

**Visitors Promotion Committee**  
**Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce**  
**November 19, 2025**  
**MINUTES**

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Dave Derbin, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Todd Ogden, Tim Savona, Bennie Shobe, Riley Slezak and Bryan Sullivan

Guests:

Absent: Sean Flowerday, EK Franks and Aaron Stitt

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

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

Vice Chair Tara Knuth called the meeting to order at 1:32 p.m. She welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. Skylar Reestman, Marketing and Program Coordinator at the Chamber, attended the meeting, and Knuth asked Skylar to tell a bit about herself. Reestman said she first worked for the Chamber as an intern and started full time last May. She does marketing, design and social media posts for Visit Lincoln and the Chamber. Jeff Maul added that Reestman has been doing an amazing job. Knuth asked the attendees to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call.

**Approval of August Minutes:**

Vice Chair Knuth asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the regular quarterly meeting in August's minutes, 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 August minutes. Bryan Sullivan made a motion to approve the minutes, and Jason Hoehne seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Knuth called for a vote. Jeff Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Todd Ogden, Tim Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Aaron Stitt was absent. Motion carried.

**Approval of October Financials:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the Visit Lincoln Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for fiscal year July - October 2025. Income is down, he said, and in Room Tax-Operations, the budgeted number is 1/12 of the annual budget and we continue to request funding as needed. Salaries are down a bit because the intern budgeted for has not started yet and our services team is working less hours. Also, Postage and Equipment/Maintenance are both up due to a trade show mailer and Threshold 360 software purchase. He said Net Income for this timeframe is \$0. There were no questions on the financials, so Knuth asked for a motion to approve the financials. Barclay made a motion to approve them, and Ogden seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Knuth called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Stitt was absent. Motion carried.

**Visit Lincoln Audit**

Kalkwarf next presented the audit to the Committee. He said the audit was performed by HBE, LLP this year. It was their first year performing the audit and things went well, he said. Things were standard and there were no issues. Kalkwarf said the audit document and opinion letter are in your packet and drew attention to the sentence from page 1 of the report: "In our opinion, the accompanying financial statements

present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Visit Lincoln as of December 31, 2024.” He encouraged the group to read through it and reach out if they find anything they wish to discuss. Savona made a motion of approval, and Barclay seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Knuth called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Stitt was absent. Motion carried.

### **2026 Visitor Improvement Grant Guidelines**

Next, Jeff Maul and Dave Derbin led a discussion about the changes coming to the Visitor Improvement Fund in 2026. Maul said there is a total of \$12M in grant funding available during this grant cycle and we will continue working to not let the fund balance get below a certain threshold. If approved, during the February meeting the Committee will hear requests of up to \$3M per attraction, with a minimum of \$250K. There will be a 3–6-year payout schedule with maximum annual payments not to exceed \$500K and the County reserves the right to structure payment schedules in the best interest of the Visitors Improvement Fund. Derbin added that we have historically handled larger grants like this, but with the pandemic, the fund got too low. Payments to those receiving grants in February would begin receiving payments July 1, 2026. He said the grant requests will be heard at the February meeting and there is no idea of how many. Barclay asked if we have a limit of \$12M this year, what do we have next year and how has the word gotten out about this to attractions? Derbin said it would likely be smaller grants next year. Maul said we will send out notifications on December 5<sup>th</sup>, if it’s approved here and through the County. Hoehne asked why not give \$6M the next two years vs. one year giving \$12M? Derbin said so we could get some larger projects in one cycle. One example given in a larger grant request was a larger Zoo exhibit. The convention center was brought up as well, and Maul said that it will be a part of long-term discussions. Knuth asked if all the funds weren’t used this year, would they carry over to next year and Derbin said yes. She said it may be difficult to have the project completed in one year and Derbin said perhaps one phase of the project would be done in year one and so on. Knuth said it would be helpful to have it worded that way in the application. Savona asked if one entity could apply for multiple grants and Derbin said no it will be limited. The group asked questions regarding the timing of this and if people have time to prepare and plan. Derbin said the fund is large and growing and we, along with the County, want to get it back into the community. The group talked about how they will be judged, graded and decided on. Derbin mentioned using a system similar to that used in 2025 using scales and a matrix. Knuth said the attractions won’t have an immediate result to be measured and we need to be able to show the money is available for financing. Derbin said capital financing can be added. After the questions and discussion, Knuth asked for a motion to approve. Sullivan made a motion to approve the language in the 2026 Improvement Fund grant guidelines. Barclay seconded it. There was no further discussion, so Knuth asked for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Knuth, Ogden, Savona and Sullivan voted yes. Stitt was absent. Motion carried.

