

**Visitors Promotion Committee  
Meeting at Lincoln Chamber of Commerce  
August 18, 2021  
MINUTES**

In Attendance: Jeff Barclay, Amy Dickerson, Jason Hoehne, Tara Knuth, Aaron Stitt, Dave Derbin, Roma Amundson and Kate Bolz

Absent: Jeff Cunningham, Susan Madsen, Tammy Ward and Michelle Waite

Staff Attending: Jeff Maul, Derek Feyerherm, Ron Kalkwarf, Todd Wiltgen and Diane Pryor

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

Chairman Aaron Stitt called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. He welcomed everyone and asked the new members, Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne, to introduce themselves to the group. Barclay said he was born in Lincoln and is currently owner of Pillar restaurant group. They began with Mr. Goodcents and later added in the Venue, Piedmont Bistro and now Cactus. They do restaurant serving as well as catering, he said. Barclay also said he's excited to be on the committee and thanked everyone for allowing him to be a part of the group. Hoehne introduced himself saying he has been in Lincoln since 2007 and graduated from UNL. He is the COO of the family-owned New Victorian Hotel Group with six locations in Nebraska and Iowa. He also said he is excited to serve on the committee. Stitt asked everyone else to introduce themselves and for that to serve as the roll call.

**Approval of June Minutes:**

Chairman Stitt asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the June minutes that had been sent out ahead of time in an email to the group. There were no questions and he asked for a motion to approve the June minutes. Tara Knuth made a motion to approve the minutes and Amy Dickerson seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

**Approval of CVB Audit:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the audit to the committee saying it was based on the calendar year 2020 which follows the Chamber fiscal year. He said there is a lot of information to read and to get back to he or Jeff with any questions. Kalkwarf drew everyone's attention to page three in the audit, the Opinion, as it said the financial statements are presented fairly and clean. It is a good audit, he said. Jeff Maul added there were no changes and apologized saying we just received the audit yesterday. He also said he'd be happy to answer any questions they might have. Kate Bolz said hearing clean audit is a good thing; congrats to you all! Stitt asked for a motion to approve the audit. Knuth made a motion to approve the audit as presented and Dickerson seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

**Approval of July Financials:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials first explaining how the financials run on a fiscal year even though the audit was done on a calendar year. He then began showing the CVB Profit and Loss Budget vs. Actual

for the month of July, 2021. Total Income was \$183,448, under forecasted budget by \$78,165. Room Tax – CVB is at 35% of budget and that is because of ARPA funds coming in from the county. We did request reduced funding from Lancaster County in July because of our PPP loan. Moving down to expenses, Total Expense was at \$231,653 and just over by \$2,410 so right on budget. He noted in Sports Event Promotion we already hit the budget with \$100,000 for the rodeo. On the bottom line, Net Income was actually a loss of \$48,205 due to pending approval of PPP loan forgiveness. This will move to revenue once approved. Maul added a note regarding bid fees. He explained, for the benefit of the new members, the bid fees are used to pursue events and to pay the marketing grants. He said it is a clean process. Stitt asked why the Professional Fees were double the budget amount and Kalkwarf said he would check into it and get back to him.

Stitt then asked for a motion to accept the financials. Dickerson moved to accept the financials as presented. The motion was seconded by Hoehne. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

Stitt asked Dave Derbin to give an update on the lodging tax and where we're at with it. Derbin said beginning June 1st we have \$917K in the improvement fund. The estimate for the fiscal year is \$1.5M in income and expenses/commitments equal \$1.9M so we will be cutting it close. The promotion fund has a healthy balance, he said. Maul added, of the 4% lodging tax the VPC receives, 2% of it goes to the promotion fund and 2% goes to the improvement fund which used the money for commitments including grants we've promised to several entities and still have outstanding. For now, Maul said, we are not touching the improvement fund so we can catch up on the commitments since we fell behind in funds during the pandemic. Right now, we are using the 2% of the promotion fund to give micro grants presented to the Lancaster County Visitors Promotion Committee in the amount of \$5,000 for the sole purpose of marketing. He said ARPA funds are helping with the operations. Dickerson asked what is the length of time we'll receive that and the amount. Derbin said five years, until 2026.

