

Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
May 21, 2025
MINUTES

In Attendance: Dave Derbin, EK Franks, Tara Knuth, Todd Ogden, Tim Savona, Bennie Shobe, Riley Slezak, Aaron Stitt and Bryan Sullivan

Guests:

Absent: Jeff Barclay, Sean Flowerday and Jason Hoehne

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

Call to Order and Introductions:

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:41 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 Lindsey Bolander from Visit Lincoln to share a little about herself, her job and what she does. Bolander, Sales Development Manager for Visit Lincoln, said she works with the faith-based and association markets. She started in December and has attended several conferences and tradeshow already, including RCMA in Phoenix, CMCA in Colorado Springs and Smart Meetings in San Diego. Bolander said some of the things she's working on are a Christian group coming in 2027 with about 3,500 attendees. Also, Professional Photographers of Nebraska in 2026, UPMA – Postmasters in 2026 and she is working with Indian tribes. Before joining Visit Lincoln Bolander was at the Lincoln Country Club for 17 years and the Field Club of Omaha for 4 years. Jeff Maul said we have been so fortunate to have Bolander joining our team. She fits the mold with experience and personality and has been a total plug and play in our group. Derek Feyerherm added she is known in the industry and community, which is very nice.

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 Tara Knuth seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Knuth, Todd Ogden, Tim Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne were absent. Motion carried.

Approval of April Financials:

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for July 2024 through April 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 down at about \$39,000. In Miscellaneous Income we are coming in higher than budget by about \$29,000 due to higher Visitors Guide advertising and digital advertising. In Expenses, Kalkwarf said, Travel & Training is up due to additional travel for conferences which leads to more promotional items being purchased and Public Relations expense up. He said Net Income is evened out this month at \$0. There were no questions on the financials, so Stitt asked for a motion to approve the financials. Knuth made a motion to approve them, and Sullivan

seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Knuth, Ogden, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne were absent. Motion carried.

Visit Lincoln Budget for 2025-2026:

Stitt asked Jeff Maul to present the Visit Lincoln fiscal 2025-26 budget next. Maul began with Income, Room Tax-CVB (Operations) showing an increase of 6.6%. This is from the promotion fund only, he said, as well as the Room Tax-Bid Fees account, which is 19.6% less this year over last. Other Income, a non-tax revenue account will be increased by 42% due to an increase in ad sales from print and digital media. For the overall ask from the Promotion Fund, that ask is down by around \$49,000. Sullivan asked him what trends he's seeing, and Maul said the numbers are down a little bit this year but still tracking steady growth. Looking at Expenses next, in Salaries, we are increasing about 14% due to a new marketing staff that we are sharing expenses on. That person's primary focus will be on Visit Lincoln marketing. Also, he said, Clay Simpson has really evolved in his role to more of a sales position and is doing great. Commissions are going to be down 10% with the restructuring of the commission program. Travel & Training is budgeted up again \$24,454 because of outbound expenditures related to market conferences, market blitzes and bid presentations. Maul said Public Relations will see a small increase due to client meetings, specialty items and tradeshow items. Events and Sports Event Promotion will be budgeted less as we see this as an off year for some associations and events. Next year they will rotate back on, Maul said, so we do anticipate these to increase next year because of major events like the USARS and the National High School Rodeo. Net Income is budgeted at \$54, he said, and thanked Dave Derbin for his input and assistance with the finances. Stitt asked for the anticipated cost of sports event promotion next year and Maul said somewhere around \$800,000 is his estimate. Sullivan asked if budgeted income was a fixed number and Maul said we typically see a 3.5% increase year after year. He followed with a question on future years with the convention center and how that would affect the budget. Maul said we are working through those three years out and building the budget to support increased marketing and bid fee asks. In alignment with the County, the goal is to keep \$2M - \$2.5M with in county promotion fund reserves throughout.

There were no other questions about the budget, so Stitt asked for a motion of approval. Todd Ogden made a motion to approve the budget and Stitt seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Knuth, Ogden, Savona, Stitt and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne were absent. Motion carried.

VPC Committee Renewals/Appointments

Next, Stitt told the group we have three committee members who have terms up for renewal: Bryan Sullivan, Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne. First, Sullivan has agreed to an additional four years. He served from October 2022 - June 2025. He didn't serve a full term as he finished Susan Madsen's term, Stitt said. The new term would take him through June of 2029. Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Savona made a motion to approve, and Stitt seconded it. There were no questions or discussion, so Stitt asked for a vote. Knuth, Ogden, Savona and Stitt voted yes. Sullivan abstained. Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne were absent. Motion carried.

The next committee member, Jeff Barclay, served a term from July 2021 to June 2025 and would be renewed to run through June 2029. He has agreed to serve an additional four years, and we need a motion of approval, Stitt said. Sullivan made a motion to approve, and Knuth seconded the motion. There were no questions or discussion, so Stitt asked for a vote. Knuth, Ogden, Savona, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne were absent. Motion carried.

