

MINUTES

ELKHART COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

PUBLIC MEETING OF THE COMMISSION AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Friday, September 9, 2016

8 a.m.

Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau

219 Caravan Drive

Elkhart, IN 46514

PRESENT: Ms. B. Ronzone, Commission
Mr. D. Shoup, Commission
Mr. S. Baker, Commission
Mr. A. Patel, Commission
Ms. G. Patel, Commission
Mr. L. King, Board of Directors
Mr. J. Siegmann, Board of Directors
Ms. E. Billey, Board of Directors
Ms. K. Clarke, Board of Directors
Mr. D. Bearss, Board of Directors
Mr. B. Hoffer, Board of Directors
Ms. D. Lawson, Executive Director
Mr. T. Mark, Staff Recorder
Mr. M. Huber, Staff

ABSENT: Mr. R. Jenkins, Commission
Mr. K. Janowsky, Commission

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:06 a.m. by Ms. B. Ronzone

APPROVE MAY MINUTES

Mr. J. Siegmann moved to approve the minutes of the May 13, 2016, meeting. Mr. D. Shoup seconded the motion. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Ms. K. Clarke reported that, as of August, there was \$1.6 million in bank and the ECCVB had reached the cap on receipts from the innkeepers tax for the year. She said that Cindy Ostrom, business manager, is projecting \$800,000 in carryover funding that will be held in escrow until next year. Of the \$1.6 million in cash on hand, \$200,000 is dedicated to various cooperative projections. Ms. D. Lawson said \$90,000 is committed to the Live. Work. Play. Capacity Grants

program, \$60,000 for Vibrant Communities and and \$100,000 from the Elkhart Redevelopment Commission for the Exit 92 marketing campaign.

Ms. K. Clarke said the accounts receivable balance stood at \$8,300. Ms. D. Lawson expressed concern about one account's ability to pay. Overall, expenses are projected to be on budget for the year.

Mr. J. Siegmann said the deviation from budget is remarkably small. Ms. D. Lawson reviewed the process of by which innkeepers tax receipts are received and budgeted, and the budget approval process with Elkhart County.

Ms. D. Lawson said that anticipated changes in the Market District in downtown Elkhart and sports facilities may affect future programming and staff needs. The density of sports opportunities increasing has opened the possibility of partnership with St. Joseph County.

Mr. L. King moved to approve the the financial report. Ms. E. Billey seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

BUREAU UPDATE

Ms. D. Lawson invited everyone to attend an Indiana Toll Road forum starting at 10 a.m. Sept. 21 at Notre Dame. It is organized by the Northern Indiana Tourism Development Commission and the purpose to discuss the toll road's importance to the region and future opportunities. There are 45 million vehicles which access the toll road, bringing 80 million people through the area. This is an opportunity for partners in toll road communities to exercise their voice. We want to have a better, more sophisticated conversation with toll road users by bringing stakeholders together. Discussion ensued on the importance of taking the initiative with the toll road. Mr. D. Bearss said the forum will be facilitated by Planning NEXT, followed by lunch and an optional stadium tour.

Mr. S. Baker invited everyone to a ceremonial groundbreaking for GLO on Sept. 22. This is a new Best Western property that will be one block south of the existing Best Western Inn on Lincolnway in Goshen.

Ms. D. Lawson highlighted two recent media placements for ECCVB destinations — the Quilt Gardens in Martha Stewart Living magazine and Midwest Living Best of the Midwest magazine.

Ms. D. Lawson reviewed the Vibrant Communities Summit on the Future, which drew well over 500 attendees. Keynote speaker Jamie Bennett spoke on how to find artists in your own community, and Action Agenda was presented. The next step is three different programs: (1) getting organized for implementation, which includes working with Community Foundation; (2) Vibrant Bucks \$50,000 micro-grant program to encourage cool ideas; (3) identifying four workshop topics, led by expert speaker. The hope is to carry out one workshop by the end of the year, and three in 2017.

Ms. D. Lawson said 2017 business plan will include an emphasis on outdoor recreation, which will be accomplished in part by working with communities via Vibrant Communities.

Ms. D. Lawson said preparations for the Quilt Gardens will include Seward Johnson sculptures at some, if not all, Quilt Gardens as part of the 10th anniversary celebration. A group is working on the program. Sponsorships would run in the range of approximately \$3,500.

Mr. M. Huber spoke on the economic impact and visitor profile reports from Certec. The 2015 economic impact report, conducted in summer 2016, includes survey of lodging properties, attractions and local businesses. Visitor profile study involved extensive survey of in-person surveys of visitors in destination in spring, summer and fall of 2015.

There has been significant growth in all areas since 2013. Direct visitor spending went up 13 percent since 2013, an increase to more than \$330 million. It is the highest percentage increase since the ECCVB started tracking. The report also showed more than \$100 million paid in wages and more than \$22 million generated in local tax revenue.

Smith Travel reports validates economic impact growth — more than 80,000 room nights were sold in 2015 than 2013. Total lodging revenue increased \$9 million between 2013 and 2015. However, there has been softening in industry in 2016.

Other details from the report: Lodging visitors accounted for 35 percent of direct visitor spending. Conclusion: Perhaps Exit 92 converted pass-through visitors to lodging visitors. Visiting friends and relatives (VFRs) are an impactful segment — second highest in spending per person per day.

Key details from the visitor profile include that people find it easy to get here, and we have a high repeat business. We are having success in extending the stay, converting day trips to overnights, short stays to longer stays. Elkhart County is the primary destination for visitors here — Shipshewana higher in spring on percentage basis, Notre Dame higher in fall. Short trip visitors are the predominant visitors, with day trips and vacation making up smaller proportion. Elkhart County attractions are popular with all northern Indiana visitors.

Ms. D. Lawson said the strategy of linking communities via the Heritage Trail and Quilt Gardens is paying off.

Mr. M. Huber added that visitors perceived Elkhart County has checking many important factors — unique, scenic, affordable, family. Visitors are highly satisfied by the destination. We met or exceeded expectations overwhelmingly — more than 95 percent.

Ms. D. Lawson said increasing capacity at the RV Hall of Fame could also be an important driver for further visitors. We are an enviable destination — Toll Road, Amish Country, RV, sports. While we are not a one-trick pony, our difficulty is with our branding.

OTHER BUSINESS

Discussion resumed about the Toll Road Forum and leadership change at ITRCC, the lease holder of the Toll Road.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be at 8 a.m. Friday, Nov. 11, 2016.

Mr. D. Shoup moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. L. King seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:41 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Terry Mark
Staff Recorder