

Visitors Promotion Committee
August 15, 2018
MINUTES

In attendance: Lynne Ireland, Amy Dickerson, Jeff Cunningham, Aaron Stitt, Roland Morgan, Susan Madsen, Carl Eskridge, Bill Avery, Nicole Fleck-Tooze, and Kerry Eagan

Staff attending: Derek Feyerherm, Jeff Maul, Ron Kalkwarf and Justine Petsch

Call to Order and Introductions:

Lynne Ireland called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. and introductions were made. Ireland welcomed Stitt to the VPC.

Prairie Corridor/Haines Branch Grant Request:

Prior to hearing the grant request, Eagan gave an update of the improvement fund balance. Eagan noted the current fund balance is \$2,240,446.59 with obligations in FY 19 equaling \$2,043,113.66. The anticipated annual revenue of the fund is \$1,700,000. Eagan continued stating there are \$1.5 million in obligations for FY20 and \$1.8 million in FY21. Based on the anticipated annual revenue, Eagan stated Dennis Meyer believes there is \$1 million available for grants moving forward and these figures encompass the amount set aside for bid fees and mini-grants. Maul referred to these estimated expenditures on the balance fund handout. Being no questions, Ireland welcomed the first presenters.

Lynn Johnson, Sara Hartzell and Nicole Fleck-Tooze with Lincoln Parks and Recreation department presented the Prairie Corridor/Haines Branch Grant request. Johnson showed a map of the Lincoln and Omaha metro area which included the boundaries of the Salt Creek Watershed and the area that contains the Prairie Corridor on Haines Branch. He noted that the Corridor is unique with its tallgrass prairie. On a zoomed in map of Lancaster County, Johnson noted how the Haines Branch is southwest of Lincoln limits but feeds into the interconnected trail system which allows visitors and residents to get anywhere in Lincoln they want. The Prairie Corridor extends from Pioneers Park, west to Conestoga State Recreation area and south down to Spring Creek Prairie. Johnson stated this project began in 2012 and there are three pillars including 1) conservation and habitat development, 2) trail and economic opportunity, and 3) education/outreach and research. Currently 800 acres have been acquired, of which 100 acres include high diversity tallgrass prairie. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is partnering with them to study the benefit of pollinator species and to help design the corridor to include habitat diversity. Hartzell said that this project will provide ecotourism to Lancaster County that we currently don't have. Pioneers Park has 400,000 annual visitors and Spring Creek Prairie has 14,000 visitors. Hartzell referred to results from the Nebraska Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) survey that stated of 3,500 Nebraska respondents, 26% of Nebraska said they would travel to experience outdoor recreation area. The study reported that Nebraskan who answered the survey spend on average \$647.39 per year on transportation to outdoor activities, \$122.11 per year on trail equipment and \$63.40 per year on wildlife observation equipment. The report also showed that 1/3 responded that Nebraska does not have enough outdoor opportunities. Hartzell said this project will generate economic impact for Lincoln, Denton, and the rural area in the middle. She noted visitors could hop on one of the new bikes as part of the BikeLNK project and head out on these trails. She referred to the success that small towns around Lincoln have had such as Eagle with its 'Nacho Ride'. The trail will be approximately twelve miles and could accommodate a half marathon between the two communities in Lancaster County. Hartzell

