

MINUTES

ELKHART COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

COMMISSION AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PUBLIC MEETING

Friday, January 11, 2019

8 a.m.

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

PRESENT: Mr. D. Shoup, Commission and Board
Ms. G. Patel, Commission
Mr. S. Baker, Commission
Mr. K. Janowsky, Commission
Mr. A. Patel, Commission
Ms. E. Billey, Board of Directors
Ms. K. Clarke, Board of Directors
Mr. D. Bearss, Board of Directors
Mr. A. Dawson, Board of Directors
Mr. B. Hoffer, Board of Directors
Ms. D. Lawson, Chief Executive Officer
Mr. T. Mark, Staff Recorder

ABSENT: Mr. R. Jenkins, Commission
Ms. B. Ronzone, Commission
Mr. L. King, Board of Directors

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:08 a.m.

APPROVE NOVEMBER MINUTES

Mr. K. Janowsky moved to approve the minutes of the Nov. 9, 2018, meeting as presented. Ms. G. Patel seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Ms. K. Clarke referred members to the written report provided in advance of the meeting. She said the ECCVB received the \$2.1 million in innkeepers tax revenue budgeted in 2018, the the remainder of \$700,000 to be received next week. The 2019 budget increases revenue to \$2.4 million. She said the balance sheet records \$945,000 in cash on hand, with \$870,000 in the bifurcated fund for non-room tax revenue. Ms. D. Lawson said additional revenue is anticipated as payments are received for travel guide sales, which will return around \$90,000 in profits.

Mr. K. Janowsky moved to approve the financial report. Ms. G. Patel seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

ELECTIONS

Mr. D. Shoup presented the slate of officers for 2019 for the Elkhart County innkeepers tax commission which was approved in the November 2018 meeting: Mr. Dan Shoup as president, Ms. Gita Patel as vice president, and Mr. Rick Jenkins as secretary/treasurer. Mr. K. Janowsky moved to accept the slate as presented and elect the nominees. Mr. A. Patel seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

Ms. E. Billey presented the slate of officers for 2019 for the ECCVB board of directors which was approved in the November 2018 meeting: Mr. Levi King as president, Ms. Eleanor Billey as vice president, and Ms. Kim Clarke as secretary/treasurer. Mr. B. Hoffer moved to accept the slate as presented and elect the nominees. Mr. A. Dawson seconded. A vote was taken and it was approved with all in favor.

2019 BUSINESS PLAN OVERVIEW/2018 BUSINESS PLAN REVIEW

Ms. D. Lawson invited members to view Page 5 of the 2019 Business Plan, which makes ECCVB performance measures for 2018 more consumable. She said there is a tremendous amount of work needed to manage the business plan. She meets with each staff person individually to review plans, and the staff are very proud of work accomplished in 2018. She said it was a year of transition, including much invested time and resources into research. This will be a three-year transition — 2020 will be the year when we see a lot of different things coming together. She highlighted travel trade, promotions/advertising, and Heritage Trail activity. There was a total return on investment \$33 million connected to ECCVB advertising, promotion and sales.

Ms. D. Lawson highlighted the Vibrant Communities project for helping the ECCVB reach deeper on community pride and going beyond tourism with each community in Elkhart County.

Mr. D. Bearss said the ECCVB has done a great job and praised the very complete reporting in the business plan. He said he's not surprised by any of this.

Mr. D. Shoup congratulated Ms. D. Lawson and his staff on the work they do.

Ms. D. Lawson said this year more than ever the ECCVB will be more clearly communicating what we do. She reviewed key pillars of our strategies in the business plan. The first is place identity and in 2019 the ECCVB will have defined place identity, including new website, Heritage Trail, and changed how we talked to people and adding new tools to talk with people, technology that can track behavior based on your interests. She said the ECCVB will be using strategies and intelligence to better harness communications channels.

The second key strategy is visitor experiences, which involves investing in helping stakeholders understand what visitors want to experience, promoting signature events and refining messages to critical niche groups.

The third key strategy is Vibrant Communities. Ms. D. Lawson described a meeting with Candy Yoder of the Community Foundation, and a presentation to the foundation's placemaking grant committee which reinforced ECCVB's commitment to quality of place, possibly exploring further projects, and continuing to balance ECCVB communicating to visitors, local residents and influencers. This strategy maintains the ECCVB's relevance to this community.

