

MINUTES

ELKHART COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU COMMISSION AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS PUBLIC MEETING

Friday, January 13, 2017

8 a.m.

Elkhart County Visitors Center, 219 Caravan Drive, Elkhart, IN

PRESENT: Ms. B. Ronzone, Commission
Mr. D. Shoup, Commission
Mr. R. Jenkins, Commission (by conference call)
Mr. S. Baker, Commission
Mr. A. Patel, Commission
Ms. G. Patel, Commission
Mr. K. Janowsky, Commission
Mr. L. King, Board of Directors
Ms. E. Billey, Board of Directors
Ms. K. Clarke, Board of Directors
Mr. D. Bearss, Board of Directors (by conference call)
Mr. B. Hoffer, Board of Directors
Mr. A. Dawson, Board of Directors
Ms. D. Lawson, Executive Director
Mr. T. Mark, Staff Recorder

ABSENT: None.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:05 a.m. Ms. D. Lawson said that the ECCVB's lobbyist, Matt Whetstone, would be joining the meeting by conference call at around 8:20 a.m. He will provide an update on the proposal to seek enabling legislation for an innkeepers tax increase of 1 percentage point.

APPROVE NOVEMBER MINUTES

Mr. L. King moved to approve the minutes of the November 2016 meeting. Mr. D. Shoup seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Ms. K. Clarke said the balance sheet has about \$750,000 on hand, not including partner money. We received the rest of 2016 payment for innkeepers tax collected, totaling more

than \$900,000. The ECCVB had problems collecting accounts receivable from the Old Bag Factory. On the income statement, everything is within budget, but there was some money left over that was not expended. The money was reallocated to pay the deposit on the upcoming sculpture exhibit. Ms. D. Lawson said that money had been allocated to Live Work Play, but some communities weren't ready, so the funding will be available to them in 2017 rather than 2016.

Ms. E. Billey moved to accept the financial report. Mr. K. Janowsky seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

ELECTIONS

Ms. B. Ronzone presented the slate of 2017 officers for the commission: Ms. B. Ronzone for president, Mr. D. Shoup for vice president and Mr. R. Jenkins for secretary-treasurer. There were no further nominations from the floor.

Mr. K. Janowsky moved to accept the slate as presented. Mr. A. Patel seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

Mr. L. King introduced Mr. A. Dawson as nominee for the vacant position on the board of directors. Mr. L. King opened the floor for additional nominations. There were no other nominations and the floor was closed.

Mr. B. Hoffer moved to recommend to the commission that Mr. A. Dawson be appointed to the board of directors. Ms. K. Clarke seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all board members in favor.

Mr. D. Shoup moved to appoint Mr. A. Dawson to the board of directors. Ms. G. Patel seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all commission members in favor.

Mr. L. King presented the slate of 2017 officers for the board of directors: Mr. L. King for president, Ms. E. Billey for vice president and Ms. K. Clarke for secretary-treasurer.

Mr. B. Hoffer moved to accept the slate as presented. Ms. K. Clarke seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all board members in favor.

BUREAU UPDATE

Ms. D. Lawson presented the 2017 Business Plan, which was mailed to all members.

Ms. E. Billey moved to accept the 2017 Business Plan. Mr. A. Dawson seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all board members in favor.

Mr. Matt Whetstone joined the meeting via telephone conference call.

Ms. D. Lawson explained that Mr. M. Whetstone and State Rep. Doug Miller of Elkhart are recommending that the ECCVB move forward with pursuing legislation that allow for an increase of Elkhart County's innkeepers tax.

Mr. M. Whetstone said the groundwork was laid in 2016. With 2017 a budget-writing year in the state legislature, there is a "slight appetite to do some things to set things up for the long term," said Mr. M. Whetstone. He said a number of communities are interested in innkeepers tax issues, and State Rep. Dave Ober intends to submit a bill for Allen County. The bill has enabling language and would not be enacted until ready at the local level. He advised not to pass up the opportunity to seek this change in the law. Mr. M. Whetstone and Ms. D. Lawson took questions from board and commission members. Mr. M. Whetstone said there is no expiration date on the enabling language and there would not be unless an expiration is written into the law. Ms. D. Lawson Diana said the purpose for the increase is written into the bill, for a communications strategy. Ms. D. Lawson said that, when ready, the ECCVB organization through the commission would make that decision to ask for the increase and then the Elkhart County Council would have to approve it. Mr. B. Hoffer said the county council has the authority as the county's fiscal body. Mr. B. Hoffer proposed broadening the purpose of the legislation to allow for greater flexibility. Mr. M. Whetstone read the proposed amendment, which referenced a communications strategy to promote quality of place.