referred to a report from the Outdoor Foundation saying that 48.8% of American participated in outdoor activities in 2016. These participants lead to economic impact and referred to a study conducted by Dr. Eric Thompson from the Bureau of Business Research at UNL that looks at similar projects in Iowa and Wisconsin. His study shows that 14.5% of trail visits lead to overnight stays that generates \$1.84 million in economic impact annually. The impact of day trips is \$1.85 million and overall economic impact of visitors to Lancaster County as result of this project is estimated at \$4.3 million annually. Fleck-Tooze showed a map of the Prairie Corridor trail and noted the trail within Pioneers Park is finished. She reminded the VPC this is a legacy project and will be done in phases over several years. More land area acquisitions need to happen to complete the trail but they have enough already to begin segments and have the land to create trail heads until the trail is completed. Fleck-Tooze said the specific ask is \$120,000 over a three-year period. The timing of the ask is good due to a matching grant from the National Environmental Trust. The request in front of the VPC is specific to trail construction and not land acquisitions. They currently have twenty partners in place but the VPC grant is a good way for Lancaster County to be involved. GPTN funds will be paired with the VPC Grant to go toward the matching Recreational Trails Program grants. They feel that a VPC Grant will help the Lincoln Parks Foundation to go after private funds.

Ireland opened the floor to questions by the VPC members. Eskridge asked if the discussion to close existing railroad tracks from downtown to Pioneers Park will help with land acquisition. Hartzell said that moving the tracks will create quieter neighborhoods and provide increased safety. This will also abandon the rail routes that could be used including the connection between Pioneers Park and Conestoga. Dickerson asked what the current visitor experience is like on the trails. Fleck-Tooze said the trails are crushed limestone with certain areas paved due to safety. She said they are mindful of the aesthetics and aim to keep the natural habitat. Madsen asked if the trail will be used by hiker or bikers. Hartzell said both will use this trail. Johnson said eventually there will be interpretation areas along the way which will create interest. Dickerson asked what the money will be specifically used for. Fleck-Tooze said the VPC funds would be used for the engineering study and construction of the trail. Hartzell reminded that no VPC funds would be used for land acquisitions. Petsch said she has not been to Spring Creek Prairie and asked if there is a physical structure there. Fleck-Tooze noted they have a visitor center on the property. Eskridge asked how many total acres Spring Creek Prairie is. Hartzell answered 800 acres of virgin prairie land but have additional conservation easements around the property. Fleck-Tooze said public easements will be used to give access to the trail until it is completed between Lincoln and Denton. Dickerson asked when this project started. Fleck-Tooze said the Prairie Corridor was part of the city's Comprehensive Plan in 2011, part of the 2012 master plan and received first funding from the VPC and NET trust grant in 2013. They currently are on phase three of the project. Stitt asked if there will be events planned to use the trail. Hartzell said Spring Creek Prairie and Pioneers Park have already had discussions on this. They believe they could do a half marathon between the two properties or a full marathon if runners go down to Spring Creek Prairie and return back to Pioneers Park. Johnson said Pink Gorilla Events, Angry Cow Adventures and others will be able to build events around the trail. Stitt asked how many hotel rooms are currently utilized by visitors to Spring Creek Prairie or Pioneers Park. Fleck-Tooze said this has not been quantified but they know the number of people visiting based off usage and the Thompson study. Eagan stated Spring Creek Prairie may have more information to answer this. Maul said that travel writers focus on ecotourism and the trail could bring life to new events. Feyerherm stated the CVB sales team has referred to the trail before and have used places such as Spring Creek Prairie in recruiting events including the League of Conservation Voters. Petsch asked what the timeline is for completion of the whole project. Fleck-Tooze reminded that this is a legacy

project and may take 10-15 years to finish the trail, but a lot depends on land acquisition and they need to be sensitive to the wishes of current land owners. Madsen asked what the maintenance and upkeep of the trail will be. Hartzell said that limestone which is being used is best when factoring in rain and it has less of an impact on natural areas. The trails can be dragged to help smooth them out and have gravel added as needed. They will be using a geofabric to help in weeks not coming up on the trail.