### **Visitors Promotion Marketing Grants Review:**

#### **Lincoln Calling:**

The first grant request reviewed by the Committee was for Lincoln Calling, a non-profit that advances music, art and innovation through cultural experiences. They have been in Lincoln since 2004. Stitt asked if there were any questions or points of discussion. Maul said they requested \$5K and he has run through each request and done a pre-approval to make sure they fulfilled all the requirements in the application process. Barclay asked how many of these \$5K grants can we give. Derbin said we have \$100K in the budget for them and we will go through this process two times a year. There was no further discussion and Stitt asked for a motion to approve granting the \$5K to Lincoln Calling. Barclay made the first motion and Dickerson seconded it. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

#### **Lincoln Children's Museum:**

The Game Day Play Dates project sponsored by the Lincoln Children's Museum is requesting \$5K and Stitt asked Knuth, Director of the museum, if she would like to talk about the program. It was allowed but she would abstain from the approval vote. Knuth said this is an awesome opportunity for childcare in downtown Lincoln on most Husker football home gamedays. You can drop your child off at the museum during the game. They plan to make it a VIP experience for the child. She said she will market it through

social media and people are asking them about it already. Barclay asked if it was a flat rate and she said yes. If the game is over a mealtime, that would be an extra charge to feed the children. Stitt asked how many spots will they have for each game and she said 60. Kate Bolz said she thinks this is a great idea! There were no other questions or comments. Stitt asked for a motion to approve the grant of \$5K to the Lincoln Children's Museum. Dickerson made the first motion to approve the request and Stitt seconded it. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne and Stitt voted yes. Knuth abstained. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

### **Lux Center:**

The Lux Center for the Arts requested \$5K for EMERGE LNK Mural and Street Arts Festival taking place the end of August. Maul said this will be fun for visitors to drive around and look at all the murals that will be a part of this festival. Art is popular and really thriving. Stitt asked if there was any discussion and there was none. He asked for a motion to approve the \$5K grant request. Hoehne made the first motion to approve the grant request and Barclay seconded it. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

### **Nebraska Communities Playhouse:**

The Nebraska Communities Playhouse in Hickman requested a grant of \$5K to promote their grand opening this December. We gave them a grant a couple years ago and this is exciting to see them opening now, Maul added. Hoehne asked if we get any tax revenue from the ticket sales. Derek Feyerherm said they would only collect state sales tax and local tax if Hickman has local tax there. Feyerherm also added Kelsey Meyer works on organizing Christmas bus tours and this is one of the events she adds to their list of stops on the tour. There were no other questions or discussion, so Stitt asked for a motion to approve the grant request of \$5K. Dickerson made the first motion to approve the request and Stitt seconded the motion. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

### **Nebraska Repertory Theatre:**

The next request of \$5K came from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and its Nebraska Repertory Theatre. They will use the money to promote a theatrical event about William Shakespeare that they will be presenting in October. Maul said the targeted audience is students and young adults within a 100-mile radius. There were no other questions or discussions so Stitt asked for a motion to approve the grant request of \$5K. Barclay made the first motion to approve the request and Dickerson seconded the motion. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

### **Nebraska State Museum:**

The last request was from University of Nebraska-Lincoln for NE State Museum. It will be for a Morrill Hall promotion – *Hidden Prairie* exhibit. It will mainly feature prairie with little or no animals. The main purpose is to bring interest to Morrill Hall. There were no other questions or discussion, so Stitt asked for a motion to approve the grant request of \$5K. Hoehne made the first motion to approve the request and Knuth seconded the motion. With no further discussion, Stitt called for a vote. Barclay, Dickerson, Hoehne, Knuth and Stitt voted yes. Cunningham and Madsen were absent. Motion carried.

With that approval we concluded the grant requests and Maul thanked everyone for their participation.

### **Directors Report:**

Maul gave a VPC director's report saying this is the fun part where everyone gets a peek at what kind of projects and marketing we are doing. At the Visitors Center, at 7<sup>th</sup> and P, our numbers are coming back and people are coming in. Things are clicking. In July 2021 we had 713 total visitors. The demand for Lincoln continues to resonate in accolades we are seeing. A WalletHub study backs this up, saying Nebraska is the state with the 2<sup>nd</sup> quickest recovery from COVID-19. We were 2-3 months ahead of others, Maul said. Insurify's 2021 Best Cities for Trips named Lincoln the Top Road Trip Destination in Nebraska. We are a drive-time destination. He reminded everyone we are reusing our 2020 Visitor's Guide currently but the new Guide is in the development stages and we hope to have it available in late 2021/early 2022. There are big events and big returns for our industry in June, July and August. First of all, the National High School Finals Rodeo new this year was awesome! He asked Dickerson to give an update to the group about the rodeo. She said wow, what a ride! Thank you all for helping with the recovery. We had wind and the community helped them recover from the wind and rain. She couldn't believe how everyone rallied around and volunteered to help. The mayor, the governor and the county board were all out in support. Dickerson talked about the Room for the Whole Family campaign promoting hotels, the biggest rodeo with two arenas operating simultaneously, a lot of vendors and shoppers coming to town to shop, stay and eat, selling over 2,000 wristbands, the rodeo queens checking in to kick things off, meeting their marketing goals and sales up from local stores and restaurants. She said it was definitely a challenge but visitors were pleased and they had many good comments about a great first-year facility. We have a lot to be proud of here and it's easy to sell Lincoln, she said. Maul added adversity creates awareness because of everyone stepping up to volunteer when they were needed most. He also said he heard contestants were seen in Omaha at Top Golf and all over Lincoln and Omaha. He said to Dickerson, then you went right into the Super Fair and did it well.

