

Visitors Promotion Committee
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
November 9, 2022
MINUTES

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Jeff Cunningham, Jason Hoehne, Bryan Sullivan, Aaron Stitt, Dave Derbin and Tammy Ward

Absent: Roma Amundson, Michelle Waite, Saige Walker and Mairead Safranek

Staff Attending: Jeff Maul, Derek Feyerherm, Ron Kalkwarf, Todd Wiltgen, Diane Pryor and Jason Ball

Call to Order and Introductions:

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 2:02 p.m. He thanked everyone for attending, welcomed new Board member, Bryan Sullivan, and asked the attendees to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call. Following roll call, Stitt said we are excited to have Sullivan join the committee and asked him to share a bit about himself. Sullivan said it is nice to meet everyone and he sees some familiar faces here. He said he began his career in 1994 with the Cornhusker Hotel and Burnham Yates Conference Center. It was a great opportunity and he enjoyed it very much. He moved to the Embassy Suites in 1999. Time flies, he said, and he still enjoys work at the Embassy. He said he feels Tom Lorenz brought him here to this committee and he wants it to be the best experience it can be. He wants to move the committee forward in the hospitality industry and he's looking forward to this.

Approval of August Minutes:

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the August 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. Jason Hoehne 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, Sullivan and Stitt voted yes. Jeff Cunningham and Tara Knuth were absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Approval of October Financials:

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the CVB Profit & Loss Budget vs. Actual for October 2022. Total Income is at \$815,000 and under budget, he said, with Room Tax-CVB budget number being split 1/12 each month and we are asking for the funds as needed. On the Expense side, Total Expense is \$872,651. Net Income is actually a loss of \$57,651, Kalkwarf added, because we are waiting for approval of an ARPA grant from the State for a CVB promotional video. Jeff Maul added we have \$57,000 coming through ARPA and we are following procedures and waiting for reimbursement. Sullivan had a question regarding the cost of the videos. Derek Feyerherm said this will give us 16 videos. There were no other questions on the financials and Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Barclay moved to approve the financials as presented. The motion was seconded by Hoehne. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Sullivan, Stitt and Jeff Cunningham, who was now present, voted yes. Tara Knuth was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

CVB Audit

Stitt asked Kalkwarf to present the CVB Audit as of December 31, 2021. He said the audit was done by RSM, who we have used for several years now, and we enjoy working with them. They do a great job and said in their opinion that the accompanying financial statements present fairly, in all material respects. It was a good audit, Kalkwarf said, and if anyone had questions to reach out to him. Nothing stood out and it was pretty simple. There were no questions. Chamber President Jason Ball said RSM does good work and thanked Kalkwarf and Tina Kluczynski for their internal efforts with our books. Chair Stitt asked for a motion to approve. Sullivan moved to approve the audit report as presented. The motion was seconded by Barclay. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Hoehne, Sullivan, Stitt and Cunningham voted yes. Tara Knuth was absent for the vote. Motion carried.

Directors Report:

Chair Stitt asked for the directors report. Maul asked Ball if he would like to begin with a few words. Ball said we are in our first cycle of changes with Board leadership. A community member position is opening with Bill Stephan going off and we are excited to have Aaron Stitt joining so we continue to have a connection with the tourism industry, he said. His post was approved by our Executive Committee and Board. Ball also stated that Evan Killeen with the Lincoln Children's Zoo will also be joining the Chamber Board, expanding hospitality and tourism representation. Also, Ball said, work continues with the economic vitality strategic plan. We have reviewed drafts with the committee and continue towards a final draft that we plan to roll out early in 2023 at our Annual Lunch. We have another meeting of the Committee next week and will review the latest copy that has been reviewed by staff and the consultants. Maul added that Ball has given special focus on tourism and hospitality looking forward. When we are in those meetings, they want to talk about a convention center and hospitality, which is exciting, Maul said!

Maul gave an update on the Lincoln Youth Complex (LYC) next. We are working to begin spring of 2023 with completion in fall of 2024 and will be ready to play ball. The CVB, NWU, city and county and community partners are working together as we all know youth sports help our book of business. It will be located at 1st and Cornhusker and serve as an enhanced entry way to our city when coming in from the northwest and the airport. It is in a great location to many amenities as well as the downtown district. This project was initially a pillar of the 2015 Vision Committee to compliment the sports triangle. For more information the website is lincolnyouthcomplex.com. The eight, turf fields include two championship fields which will be home to NWU baseball and softball as well as Homer's Heroes with a barrier free athlete experience. Five youth ballfields are in the plans. This will be a \$9M economic impact and have 100,000 new visitors in year one. Maul said we received \$13M from county, city and JPA and we are working on collecting another \$5M from the private sector, but optimistic and excited. It's important for all our sports facilities to work together. No one is trying to take from another. They all want to work together and enhance the city. Continuing with the update, the CVB staff has involvement in event production, including the Veterans Day Parade on November 13. County Commissioner Roma Amundson will be the grand marshal. Visitor Center traffic and interest are in line with pre-pandemic numbers and people are continuing to travel again. Maul said we are thankful for Amendment 1 passing overwhelmingly as this will help tourism and the future of a convention center. Our airport will benefit as it gains access to additional revenue streams to fund projects and services.