There being no further questions the presenters were excused. Fleck-Tooze excused herself from the room to allow for discussion. Madsen asked if the VPC had given grants previously to the project. Maul and Eagan both stated yes and that the projects were finished quickly. Ireland said there is an advantage to them not asking for the full amount upfront but being willing to spread it over three years. Dickerson asked for confirmation that the VPC funds will go toward the grant match for the \$900,000 grant. It was confirmed. Morgan asked if this project will assist the CVB in going after events. Maul said that Lincoln has one of the top trail systems and projects like this are an advantage to tourism. Feyerherm stated that the completed trail will help in recruit running events as it will prevent the need for costly road closures. Madsen asked if the project would move forward without the VPC grant. Maul said he did not know. Eagan said that the last grant was written that VPC funds would only be given contingent on them being successful in getting a NET grant. Stitt asked how wide the trail would be. Petsch said usually they are wide enough to allow two bikers side by side. Madsen asked who is financially liable for the trail. Petsch said Iowa recently had issues with people putting out fish line to be a trip hazard. Dickerson referred back to Madsen's question and said that liability goes back to who owns the trail. Eagan said the county would not own it and perhaps it was the city but noted there are public laws in place to protect against liability on trails. Dickerson asked what years for sure the request was for. Maul said it was three years, beginning in 2019. Dickerson made the motion to approve the grant request of \$120,000 by Lincoln Parks and Recreation department over three years starting in 2019 contingent on the awarding of the NET grant. Morgan seconded the motion. Being no further discussion, Ireland called for a vote. Dickerson, Madsen, Morgan, Stitt, Cunningham, and Ireland voted yes. Perrett was absent. Motion carried.

Capitol Courtyard Gardens Grant Request:

Ireland welcomed the group to meeting. Attending on behalf of the grant request was Susan Larsen-Rodenburg, Bob Ripley, DiAnna Schimek, Sandy Scofield and Bob Wickersham. Schimek noted that Ripley heads the office of the Capitol Architect and Scofield, Wickersham, and herself are former state senators. She went on to say that this project is to build out the capitol courtyards and create an endowment for future needs. During the original construction of the capitol, the fountains were not added as originally designed due to funding, but landscaping did happen. The landscaping stopped in the 1960's due to funding and the courtyards became open grassy areas. Schimek said the state gave \$3.1 million in 2017 to add the courtyard fountains and they were presented last September as part of the state's sesquicentennial celebration. The courtyards will be considered complete once the landscaping is done as originally planned by Bertram Goodhue and Ernst Herminghaus. Ripley said that the courtyards were designed by Herminghaus to reflect the variety of color and pattern in the building itself. The landscape was considered to be as important to the capitol and the mosaics inside. Ripley said the landscaping surrounding the building was meant to be subtle and more exciting in the center courtyards. They have been able to go off of Herminghaus' original drawings for each courtyard as all four were meant to be different. They all will have shrubs and trees around the perimeter which was meant to keep people from looking directly into the offices. Flowerbeds will be in the middle with knee high trimmed shrubs around the walkways. Dickerson asked if the flowers were perennials or annuals. Ripley said they will be annuals as they were meant to be

changed out. He also commented that the capitol building is a national historic landmark and at the time it received its designation, was one of few where the building and the landscape were both recognized as part of the designation. Schimek then went over the various components of the project which includes sub-soil irrigation systems, bed preparations, annuals, bulbs, tree, shrubs and an endowment of \$1 million, for a total cost of \$1.4 million. She went on to say that the courtyards will be a unique attraction and will help the CVB recruit events and visitors. Schimek noted that when she was in the legislature they hosted the Midwest Legislative Conference and would have done events in the courtyard if they would have been finished and more attractive. She also said that the public will be able to do events in the courtyards once completed. She believes visitors will return to the capitol to see the courtyards as it is rare to see comparable gardens in any other state capitol building. These gardens could be put together along with the Sunken Gardens, arboretums, etc to create a tour. Schimek said that 100,000 people currently visit the capitol building annually and they believe that the project will have a \$6.16 million economic impact based off the multiplier on the grant document. They believe that there will be a 20% increase in the number of visitors once the project is completed. Schimek said the VPC grant will help leverage private donors to step forth to finish out the fundraising.

