

MINUTES

ELKHART COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

PUBLIC MEETING OF THE COMMISSION AND BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Friday, January 8, 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. R. Jenkins, Commission
Mr. S. Baker, Commission
Mr. K. Janowsky, Commission
Mr. A. Patel, Commission
Mr. L. King, Board of Directors
Ms. E. Billey, Board of Directors
Ms. K. Clarke, Board of Directors
Mr. B. Hoffer, Board of Directors
Mr. J. Siegmann, Board of Directors
Ms. D. Lawson, Executive Director
Mr. T. Mark, Staff Recorder
Ms. J. Miller-Barnhart, Staff

ABSENT: Mr. D. Bearss, Board of Directors
Ms. G. Patel, Commission

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ms. B. Ronzone called meeting to order at 8:07 a.m. Mr. Jenkins participated in the meeting via telephone.

II. APPROVE NOVEMBER MINUTES

Motion to approve the minutes of the November 2015 meeting was made by Mr. J. Siegmann. Seconded by Mr. D. Shoup. A vote was taken and it passed with all in favor

III. FINANCIAL REPORT

Ms. K. Clarke gave the financial report. She said the CVB had \$600,000 in cash on-hand, but that \$90,000 was being held for Vibrant Communities. Prepaid expenses were up a little because of new software, conferences, dues and subscriptions. The CVB received \$860,000 by direct deposit, catching us up on room tax collected in 2015 that was held by county as an

overage from the amount budgeted then released following the budget year. Ms. D. Lawson said the CVB projects conservatively on tax revenue. The money is accounted for in the 2016 budget.

Ms. E. Billey moved to approve the financial report. Seconded by Mr. K. Janowsky. A vote was taken and it passed with all in favor.

IV. BUREAU REPORT

Ms. D. Lawson reviewed the 2015 business plan and distributed a one-sheet graphic highlighting specific results. The CVB achieved its major goals, and only in a couple places just missed reaching certain activity measures. The economy was strong in 2015, and it was a great year for room nights with almost 450,000 room nights sold and \$3 million in visitor spending from Heritage Trail. The CVB also spent \$200,000 in sponsorship on local events and festivals.

Ms. D. Lawson presented the 2016 business plan, noting changes made from previous plans to make it easier to read and understand. She called attention to the key initiatives, items that are over and above the CVB's customary program of work. There are four pillars — destination marketing, connectivity, quality of place, destination development.

There will be a special sponsorship program for Indiana Bicentennial. There will also be a new effort with the city of Elkhart to leverage the CVB's investment with \$100,000 to help advertising on the Indiana Toll Road's east and west entry areas and perhaps billboards. The funding the city is investing comes from a tax incremental financing fund to market the area. There will also be further attention given improving the appearance of the Exit 92 gateway and research into potential uses in the area. The CVB will also place more of a focus on outdoor recreation and expect it to work well with Exit 92 marketing efforts. Ms. D. Lawson will serve on MACOG Active Transportation Plan.

On the connectivity pillar of the business plan, the focus will be on the Heritage Trail. Ms. D. Lawson said in 2016 the travel guide and other materials will not be called "Amish Country," but "Heritage Trail Adventures." The Amish Country and Quilt Gardens names will still be prominent. The change is the result of ongoing work in the last decade to build cities and towns as a destination. This change will serve as a bridge. As part of the Vibrant Communities initiative, Ms. D. Lawson said we likely will come out with a countywide brand. She anticipates some parties may object, but the CVB isn't taking away the Amish Country brand but trying to create something that every city and town can fit under.

Ms. E. Billey said that kind of marketing will add so much diversity and bring more people to Amish Country. The CVB staff asked themselves: "Is Amish Country a brand or a product?" Ms. D. Lawson said the staff decided it was a product — an experience people want to have that is still a huge draw. She said just because Amish Country is not a brand doesn't mean it's not important. Visitors who come here aren't "purists"; they don't want to do *just* Amish Country.

The quality of place pillar includes Vibrant Communities. Ms. D. Lawson encouraged everyone to sign up and attend the Jan. 26 kickoff. She handed out copies of Peter Kageyama's book "Love Where You Live."

Ms. D. Lawson introduced Ms. J. Miller-Barnhart for a slideshow presentation on new technology initiatives. Ms. J. Miller-Barnhart described new ways of customizing the experience when visitors come to the website. The home page will be enhanced website to display more relevant information based on the user's travel preferences, location and search activity. The Get Smart platform will detect a website user's behavior, their location, and their prior activity before on website. Local website visitors won't be presented info on lodging, but rather things to do.

Ms. J. Miller-Barnhart also destination mobile concierge, a destination-wide mobile app that will allow people to customize experience and present information based on time at destination, location and interests. The app can promote events and messages via push notifications, and will provide maps and directions based on user location. The app will be heavily promoted to encourage downloads.