### **Directors Report:**

Jeff Maul next gave a report on the Visit Lincoln (VL) projects and marketing. He began with a convention center update. There was a hearing with the revenue committee and governor on October 24 regarding the Convention Center and its turnback tax application. Assemble Lincoln presented a thorough overview of the project, he said, with data, numbers and additional information to provide the committee and governor all they need to make an educated decision. There were others presenting projects that day, too, Maul said, all sports related. We will need to wait to hear what they decide. They didn’t have a timeline of when the decision would be made. He said there will be another round of projects heard on November 20.

Maul said in a Sandhills Global Youth Complex (SGYC) update they have held 3,200+ games with only 31 rainouts. There were 32 weekend tournaments, and 120,000+ people came through the gates. The facility has served 700 youth in free clinics, and the food and beverage company has been doing a great job. Maul said there has been turf volleyball and soccer plans made for 2026. Marketing and social promotions have been highly successful in 2025 as partnering with Violet PR continues. We have had 57

total pieces of national media coverage through October with an audience reach of 283M. Some of the features included are Convention Center site selection, Sandhills Global Youth Complex opening and Breeze Airlines. We've also used a state grant and our partnership with Maly Marketing to market Taste 27<sup>th</sup> to show the many international variety of restaurants on N. 27<sup>th</sup> Street. There have been 3,210 page views to Lincoln.org, 128,803 touches through social media and 1,165 digital passport downloads, Maul said. We continue to see amazing success with Beer Week (the week of October 11) and Coffee Week when we have it. Maul said the Visit Lincoln Podcast Series – part of the award-winning Chamber BUSINESSLNK Podcast Award through the ACCE – has featured 16 tourism entities so far in 2025.

Next, Maul said new facilities' growth and expansion continues to include meetings with our staff for ice hockey, track & field and rollersports. Maul looked into 2026 saying we have a busy year planned, especially June and July with Savannah Bananas in town June 11 and 13 at Haymarket Park and Memorial Stadium. We have USA Rollersports July 1-27, the Chamber Intercity Visit will be in Madison, WI July 14-17, NHSFR is July 19-25 and USA Archery July 23-26.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next. Visit Lincoln has issued 152 sales leads for 108,938 room nights. Of that, 28% of the leads are for new events, 26% of the leads are for national events and 28% are for regional events. In definite bookings, we had 130 events booked for 100,462 room nights. Of that, 17% of the booked rooms are for new events, 22% were national and 31% were regional. He reminded the group that these percentages are below our normal averages and its relates back to many long-term renewal contracts for state business that occurred during the first quarter. Feyerherm said Lindsey Bolander has been doing a great job with the return to the faith-based market and we are seeing larger events coming back. He said our pace for future events is much stronger for '26/'27 compared to '25/'26. We have 73% more booked room nights for the 2-year period. In the educational event planners, we see expanded content and content dedicated to each campus. Clay Simpson did a podcast with Sue Ellen Pegg from UNL East Campus, he said, that went very well.

Feyerherm gave an update on tradeshows and conferences. Bolander will be attending Smart Meetings in Kansas City as well as the NACO Annual Conference in Kearney both in December. Tracie Simpson goes to American Bus Association Conference in Reno in January and Clay Simpson heads to Pittsburg to the Connect North conference that month. Derek Bombeck will once again go to Colorado Springs for the Sports NE trip in January. This is one where the state bands together and is always successful. Wrapping up the winter travel is Bolander to a religious conference – RCMA – in Lexington, KY in February.

Next, Feyerherm presented information we gathered through Zartico for 2025 YTD vs (the same period in) 2024. Visitors represented 15% (21%) of all devices (cell phones) observed in Lancaster County, 73% (70%) of those were out-of-state. Visitors represented 14% (15%) of all spending activity (from credit cards) in the county, 28% (25%) of that spending was at local businesses. In terms of spending by category, restaurants had 19% (19%) of all spending from visitors, with \$103 (\$44) as the average spend. Retail had 17% (18%) of all spend from visitors, with \$87 (\$89) as the average visitor spend. Attractions/Arts/Entertainment had 57% (24%) of all spending from visitors with \$36 (\$37) as the average spend. Feyerherm said the numbers for 2025 will increase because of football season.

Maul next thanked Feyerherm for all the work he does and said he's been doing a fantastic job. Bryan Sullivan asked Feyerherm if he had considered the SPMG conference. Derek said staff haven't attended for a while and we look at the market and how many leads we get from them. Feyerherm added once we open the convention center we will need to look at different conferences. Sullivan said we've been seeing a lot of government travel. Feyerherm said we watch trends and fluctuate and watch performances. We think 2026 will be a strong year, he said, and the Committee agreed.

**New Business:**

In new and other business, Knuth asked everyone to note in their meeting packet the invitation to this year's Visit Lincoln Holiday Party on December 4 from 4-6pm. Also included in the packets is a list of meeting dates for 2026.

**Adjourn:**

Knuth thanked everyone again for their attendance, wished the Committee a happy Thanksgiving and adjourned the meeting at 2:47 p.m.