Ireland opened the floor for questions. Madsen asked if the fountains were installed and currently running. Ripley said yes and that the water bubbles and circles down into the bowls. The bowls themselves are eight feet in diameter and after an article in the newspaper reported that the colorful tiles inside the bowls were not installed due to funding, that an anonymous donor donated the money to complete these. The colors in each of the bowls include gold and vary based on the courtyard and were designed from the colors of a Native American medicine wheel. He said that the water is always moving, creating an amazing sound of rushing water. Madsen asked if there are adequate lights in the courtyard for the fountains. Ripley said the capitol is a daylight building so there is not a need for additional lighting. Dickerson asked Ripley if all the money was raised for the fountain tiles to be installed. He said the funding is complete for that. Dickerson asked what the hours of the building are. Ripley said that due to security reasons, the building is open during the day but that building hours are adapted as needed for private events. Petsch asked if the funding from the VPC affects the timing of this project. Ripley said it does and Schimek stated that the planting of the courtyards will correspond with the current HVAC project and the installation of new windows. Dickerson asked what years the \$200,000 request was for. Schimek stated that they would like the \$200,000 this year and the following year. Maul asked if this meant the fall of 2019 and 2020 to cover plants, irrigation and maintenance. Schimek confirmed Maul's statement. Cunningham asked if there were other bids outside of Campbell's Nursery. Ripley said not at this time as their primary focus has been raising the money. He noted that Kathy Campbell is a former state senator and the Campbells have been generous with the quote. Stitt asked what the exact hours of the building are. Ripley said the building is open 7am-6pm Monday-Friday, 10am-5pm on Saturday, and 1-5pm on Sundays. The courtyard that is accessible through the café is subject to the hours that is open. Stitt asked how many private events they have currently in these courtyards. Ripley said he did not have these figures with him but did say that large events will not be able to occur in the courtyards moving forward, due to they are no longer wide open spaces. He also said that alcohol in the courtyards would only be allowed in the one accessible through the café. Stitt asked what the color concepts were for each courtyard. Ripley said he did not know this with him but that the plans do have four distinct looks. Stitt asked if the work for this project could occur with in-house labor. Ripley said that the maintenance of the space will be absorbed by the state but they don't have enough staff to plant the courtyards so need outside contractors. Avery questioned how much the endowment will

grow if plants are needed to be changed annually. Schimek said that the funds will be invested through the Nebraska Endowment Council and should allow up to \$40,000 to be removed annually for the replanting. Wickersham said he believes that \$40,000 is a comfortable amount to remove as the fund is slated to have between 6%-6.5% return annually. There most likely will be a stipulation that only earned income can be removed from the endowment and no more than 4% of the total fund could be used annually. Dickerson questioned that \$40,000 would be enough annually for the replanting. Ripley said it would. Madsen said to make sure pollinator plants were installed. Ripley said these will be included. Dickerson asked what the marketing plan is, noting there is budgeted funds for this. Ripley said most will come through staff doing tour and the help of bus tours and travel/media writers. Dickerson followed up by asking who updates their Facebook page. Ripley said most of this including website content is done by Roxanne Smith. Dickerson questioned what will happen with the project if the endowment is not in place. Ripley said he does not have a projection of how fast the money will be raised. Wickersham said the optimistic projection is the installment of one courtyard by 2020 and that at least the annuals will be planted in the others with the \$200,000 being requested. The other courtyards will have to wait on the perennials being planted until the HVAC project is further enough along to ensure no damage to the courtyards. He said that he is confident that enough money will be raised by 2020 for all of this to occur. Wickersham also said he hopes that the maintenance costs moving forward will not be as high as project. He noted that private dollars will be easier to raise if there is evidence public bodies like Lancaster County step forward with support of the project. Dickerson asked if the \$200,000 request could be paid out with \$100,000 in 2019 and the same in 2020 or if it could be skewed with one years being paid more than the other. Wickersham said they can make either work as they already have over \$120,000 raised and only need \$300,000 to do the bare installation. Cunningham asked if the quotes for work are projected to increase by 2020. Wickersham said they have budgeted more in case costs go up from original projections. Dickerson asked if they would be willing to take all \$200,000 in 2020 instead of breaking it up. Schimek said they would be fine with that. Madsen asked what will happen if the HVAC project is ahead of schedule and allows construction before 2020. Schimek said they would like to have the money committed early and Ripley said that 2019 is the earliest he first courtyard could be done. Maul questioned that with an eight year HVAC project, will anything occur that will affect the courtyard projects. Ripley said no as the windows are being changed out now in the courtyards and by the time the courtyards are completed they will be working on the tower which will have no impact on the courtyards. Maul thanked Ripley and his staff for their continued support of tourism. Avery recognized Ripley stating he has the best job in the state.

