

Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
November 15, 2023
MINUTES

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Tim Savona, Bryan Sullivan, Dave Derbin, Rick Vest and Riley Slezak

Absent: Jeff Cunningham, Aaron Stitt and Bennie Shobe

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

Call to Order and Introductions:

Vice Chair Tara Knuth called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. She welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Knuth introduced Riley Slezak from the mayor's office and thanked him for joining the committee. She asked the attendees to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call.

Approval of August and October Minutes:

Vice Chair Knuth asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the August minutes, from our regular quarterly meeting, that had been sent out ahead of time in an email to the group. There were no comments, so she asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Jeff Barclay made a motion to approve the minutes and Jason Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Knuth called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Tim Savona and Bryan Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Cunningham and Aaron Stitt were absent. Motion carried.

Next, Knuth said we have minutes from our special October meeting we held on October 25 to approve. Those, too, were sent out ahead of time and she asked if there were any comments or questions on them. There were not, and she asked for a motion of approval. Jason Hoehne made a motion to approve the minutes and Bryan Sullivan seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Knuth called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Cunningham and Aaron Stitt were absent. Motion carried.

Approval of October Financials:

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for October 2023. Beginning with Room Tax-CVB, he said, it is under budget. The budget is 1/12 of the annual budget and we continue to request funding as needed. Other Income is over budget due to grant income offsetting expenses we incurred for several months as we waited for the grant to come in, which it now has. On the Expense side, Salaries are a little low because we have one budgeted position open. Professional Fees are over budget because of outside services for media production. Net Income is \$7, which is rounding, according to Kalkwarf. There were no questions, and Knuth asked for a motion of approval. Jeff Barclay made a motion to approve the financials and Bryan Sullivan seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Knuth called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Cunningham and Aaron Stitt were absent. Motion carried.

Visit Lincoln Audit

Knuth asked Kalkwarf to give an update on the Visit Lincoln audit for December 31, 2022 and 2021. He said it was a good audit, RSM is a good organization, and they are great to work with. He said in RSM's

opinion, the financial statements presented fairly, in all material respects. If anyone had questions after reviewing the audit, Kalkwarf invited them to reach out to him or Maul. There were no questions, so Knuth asked for a motion of approval of the audit. Bryan Sullivan made a motion to approve, and Tim Savona seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Knuth called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Cunningham and Aaron Stitt were absent. Motion carried.

Visitors Promotion Marketing Grant Review:

Next, Knuth said we have one marketing grant to review for Domesti-PUPS' I Love My Dog Expo. They are requesting a grant for \$5,000 to use for marketing through TV spots and UNL journalism advertising. They have met all the requirements, she said, and have shown growth over the years. Maul added that they are using this for marketing, and this is the last go-around for marketing grants. There were no other comments or questions, and Knuth asked for a motion. Jason Hoehne made a motion to approve the \$5,000 grant request and Jeff Barclay seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Knuth called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Jeff Cunningham and Aaron Stitt were absent. Motion carried.

Visitors Improvement Fund Grant 2024 Update:

For the next order of business, Knuth asked Maul to update everyone on the Visitors Improvement Fund Grant. Maul first complimented everyone who attended the last meeting, in October. The discussion was very businesslike, well-handled and professional. Maul said he and Aaron Stitt went to the County's meeting and delivered a request to deny the grant request from LEC along with all the points we had prepared to make. They unanimously voted against the recommendation and sent the request to next week's final vote, he said.

Knuth questioned the balance in the fund and what the group considers a good balance to keep in it. Dave Derbin reviewed the numbers showing ending balance for FY23-24, after commitments are paid, would be about \$2.5M. In FY24-25 it is projected to be \$2.97M. He said the county would split the LEC match over the next two years to keep the balance in the fund around \$2.5M and that he feels that would be a healthy balance going forward. Maul commented that commitments from the fund in the next two years include two for the Lincoln Zoo, two to the Ag Society and two to LEC. It would be split over two years because the match must be spent by a certain time to qualify. It was also added that the improvements need to be finished by the beginning of the 2026 National rodeo event hosted by LEC.

Hoehne asked what the plans with the fund are going forward. Do we continue the small marketing grants, or will there be enough to give the larger improvement grants? Maul reminded the group of two things; we use the fund for the improvement grant program and for bid fees to bring events and attractions to Lincoln. Sullivan asked if there were any specific allocations to bid fees. Derek Feyerherm said traditionally about \$366K/year are used for that, and Maul added we need to keep in mind, like everything else, bid fee costs are rising. Knuth asked if we know when we can bring back the grant fund. Derbin said each year you can see improvements in the ending balance as the commitments are met and the fund continues to grow. Barclay asked why we think \$2.5M is the right amount to keep in the fund. Rick Vest said that amount isn't a cement floor. The intent was to handle payments to maintain a healthy balance and to protect the fund. The amount makes sense, he said, and we can look at smaller requests for a couple years and then go back to the larger requests in FY25-26. Maul said we don't want to be set back to the point where we're unable to help those that really need a grant.

