank you to Aaron Stitt for being such a great leader over the years and that his smile and great attitude has always been appreciated.

Directors Report:

Jeff Maul next gave a report on the Visit Lincoln projects and marketing. He began with a convention center update and said the governor has delayed the final vote on use of turnback tax for the convention center. He said 11 sports venue turnback applications were reviewed and only two were approved, a soccer facility in Omaha and N4VB in Lincoln. The decision on the Convention Center was delayed 30 days so the governor could gather more information on other funding sources and the zoning areas.

Maul said in a Sandhills Global Youth Complex (SGYC) update they have had enormous success in 2025 and already have a full calendar for 2026. They are looking at expanding with Phase 2. He also mentioned the volleyball "Turf Tournament" they are planning on the field turf later this year.

Next, Maul went through the Lancaster County Board grant approvals showing where the County ended up distributing the \$12 million to 13 various attractions. Contracts will be established between the applicants and the County. The NSAA State Basketball tournaments this spring were the largest in years, he said with 7,000 more than in 2025 attending. Nebraska DECA, FFA and FCCLA conferences were also held in town bringing in over 11,000 students for the triad of events. Visit Lincoln staff have kept busy with statewide associations and DED Director Maureen Larson monitoring funding cuts at the state level, he said.

Maul said Maly Marketing, whom we partnered with on the Taste 27th Campaign to win a best marketing award, received a runner-up for the campaign at the AMA awards. Also, youth sports tourism continues to be a huge economic driver accounting for \$60.1B in direct spending and \$149.1B in total impact nationally. Social media is also very successful as we have started using TikTok and have over 1,000 new followers. We continue to get noticed with views on Facebook, Instagram and X, Maul said. Our earned media campaign through VioletPR has had 15 pieces receiving national coverage reaching over 12M. Specifically, tourism drivers have been Youth Complex Leads Sports Funding in Lancaster County, Lied Center for Performing Arts expansion and groundbreaking, Lincoln's Music District and How Music is Helping Midwest Cities.

Maul updated the Committee on upcoming tourism activity in Lincoln with the Savannah Bananas June 11 and 13, World Cup Soccer watch parties in downtown Lincoln in the second half of June, USA Rollersports July 7-August 7, USA Archery July 23-25, National High School Finals Rodeo July 19-25 and

the American Association All Star Game/Home Run Derby July 13-15. Maul added there are several concerts at PBA and asked Savona to elaborate. He said July will be a big month with four scheduled concerts.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next. Visit Lincoln has issued 87 sales leads for 44,306 room nights. Of that, 44% of the leads are for new events, 63% of the leads are for national events and 28% are for regional events. In definite bookings, we had 84 events booked for 43,191 room nights. Of that, 43% of the rooms booked are for new events, 64% were national and 27% were regional. Feyerherm said site inspections and visits are increasing, especially in education and the religious markets. We are hopeful that Amway will choose Lincoln for their August 2028 convention and they really bring in a lot of representatives. We are also seeing an increase in group tour business, he said, mentioning the ABA tradeshow this year.

Feyerherm gave an update on tradeshow and conferences saying it is a busy spring. The Sports NE trip to Colorado Springs that Derek Bombeck attended went over really well and the national governing bodies were appreciative that we went as a state. The Chicago Sales Mission in April went well, too, Feyerherm said. Clay Simpson and Lindsey Bolander will travel to Minneapolis for a sales mission June 10-12, and the Meeting Planner Series was brought back in April 2026. Bombeck hosts the Sports Planner Reception next week, Feyerherm said. Looking at Visit Lincoln sales, he said the updated Meeting Planner Guide is in progress and the RFP campaign is going to meeting planners through monthly e-blasts. We will have the Fam Tour October 13-16 and Bolander is visiting over 140 churches in Lincoln as she works on the religious market. She has also been asked to serve on the Mayor's Interfaith Prayer Breakfast Planning Committee. She is to become the VP of NSAE and doing a great job there, he said. Clay Simpson has been working with the Provost at Nebraska Wesleyan as they restructure departments and we have been talking to see if we will continue the Cities of the Big 10 passport.

Next, Feyerherm presented information we gathered through Zartico for 2026 YTD vs (the same period in) 2025. Visitors represented 16% (14%) of all devices (cell phones) observed in Lancaster County, 73% (70%) of those were out-of-state. Visitors represented 15% (13%) of all spending activity (from credit cards) in the country, 31% (29%) of that spending was at local businesses. Visitor trends are up in every category, he said, and we continue to keep an eye on it. Feyerherm said the numbers are a little softer this time around and we will watch them throughout the year to see if they are in line with the national average. There was a discussion on how Committee members could use the data and how it gives us information related to spikes in events in various locations around the county. Hoehne asked about UNL's Memorial Stadium and if we see that being used for more concerts and out-of-the-box events. Maul said UNL Athletics do want it to be used in a lot of different ways. Savona said UNL and PBA need to have a shared voice and benefit from each other on various events and be positive and constructive in planning and working together.

New Business:

In new and other business, Stitt asked if anyone had an update to share with the group. Ron Kalkwarf said the audit went well through the organizations. Tim Savona said Pinewood Bowl business is down this year; however, PBA is good. There is a lot of talk about the ticket purchase system, but we have had a good year, he said. Bryan Sullivan said he appreciates working with everyone and being a part of this team. He's enjoyed his time on the Committee. Jeff Barclay said food prices are high, and the tariffs have hit their business pretty hard. Jason Hoehne thanked Stitt and Sullivan for their service and said they had a good April and May at the hotel. He said they're looking forward to a good summer. Tara Knuth also thanked Stitt and Sullivan and said they have had good sales lately. Aaron Stitt said they have had growing phases in the new hotel but are doing good. It has been a blessing and honor to be on this Board, he said, and it has opened so many doors for him. He said he appreciates everyone here and thanked both Jeff Maul and

Derek Feyerherm. Katie Bohlmeier said we have had lots of progress on road construction and will continue to see it through Project O Street. She said if your business is feeling impacted, let her know as we are working to support effected businesses. She said they are having Coffee with the Contractors every Wednesday to keep everyone involved on the same page. She also said Sen. Ballard has been working to help us. Maul said Sean Flowerday and Dave Derbin had other important commitments today and sent apologies for having to miss this quarterly meeting.

Adjourn:

Stitt thanked everyone again for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 2:57 p.m.