The fourth key strategy is relationships. Ms. D. Lawson said the staff has developed an advocacy plan and is hoping to finalize it by the end of the month and develop key messages.

Mr. K. Janowsky asked about budget items that were significantly different. There is an increase in ad placements. Ms. D. Lawson said the ECCVB budgeted for an increase in room tax revenue. She said in recent years innkeepers tax collections exceeded the budgeted amount and the excess accumulated in reserves with county. There will be an increase in advertising promotion to help lift the new brand. It was noted that partner receipts decreased, and Ms. D. Lawson said these are separate programs not included in budget and handled differently because it's not revenue the ECCVB generated. Further discussion/explanation ensued on funds in the bifurcated account.

Mr. B. Hoffer moved for the board to adopt the business plan as presented. Mr. A. Dawson seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all on the board in favor.

Mr. K. Janowsky moved for the commission to adopt the business plan as presented. Mr. A. Patel seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all on the commission in favor.

Mr. A. Dawson moved for the board to adopt the 2019 budget as presented. Mr. B. Hoffer seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all on the board in favor.

Ms. G. Patel moved for the commission to adopt the 2019 budget as presented. Mr. K. Janowsky seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all on the commission in favor.

Ms. D. Lawson reviewed a previous discussion in which it was suggested that funds from the bifurcated account, which is where revenue from travel guide sales is deposited, could be used for improvements to the new Visitor Center. At Mr. K. Janowsky's suggestion, ECCVB staff met with highly qualified interior designer Ms. J.J. Osterloo. The interior designer presented a preliminary proposal of \$10,000 to manage interior design process. The ECCVB has budgeted for the basic cost of the new Visitor Center in the operations budget. Ms. D. Lawson asked the board to approve an expenditure of up to \$400,000 from the bifurcated account for the improvements. The ECCVB staff expects to have a better idea of the actual cost by April.

Mr. A. Dawson moved to spend an amount not to exceed \$400,000 from the travel guide co-op fund for improvements to the new building. Mr. B. Hoffer seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all on the board in favor.

OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. D. Lawson congratulated JSK for being honored at the annual Marriott convention. Mr. A. Patel said that out of 700 hotels, we were recognized for best project. The convention was in San Diego and they had lunch on the field of Petco Park and met the president of Marriott.

Ms. D. Lawson said that Mr. Matt Whetstone, who is the lobbyist who has worked with the ECCVB on potential increases to the lodging tax, called her. She said that Mr. Matt Whetstone said the Indiana legislature's appetite for option taxes such as food/beverage and lodging seems to be higher in this session. He advised that this year could be a good opportunity to pursue this. If it passes at state level, the final approval would move to the local level at county council.

Mr. D. Bearss said it seems that the climate is right and gives the ECCVB another arrow in our quiver. He said it would be good to seek the increase so that we would be ready when/if we wish to seek it. There was further discussion on strategy and competitive analysis. Ms. D. Lawson said an increase of 1 percent, from 5 percent to 6 percent, would generate around \$450,000 additional revenue per year.

Mr. D. Bearss suggested a motion to allow the ECCVB to move forward to seek an increase of up to 2 percent pending further discussion. He said it's a local control issue. Mr. A. Dawson said it's better to seek a 2 percent increase.

Mr. D. Bearss said moved to give ECCVB staff approval to move forward with an up to 2 percent increase pending discussion with the Elkhart County commissioners and others such as the lobbyist so that we optimize local control. Mr. A. Dawson seconded. There was a vote and it was approved with all on the board in favor.

Mr. K. Janowsky said that his restaurant Artisan was chosen by MSN as a bucket list restaurant. There was only one restaurant recognized per state.

There was further discussion on the branding initiative. Ms. D. Lawson said there was been additional meetings with Destination Think and is hoping to get everything wrapped up by the end of February.

Mr. A. Patel said that demolition will start within 10 days on the new Visitor Center. He will be having a final meeting on Tuesday and is aiming for a mid-May opening.

There was general discussion on the economic climate. The consensus is that the fundamentals are still strong.

SET NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be Friday, March 8, 2019, at 8 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:29 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Mark
Staff Recorder