Being no further questions, the capitol committee was excused. Morgan said he would like to see the building more accessible as this is a significant ask. Stitt said he would like the courtyards to be utilized, maybe even charging for rental as a fundraiser for the project. Ireland said that the capitol is challenged with outside events due to the rules in place to protect the building. Avery said the capitol building is the people's house and people should not be charged for using it. Madsen stated she thinks this will bring people in to see the completed courtyards. Maul said this will bring people back to Lincoln to revisit the capitol. Ireland asked Eagan if the money can be given in 2018 with the construction not occurring until 2020. Eagan said yes and that the VPC has done this frequently with the larger multi-year projects. Maul said he felt that if the construction was not to occur until 2023 or later to hold off on awarding the grant but since the construction is fairly soon it is safe to award the grant. Stitt stated it was a great project and thanked Ireland for explaining the limitations of hosting events at the capitol. Ireland said the design is great but people in the courtyard will be limited due to the sidewalks. Dickerson said it sounded like giving \$75,000 in 2019 and \$125,000 in 2020 would be

okay and that works better for the fund balance. Avery said he believed they would be fine with however the breakdown of funds would be. Madsen made a motion to assign \$75,000 in 2019 with \$125,000 in 2020 to the capitol courtyard project. Cunningham seconded the motion. With no further discussion, Ireland called for a vote. Dickerson, Madsen, Morgan, Stitt and Cunningham voted yes. Ireland abstained. Perrett was absent. Motion carried. Following the vote, Cunningham excused himself from the remainder of the meeting.

Approval of May Minutes:

Ireland asked for approval of the May minutes. Dickerson made a motion to approve the May minutes. Morgan seconded the motion. There being no discussion or corrections, Ireland called for a vote. Dickerson, Madsen, Morgan, and Ireland voted yes. Stitt abstained. Perrett and Cunningham were absent. Motion carried.

Approval of July Financials:

Kalkwarf reminded everyone that the CVB budget coincides with Lancaster County's and runs from July through June. The financials presented were for the FY18-19 fiscal year and covers the month of July. Kalkwarf reported that revenue was \$154,172 with expenses of \$172,186 with a net loss of \$18,014. This net loss is primarily due to timing of expenses but will turn around in future months. Ireland asked if there were any questions and without any, asked for a motion. Dickerson made a motion to accept the July financials as presented. Morgan seconded the motion. With no further discussion, Ireland called for a vote. Dickerson, Madsen, Morgan, Stitt, and Ireland voted yes. Perrett and Cunningham were absent. Motion carried.