Knuth said we will develop a small group committee to set parameters that will protect the fund and said to let her know if you'd like to join. She'd like to hold a committee meeting before the February VPC meeting. The group discussed plans for the committee and end results. Knuth said everyone needs to

continue to use their expertise, continue to work together and to respect each other. Barclay said it would be helpful if the grants went to an organization to use for an event that could replenish the funds. Vest said the VPC made their point and sent a clear message to the Commissioners. The county works for the future, he said, and we won't always agree, but you will always be heard. Comments were made that 47% of the fund is going to this one organization; however, it was pushed out over two years to save some funds. The group agreed saying next year someone could request \$3M and we need to keep it growing and look ahead. Maul suggested the committee come up with a 5–10-year plan and a short-term plan. Feyerherm said we need to plan for increased bid fees in 2025-2027 as all events will be ramping up then. Hoehne asked if we will see an ask for a grant for the convention center. Maul said not for the building of it, but likely bid fees will be needed for certain conventions and events held there in the future, hopefully in 3-5 years from now. Derbin suggested crafting parameters and requirements and presenting it to the County Board.

Directors Report:

Vice Chair Knuth asked for the directors' report. Jeff Maul began with a convention center update. Assemble Lincoln was formed as a standing committee of the Lancaster County Board of Commissioners to take on the leadership moving forward. Its members include state senators, staff from the governor's office, Congressman Flood's office along with Todd Ogden, Dave Derbin, Maul and Eric Gerard. There are three sub-committees including public engagement, partner development and internal finance. The RFLI analysis and architect process will be led by a 3rd party firm that has experience developing convention centers. Maul continued with an update on the Sandhills Global Youth Complex. Dirt work continues and lighting, buildings and turf are coming in the spring/summer of 2024. We are also working on an operator agreement, he said.

The Visit Lincoln staff continue their involvement with events, Maul said, just last week Clay Simpson led the charge with the Veterans Parade, and we are working on the DLA North Pole with Todd Ogden. NSAA State Volleyball was another huge success sticking to the 4-day format initiated in 2021. The preliminary attendance numbers at PBA were great and the official numbers are coming soon. NSAA State Football is next week in Memorial Stadium. Tracie Simpson and Maul attended the Nebraska Tourism Conference in Gering, NE. In 2024 the conference will shift to a one-day summit, and we will host it in Lincoln at the Graduate Hotel, he said. The primary focus is to connect state senators and the governor on the value of tourism in our statewide economy.

Lincoln Craft Beer Week was a success in October, our second year holding this one-week celebration. There were nine venues with 60 people visiting all nine. In December, we are planning to host the first Lincoln Coffee Week. Maul let the group know we do have one opening on the committee still – a representative from the UNL Chancellor's office. We are working on that, he said, along with a replacement for Jeff Cunningham, who will go off the committee in June 2024 after serving two terms. Our Holiday Social is November 28 at 4pm, Maul said and invited everyone to attend. A list of 2024 VPC meeting dates was distributed with meetings dates of February 21, May 15, August 21 and November 20.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. Visit Lincoln has issued 163 sales leads for 97,436 room nights. Of that, 27% of the leads are for new events, 25% of the leads are for national events and 22% are for regional events. These are lower than where we like to be, he said but it was due to many of the contracts this year being multi-year renewals of statewide business. In definite bookings, we had 111 events booked for 81,303 room nights. Of that, 14% of the booked rooms are for new events, 15% were national and 23% were regional. He said we have several large bookings planned for 2024 that we are waiting on as the 2024 business continues to pick up.

Next, Feyerherm gave an update on tradeshow the staff has been attending this fall beginning with the

MPI Heartland Chapter Annual Meeting that Kelsey Meyer attended in Omaha on November 13-14. There were 75 attendees from multiple states, Feyerherm said. Meyer will also attend the Connect Faith show in Washington D.C. on November 27-29. This is a faith-based meeting where planners and DC organizations meet with everyone in one place which makes it work more efficiently. On January 22-24, Clay Simpson will attend Connect Midwest in Grand Rapids, MI. This one is a blend of association, specialty and corporate planners. Derek Bombeck will travel to the USOC Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO on January 24-26 along with Sports NE partners. Feyerherm said that Bombeck has gained great traction with that organization over the past three years.

New Business:

In new business, Knuth said the Residence Inn broke ground and is scheduled to open in March 2025. Sullivan let everyone know the Embassy Suites will begin a renovation project. Savona said they have a big month ahead at PBA with Husker basketball, Trans-Siberian Orchestra and Cody Johnson.

Adjourn:

Knuth thanked everyone again for their attendance. She adjourned the meeting at 2:38 p.m.