Jason Hoehne's term was discussed next. He has served as a member from July 2021 to June 2025 and would be extended to a term through June 2029. He has agreed to serve the additional years. Stitt asked for

a motion of approval. Sullivan made a motion to approve his term and Knuth seconded the motion. There were no questions or discussion, so Stitt asked for a vote. Knuth, Ogden, Savona, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne 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. Assemble Lincoln and the Lancaster County Board have selected and approved the Garfield site located at 13th and M (Block 90), just east of the Cornhusker Hotel. A lot of time was spent vetting information and data to determine what site would be best for Lincoln and this site was determined to be a catalyst for large-scale development in downtown Lincoln that will include adjacent developments of a hotel, parking and additional destination assets. Todd Ogden talked about a music area called the Music Box that would be nearby along 14th Street featuring live music from local talent. The Lancaster County Board has approved the Turnback Tax Application and submitted it to the State of Nebraska for the governor's approval. There is no timeframe on when that will happen, Maul said, but once it's approved, site negotiations, demo, design preparation and construction will begin.

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 scheduled. Maul said the grand opening on April 26 was a major success and 96 games were played at the facility that weekend. An all-turf facility has proven itself when all the city (grass) fields were rained out recently, the complex hosted 14 games that night, he said. Looking at long-term, a long list of tournaments are seeking dates, and we are looking at a \$15-20M economic impact after the first 12 months.

Next, Maul said National Travel & Tourism Week was in early May and we had lots of social media messaging showing that tourism is a driver of our economy. We kicked off Haymarket Walking Tours on May 17. They last about one hour, and Visitors Center staff are taking guests around the Haymarket with July – September dates being scheduled. We are excited to announce Visit Nebraska recognized seven employees from across the state with the Outstanding Frontline Employee Award going to Brenda John of the Lincoln Children's Museum and Roxanne Smith, an employee at the Nebraska State Capitol.

According to Maul, the Parks & Recreation office is doing an analysis of the existing city ballfields to see what elements need to improve to increase playability and safety. Phase one showed some concerns with the facilities. Also, the Mayor's Arts and Culture Task Force is looking at the future of the Lincoln Arts Council. There will be public and private sector analysis of what the organization should look like. Lux, Visit Lincoln, City Council, Mayor's office, Public Art Lincoln and several artists are represented on the group and the conversations are going well, Maul said.

Maul reminded the Committee of the VPC grant review meeting on June 5 from 11:30 to approximately 4pm. This is one of our biggest responsibilities, he said, and we will have eight grants to review. There will be \$559,000 in requests and more information will be sent out with advanced review and scoring requested.

There are many notable projects and events happening this year including the National Science Olympiad on May 23-24. Maul asked EK Franks to share information. Franks said there will be 2,500 students on campus with over 5,000 in total with families. We are hosting 40 events and will be using 90 rooms on campus. This is the nation's premier STEM competition, he said. Feyerherm thanked Franks for his work on it and said how appreciative we are of the support he's given. On Friday we will have 39 exhibitors with a STEM expo and activities will go on through the weekend.

Other summer events include PWBA US Open at Sun Valley Lanes on June 10-17, the Jehovah's Witness

Annual District meeting is scheduled for July 3-6 and AVCA First Serve Volleyball will be host to the best volleyball around at PBA on August 22-24. We have heard fans will be bused in from Omaha for the games. He said the SCCA Solo Championships will be here August 29-September 5, and the ATP Challenger is going to be at the Dillon Tennis Center on October 12-19 for the 2nd year. This is some of the best men's and women's tennis in the country as it serves as a qualifier for the US Open. Maul said it will be a big and busy summer. Looking ahead to 2026, we have more big event potential with the National High School Finals Rodeo next July, USA Archery (date TBD), USA Rollersports next July and USA BMX (date TBD). This is all in addition to our annual high school championship events, state education conferences and the Nebraska Ag Expo. A lot of bids are happening, and we are doing a lot of negotiations, working to bring huge events to our community, he said.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next. Visit Lincoln has issued 85 sales leads for 51,661 room nights. Of that, 23% of the leads are for new events, 33% of the leads are for national events and 7% are for regional events. These are down a bit because many of the NSAA leads were in the spring. We are looking at NSAA volleyball thru 2029, state tennis thru 2026 and state bowling thru 2030. In definite bookings, we had 80 events booked for 50,361 room nights. Of that, 11% of the booked rooms are for new events, 29% were national and 11% were regional. Feyerherm said these numbers will increase as we proceed through the year. Maul added that we are at a point where the NSAA doesn't always put events up for bid because they know Lincoln will do a great job accommodating them.

Feyerherm gave an update on tradeshow and conferences. The CMCA Conference was March 4-6 and Lindsey Bolander attended in Colorado Springs, CO with 24 appointments with religious meeting planners that we thought would be a great fit in Lincoln. Tracie Simpson attended Select Traveler March 9-11 in Owensboro, KY and had 28 appointments with group tour operators. Derek Bombeck went to the Sports ETA Symposium April 14-17 in Tulsa, OK and had 37 appointments with sports planners. Bolander and Clay Simpson went on a sales mission to Washington, DC May 5-7. They visited 14 organizations and hosted planners on a sunset Potomac River cruise and happy hour. Bolander said they also attended the Nebraska breakfast and had lunch with people from the US Grains Council.