In an update about the convention center, Maul said, five potential sites are being explored. Phase 2 is ongoing reviewing the various sites' development costs, financial operations, economic impact, footprint needed and how much square footage, financing options and governance/management of each. The NSAA Volleyball was a success last week with record breaking numbers the first two days. The final numbers are

not in yet, but everyone seemed to like the new format. Games were played mainly at PBA with championship games at Devaney and 3rd place games in an LPS gym. He talked about Nebraska Travel Conference in South Sioux City next. It is our second year back after Covid and there is great bounce back. Some emerging trends include growth in the craft beer industry, solo travel with pets, dark sky Astro-tourism, or stargazing and lots of outdoor focus. Awards were won by John Chapo, the Henry Fonda Award and Joel Green/Robbers Cave, the Outstanding Tourism Attraction. Maul thanked the city and county officials for their contribution of \$5M in ARPA money to 15 local attractions. Maul continued, saying Lincoln Beer Week was a success in September with 14 participating venues. It was very popular! We need to capitalize on art mural energy as set by the Lux Center, he said. This is a tourism driving mechanism and there are new things coming including a Lincoln related mural, he added. Looking ahead, our new CVB website is just days away! It will have vibrant photography, video and great sales tools. We are partnering with Simpleview and excited to roll it out. New feature video, logo, visitors guide and marketing material will follow. In closing, Maul said please plan to attend our Holiday CVB Social at 4 pm on December 13. 2023 VPC meeting dates are February 15, May 17, August 16 and November 15.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. The CVB has issued 141 sales leads for 52,919 room nights. Of that, 73% of the leads are for new events that have never been to Lincoln or has not returned in five or more years, 68% of the leads are for national events and 22% are for regional events. In 2019, there were 141 sales leads for 74,700 room nights. Numerous multi-year events are in negotiations and Feyerherm is optimistic for contracts before the end of 2022. In booked business, we had 94 events booked for 38,816 room nights. Of that, 19% of the booked rooms are for new events, which was a big drop for us, Feyerherm said. The multi-year contract with USA Roller Sports following the pandemic is the main reason for this drop. 68% are for national events and 24% are for regional events. We would like to be at 75% threshold for regional/national events so are exceeding this with 92%. In 2019 there were 109 events booked for 40,894 room nights. Decision dates continue to be pushed for booking. We are seeing that some want 100% in person, but a small amount still want Zoom; however, we are seeing improvement there. We are optimistic for a strong end to the year.

Next, Feyerherm said we have a busy fall schedule of tradeshows for his team. Kelsey Meyer attended the Going on Faith conference in September in Florida and had 30 appointments come from that show. Derek Bombeck went to Georgia in September for the S.P.O.R.T.S Relationship conference. He had 14 appointments with sports event planners and Sports NE also had a representative that took 15 appointments. Meyer also attended the Small Market Meetings in October in Wichita, KS. There she had 23 appointments with meeting planners and said it was a good event. The TEAMS Conference was in October in Oklahoma City and Bombeck attended with 33 appointments. He has been attending as part of Sports NE for four years. Our NE Tourism Commission provided funding for enhanced presence on a statewide level. This allowed us to sponsor the bus transportation and have attendance at the VIP event, which was very good for exposure. Attendees were asking about the LYC and wanting to book and be a part of it. We are hoping to make a 5-year commitment with the TEAMS Conference and have a video in production from this year's sponsorship.

Next, Feyerherm said in upcoming tradeshows, Meyer will go to Tennessee in January for the RCMA Emerge show and to Detroit in February for the ABA show, in partnership with the State of Nebraska. Clay Simpson is planning to attend the Connect Midwest tradeshow in January in Peoria, IL. In addition, the USOC Visit is January 18-20 in Colorado Springs and Bombeck will be going with other Sports Nebraska members and taking appointments while there. We are working on microsites and Map Publisher as a service to event organizers to set us apart. We will make them very specific for each group and it will

have options and access to board of directors – not everyone offers these. We are also sending E-Blasts to tradeshow attendees met since 2019. These go to about 534 organizations to connect them with others within their specific market. It is going very well as there is over 50% open rate. Our marketing and communications team has been working hard to have consistent new content.

Sullivan asked how do we decide which shows to attend, who do we take with us, who do we target and what do we look at? Feyerherm said we are open to taking hotel partners with us and have done this before. If anyone has interest, he said, be sure to reach out. In selecting the show, we do share notes with our peers and go with what is proven successful. We look at ROI, we go over 2-3 years to see if we get a good return. We go to a mix of all markets to stay diversified. We also keep in mind cost vs. return, Feyerherm explained. Maul added we need to be at certain shows to meet needs and relationships. There was good discussion about facilities working together to recruit business and Feyerherm said we stay on top of it and continue to look at new opportunities. Still asked about the 19% new business Feyerherm had mentioned. He wondered what is budgeted. Feyerherm said 50% on new event leads issued and 75% on other. Stitt said thank you, you do a good job of looking ahead.

Open Position on the VPC Discussion

A discussion was held to gather ideas for someone to replace Tom Lorenz and Stitt let everyone know Michelle Waite would be retiring soon so we will want to think about a new person from UNL, too. Stitt asked do we want to keep with PBA and ask their interim director to be on the Committee and transition to the person they hire to permanently replace Lorenz. Maul said historically we have that role identified as someone from an event facility. Bill Stephan's name was brought up, too, as he is officially a UNL employee and could fall into Waite's role. Discussion continued about keeping a PBA representative on the committee. Stitt asked everyone for their input.

New Business:

In new business, Maul said we are working on ways to honor Tom Lorenz's name. At our Celebrate Business Award Luncheon we are renaming our tourism award the Tom Lorenz Tourism Development award. It has been a tough time for all of us in this industry losing Tom, Maul said, and we want to honor him.

Stitt reminded everyone our next meeting will be February 15 and said please plan to attend the VPC Holiday Social on December 13 at 4 pm.

Adjourn:

Stitt thanked everyone for their attendance and wished them a wonderful Thanksgiving. He adjourned the meeting at 3:14 p.m.