Directors Report:

Maul stated that the 2018 Craft Beer Tour was going well with all 750 passports distributed within the first month. Completed passports are coming in with the first 100 receiving a pint glass, compliments of Empyrean Brewing Company. Maul said that the basketball and volleyball building at Speedway Village is now open and the CVB has been in discussions with Speedway about use of the facility for other sports as well. Feyerherm noted that there is a change in management with Dr. Robert Lane leaving the facility. Maul said the traffic at the visitor's center has been consistent this summer with people still coming in to check out the Abe Lincoln bobblehead. He said that the amount of travel writers coming to Lincoln has increased and the CVB is currently working on an upcoming travel writer trip put together by the Nebraska Tourism Commission. Maul stated it has been a busy summer with events including USA Volleyball, USA Wrestling, Formula SAE and USA Roller Sports. He noted that staff and community volunteers is essential to putting on these events and thanked those in the rooms for their involvement. Maul stated the final contract for NSAA Girls/Boys Basketball was receive which will take Lincoln through the 2022/23 season. A new CVB testimonial video is in the works and will be issued when it is ready. Maul stated that he continues to serve on the Nebraska Tourism Commission marketing committee which will release a new marketing plan at the Nebraska Travel Conference. The 2018 Visitors Guide is currently under production and Maul said that Lincoln has recently joined the Southeast Nebraska Tourism Council (SENTC). Maul said that there is a continued need for more baseball/softball facilities, but these projects are at a standstill. Maul commented that he has been talking with Lincoln Parks and Recreation about the Jensen Park complex as it is not as expensive as the one proposed for the Oak Lake Park area due to differing amenities. The fall will be a busy travel season for the CVB with Maul attending the Upper Midwest CVB Conference in Lake Geneva, WI and the Nebraska Travel Conference in Nebraska City. Maul said the CVB continues to work with the Aradius Group on its new marketing campaign

which includes both print and digital ads. There will also be billboards place in Minnesota and South Dakota through Lamar Advertising.

Feyerherm gave a sales update. The CVB sales team has issued 114 sales leads for 107,243 room nights with 52% being regional/national business and 14% being new business. Feyerherm noted that the percentage of new business is down due to the multi-year contract with NSAA and SCCA. Additionally, nine other proposals were submitted for consideration and there are 33 leads for 10,733 hotel room nights pending on a decision. Feyerherm stated 83 events have been booked for 98,687 hotel room nights with 51% regional/national and 8% new business. He stated new business was down for the same reason associated with leads. Feyerherm noted a major emphasis is finding events for 2019 as this has been difficult to fill for the last several years. He said that the CVB sales team has increased the outreach to prospective organization and past events by 16% and 15% respectfully, over 2017. Fall is a busy tradeshow season with Going on Faith having just occurred and Small Market Meetings, TEAMS, USOC SportsLink and Meetings Quest scheduled over the next few months. Feyerherm said that the CVB is trying to find a way to better track business that is recruited through these tradeshow but where the meeting planner use a third-party sourcing site such as CVENT instead of the CVB's traditional lead sourcing software. Feyerherm said that the staff have been involved with several local organizing committees over the summer, including Kelsey Meyer serving as a committee co-chair for the 2020 ABA Convention in Omaha. Several of the CVB staff are working toward receiving industry certifications including the Certified Travel Industry Specialist (CTIS) for Meyer and Certified Faith-Based Meeting Professional (CFMP) for Rachel Meyer. Feyerherm said the CVB will be launching new Lincoln.org listing profiles where attractions, restaurants, and other businesses will be able to update their own information. New sales and group tour materials have been created and are being used by the CVB. Feyerherm stated there has been a significant increase in new general managers and sales directors at hotels. He said he is trying to meet with many of them as most are not from the Lincoln area. Topics include discussing with these new managers the importance of rate integrity in Lincoln. Feyerherm stated that Meyer will be out in September and October on maternity leaves. Feyerherm asked if there were questions for himself or Maul. There were none.

New Business:

Ireland asked if there was new business anyone wanted to bring up. There was none.

Adjourn:

Being no further business, Ireland asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Madsen made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Stitt seconded the motion. Being no further discussion, Ireland called for a vote. Dickerson, Madsen, Morgan, Stitt, and Ireland voted yes. Perrett and Cunningham were absent. Motion carried. The meeting was adjourned at 3:37pm.