Discussion ensued concerning whether to pursue the increase, and the appropriate language to maximize flexibility. General consensus developed to follow the advice of Mr. M. Whetstone. Ms. D. Lawson noted that the innkeepers tax rate has been at 5 percent for around 20 years. Mr. A. Patel advised caution, particularly if the increase is not being enacted yet. Ms. D. Lawson said there has been contact with the Elkhart County Commissioners and Elkhart County Council and the members are in general agreement to support this.

General discussion ensued about a proposed food and beverage tax and whether it may be enabled. There is a proposal before the legislature to enable a food and beverage tax throughout the state. A consensus developed to focus legislative language on "quality of place."

Mr. B. Hoffer moved to authorize Ms. D. Lawson to work with the ECCVB's lobbyist to pursue an increase in the cap of the innkeepers tax for an additional 1 percent to develop appropriate language to accomplish goals. Mr. D. Shoup seconded.

Mr. L. King called for a vote from board members only. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

Ms. B. Ronzone called for a vote from commission members only. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

ADOPTION

Discussion returned to the topic of the 2017 Business Plan.

Mr. D. Shoup moved to accept the 2017 Business Plan. Mr. A. Patel seconded. A vote was taken of commission members and it was approved with all in favor.

Mr. L. King invited discussion or questions on the 2017 Budget. Ms. D. Lawson said there is an increase of about \$200,000. She said changes were made in the advertising and marketing budget to include a co-op campaign with Indiana state tourism that targets Chicago and Indianapolis. The campaign is leveraged dollar-for-dollar with the state. This campaign gives the ECCVB access to the state's advertising agency at no cost.

Ms. D. Lawson said ECCVB staff would make adjustments to programs and spending if the innkeepers tax collections in 2017 fails to meet projections. She noted that there is a reserve.

Ms. E. Billey moved to accept the 2017 Budget. Mr. A. Dawson seconded. A vote was taken by board members and it was approved with all in favor.

Mr. D. Shoup moved to accept the 2017 Budget. Mr. K. Janowsky seconded. A vote was taken by commission members and it was approved with all in favor.

BUREAU UPDATE

Ms. D. Lawson distributed an infographic reporting on 2016 performance results. She noted that there was more than \$600,000 in initiatives in which the ECCVB partnered with communities. These initiatives, such as the Quilt Gardens, Seward Johnson and downtown walking tours, have been received very well and reflect a focus on quality of

place. Room nights sold in 2016 approached 500,000. General discussion ensued on the metrics of the lodging industry (demand, average daily rate, occupancy).

Ms. D. Lawson said there has been growth in visitor spending and length of stay. The ECCVB also invests around \$200,000 in sponsorships, community events, and programs such as Vibrant Communities.

Ms. D. Lawson distributed an infographic giving an overview of 2017 activities. The tourism economic impact report from Certec shows that since 2003 that there has been increase of about 39 percent, and nearly 43 percent increase in direct visitor spending.

Discussion ensued on the Indiana Toll Road regarding tolls, rates and customer service.

Ms. D. Lawson highlighted the Indiana Tourism Conference March 13-15 and invited all board and commission members to attend if interested. Expenses would be covered.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. S. Baker provided an update on his GLo by Best Western project in Goshen. It is expected to open this year.

Mr. A. Patel provided an update on his project in downtown South Bend. It is projected to open in November.

Mr. A. Dawson will co-chair Vibrant Communities implementation steering committee along with Ms. Suzie Weirick.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. B. Ronzone opened the floor for comments from the general public. No one rose to speak, and the public comment period was closed.

SET 2017 MEETINGS

The list of meeting dates and advocacy meetings was distributed.

SET NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be at 8 a.m. Friday, March 10, 2017.

ADJOURN

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:57 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Mark
Staff Recorder