Ms. J. Miller-Barnhart said the website and app will be launched in the spring. The app does not take the place of an earlier app, which focused on downtown Elkhart. The new app will connect with the CVB database so that information always stays current. App vendor will adapt/change as technology evolves. Partners will be encouraged to notify and promote special events and promotions.

Ms. J. Miller-Barnhart will have a presence on Yelp and Wave, a mapping app used by travelers. An initial test of Waze yielded some impressive results.

Returning to the Vibrant Communities topic, Ms. D. Lawson talked about the initiative to increase the innkeepers tax by 1 percent. She proposed that the additional money raised could be used on a communications program related to Vibrant Communities — to talk about the transformational change happening in Elkhart County. The program would be intended to influence the opinions of people who live in our area and in the region, also communicating to other areas of Indiana to attract business and talent. Ms. D. Lawson said she has talked with potential investors to gauge interest if CVB had access to \$300,000 to \$400,000, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Ms. D. Lawson said an omnibus bill is going through the Indiana Legislature. Language authorizing increase to 6 percent from 5 percent would be added. Leadership in the Indiana Legislature has indicated that they're open to adding this language to the omnibus bill. If in agreement, the next step is to have more conversations with local stakeholders. Ms. D. Lawson said many local officials, are already in support. Mr. J. Siegmann observed that 5-6 percent is well below market. Mr. L. King asked how many other communities involved, and Ms. D. Lawson said it is only Elkhart County and Fort Wayne presently. Mr. S. Baker asked if the goal was for 1 percent to go to communications. Ms. D. Lawson said with partners' investment as much as \$1 million could be committed over three years. The phased-in program would include

the first year to communicate with residents, the second year expanded to targeted areas and the third year to be a broader program, all primarily through digital channels. The new tax would take effect July 1 if passed and Elkhart County probably wouldn't see any revenue until October or later. Ms. D. Lawson said the main reason for pursuing the increase is to fund a new program. Mr. B. Hoffer observed that for future the CVB will need to account for the increased revenue in its budget. Mr. K. Janowsky asked how innkeepers felt about the idea. Ms. D. Lawson said the general feeling is that 1 percent is palatable, but not higher. Mr. A. Patel said he was not initially in support of the proposal, but feels the focus on communications is a good thing. Ms. D. Lawson could not yet identify the partners but that it's important that the CVB is providing the leadership. Mr. L. King said it makes sense to put more money into something that is working. Mr. A. Patel noted that in earlier discussion of the increase that wasn't a direction for use of the money but now there is one.

Mr. L. King asked for a motion from the board to support an increase of the Elkhart County innkeeper tax from 5 percent to 6 percent. Mr. J. Siegmann made the motion. Mr. B. Hoffer seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

Ms. B. Ronzone asked for a motion from the commission to support an increase of the Elkhart County innkeeper tax from 5 percent to 6 percent. Mr. D. Shoup made the motion. Mr. R. Jenkins seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

V. VOTE TO ELECT OFFICERS

Ms. B. Ronzone read slate of officers for the commission: president, Beth Ronzone; vice president, Dan Shoup; and secretary/treasurer, Rick Jenkins. Mr. R. Jenkins moved to accept the slate as presented. Mr. D. Shoup seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

Mr. B. Hoffer read the slate of officers for the board: president, Levi King; vice president, Eleanor Billey; secretary/treasurer, Kim Clarke. Ms. K. Clarke moved to accept the slate as presented. Mr. J. Siegmann seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

VI. ADOPTION

Mr. L. King asked for a motion from the board to adopt the 2016 business plan as presented. Mr. B. Hoffer made the motion. Ms. K. Clarke seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

Ms. B. Ronzone asked for a motion from the commission to adopt the 2016 business plan as presented. Mr. K. Janowsky made the motion. Mr. A. Patel seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

Mr. L. King asked for a motion from the board to adopt the 2016 budget as presented. Ms. E. Billey made the motion. Ms. K. Clarke seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

Ms. B. Ronzone asked for a motion from the commission to adopt the 2016 budget as presented. Mr. A. Patel made the motion. Mr. R. Jenkins seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

After the voting, Mr. J. Siegmann left the meeting room.

VII. OTHER BUSINESS

Ms. D. Lawson invited board and commission members to join her and Mr. L. King from Jan. 19-20 on a trip to Indianapolis to meet with state legislators, including participating in a tourism caucus on Jan. 20.

VIII. SET 2016 MEETINGS

As meeting on the second Friday of every other month at 8 a.m. still works for everyone, the meeting schedule for the remainder of 2016 was affirmed for March 11, May 13, July 8, September 9 and November 11.

XI. ADJOURN

Mr. D. Shoup moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. K. Janowsky seconded. A vote was taken with all in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 9:27 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Terry Mark
Staff Recorder