Next, Feyerherm presented information we gathered through Zartico for 2025 YTD vs (the same period in) 2024. Visitors represented 23.4% (25.8%) of all devices (cell phones) observed in Lancaster County, 70.2% (63.7%) of those were out-of-state. Visitors represented 12.7% (14.7%) of all spending activity (from credit cards) in the county, 33% (32%) of that spending was at local businesses. In terms of spending by category, restaurants had 17% (18%) of all spending from visitors, with \$94 (\$100) as the average spend. Retail had 16% (20%) of all spend from visitors, with \$169 (\$191) as the average visitor spend. Attractions had 23% (26%) of all spending from visitors with \$53 (\$82) as the average spend. 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.

Looking at the Top 10 Visitor Markets next, Feyerherm reported that Chicago dropped out of the top 10 Visitor Market and Cedar Rapids, IA replaced them at #7 or 8. The duration of stay in short-term rentals has decreased by 3% year over year while hotel stays are remaining consistent, he said. Guests were staying 3.9 days per visit and now are staying three days in short-term rentals. Looking at trends for 2Synergize data for 1st quarter we see the number of leads for DMO's without convention centers and factoring out the NSAA bids in the comparison – at -9.7% over 2024 is national average, with Lincoln at 17% over 2024 and -13.4% over 2023 as the national average, with Lincoln at 23% over 2023. The positive in this for us is that the National average has gone down but ours has gone up, Feyerherm said. In number of bookings, looking at DMO's without convention centers, 4.9% over 2024 is the national average with Lincoln at 38% over 2024 and 13.3% over 2023 is the national average, with Lincoln at 52% over 2023.

Feyerherm is using this data to have conversations with our Communications & Marketing team to see what the visitors are doing when they're here and how they are spending their money. We are looking at what we should be promoting to those coming to Lincoln for a stay or vacation, sports, retail and restaurants and ways to promote them through e-newsletters and social media.

New Business:

In new and other business, Stitt first said he would like everyone to give an update on how their businesses are doing. He also reminded the group to attend the next meeting on June 5 and to do the pre-work. Maul will send everything they need to review all the grants ahead of time and pre-score them. Derbin added that the pre-scoring will help move things along at the meeting. Tim Savona said his business has been quiet for the last six months but will pick up in August and will then be going strong. He said there are a lot of big shows in the fall and the year should end up very good. Todd Ogden said the big things going on in downtown Lincoln include the Music Box, Lincoln Convention Center and the relocation of the library announced last week. Bryan Sullivan said thank you to Jason Ball, Jeff Maul and Derek Feyerherm for their support as they've gone through the renovations. The last 18 months have been challenging, he said, but that's to be expected. The results are very impressive, and he said they want to be good stewards for Lincoln and provide a top-notch facility on the path to downtown Lincoln as people come into town. Bennie Shobe talked about the liquor license approval for the university and said he appreciates what the Committee is doing for Lincoln. EK Franks said graduation is over and work continues through the summer on the business side of things with less students on campus. Moving on to Tara Knuth, she said at the Museum they are shifting their targeted age group from 0-8 to 0-12 with more STEM activities and a "tween space". Also, she said they will be open next Monday and six days/week again for the first time since pre-Covid. They've been averaging 120,000 visitors a year and the goal is to get back to 150,000 visitors. In Stitt's update, he said the Courtyard hit the 2024 numbers for revenue but 2025 is a little lacking. We matched last year, he said, and we hope the trend goes forward. Occupancy is up a bit, but we had a bit of a slow start. He gave kudos to Sullivan and said the Embassy is back! It looks great, Stitt said. He also said the new custom built, one of a kind, Residence Inn will open on June 19, and he invited everyone to stop by. Jeff Maul gave kudos to Aaron saying that has changed the entryway into downtown in a very positive way. Dave Derbin said we will continue to work on the convention center and hope we are able to move it along. Jason Ball thanked everyone for voting for Lincoln on the Move. He said the legislature had finalized the budget and it didn't go as badly as we had feared. The target now, he said, is statewide tourism funding. We will be watching that in years ahead. Ball said the Nebraska State Chamber hired a new president, Todd Bingham, from Utah, and we think he's going to be very good. Ball was on the selection committee and encouraged that Bingham will work hard to make Nebraska grow. In Maul's report he said state tourism took a \$2M hit on the budget but he thanked our policy team of Bruce Bohrer and Katie Bohlmeier for their work as they continue to fight for us. He said tourism is third in bringing in revenue and afraid these cuts will impact relationships we had at conventions and expos. Next, Riley Slezak said he, too, would like to thank everyone for voting for LOTM. He said the new library location and makeover has been a 20-year conversation and has a completion date of 2028. Also, the Haymarket Skate Park construction is underway and should be done by 2027. Everyone agreed it will be great for downtown.

Adjourn:

Stitt thanked everyone again for their attendance and adjourned the meeting at 3:05 p.m.