Maul next talked about the Pinewood concert series coming back, youth sports citywide continuing to use our local hotels even during the pandemic and the Cornhusker State Games with a new event – E-SPORTS that was a huge success. They had it in Pinnacle Bank Arena and it was a spectacle. The National High School Coaches Association, a new event, was hosted at North Star High School. And finally, Maul said Garth Week. Lincoln was the place to be! We had Garth mania. There was a lot going on that week, too, with Pinewood's event, Lincoln on the Street and Zoofest along with Garth Brooks in Memorial Stadium on Saturday night. Maul added he would like to see a concert in the stadium every August and will advocate to the University for that.

Looking ahead we have Gravel Worlds on August 21<sup>st</sup>. This is gravel racing and a new form of racing that's really catching on. Also on the calendar is Husker football, basketball and volleyball, the Market-to-Market Relay on September 21<sup>st</sup>, returning this year – USA Wrestling 2021 Senior World Team Trials at Pinnacle Bank Arena on September 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. We will also be hosting Goldenride Bikefest on September 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> to Beatrice and back. The last event he touched on was Feyerherm's project SCCA Solo National Championships September 3-11<sup>th</sup>. Feyerherm said the numbers are up to what they were back in 2019. The 2021 Lincoln Craft Beer Tour kicked off August 13<sup>th</sup> and runs through November with 15 participating breweries and tour booklets available at the Visitors Center. You'll get a souvenir sticker to begin and a free pint glass once you've visited all 15 breweries. This beer tour replaces the Be A Tourist In Your Own Hometown campaign previously done, Maul said.

We have big projects on our horizon! Maul has been talking about baseball fields for a long time and we are hopeful some ARPA funds will be used for them. An announcement should be made in the next month or so. There will also be analysis needed of convention space needs and growth potential. The needs there

are dire, he said. Feasibility studies are being done. We are seeing a lot of interest in Lincoln as a home for new sports ventures with E-sports growing. We have seen the Cornhusker State Games event being our entry into a growing market nationwide. Pinnacle Bank Arena created a WOW of what we can do and ALLO provided high-speed internet that was a big part of our success.

The next part of Maul's report was on the hotel projects. The 139-room Holiday Inn Express (at 9<sup>th</sup> and O) opened on August 12<sup>th</sup> with a soft opening. They are now accepting guests and reservations. The 154-room Scarlet Hotel, a Marriott Tribute Property, is expected to have a fall/winter opening. It's been pushed back due to construction supply chain issues and schedules.

We are incredibly popular, Maul said, because our communications team is awesome. Our social media results are amazing. They produced a video feature about the National High School Finals Rodeo that reached over 10,000 people across our social media accounts. Advertising has picked up with resumption in all markets, printing and digital. Maul asked Knuth to update everyone on the safety on the streets in the neighborhood of the Lincoln Children's Museum. She said they had a meeting today of the Downtown Safety Group about getting a formal outreach person to help move the homeless to a reporting center. Todd Ogden with Downtown Lincoln Association is looking into this, she said. The big thing is we need a place for them to go to get them off the streets during the day. Maul commented that they are doing a good job. She said they are looking for a long-term solution. Barclay asked if it's true they can't be within 50 feet of an ATM. That is the case, Knuth said. Next, Maul asked everyone to take a look at the Southeast Nebraska Tourism Council guide in the packets. He is proud of it and said it will help you discover southeast Nebraska.

There are a couple conferences coming up that Maul will attend; the UMCVB Conference in Des Moines in September and the Nebraska Travel Conference in Grand Island in October.

A Lodging Tax Comparison table was presented showing the numbers for 2019, 2020 and 2021 and where we've been going from '19 to '21 with the 4% lodging tax. We were very low in April 2020 – just \$66,389.07. Those were dark days, he said. We were down 46% during the pandemic in 2020 and down 18% in 2021 January to June over the same time period in 2019. August should be record breaking and let's keep pushing forward.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next with a sales breakdown. The CVB issued 82 sales leads for 27,400 room nights. 50% of those leads are for new events that have not been here before. 45% of the leads are national events and 35% are regional events. We try to be at 50%, he said, so we are happy with those numbers. In 2019 there were 101 sales leads for 42,843. This will jump up because we have a lot going on now. Leads are slower during the summer months because the planners are holding the events and not planning right now. Contracts are still being moved from year to year as planners are still rescheduling events from the pandemic.

In booked business, we have 58 events booked for 19,350 room nights. 59% of booked rooms are new events and 50% are national events with 35% being regional events. In 2019 there were 75 events booked for 29,261 room nights. We are seeing a hesitation in getting organizers to sign contracts because of the delta variant of Covid. We did see our first major cancellation of 2022 citywide event with the Jehovah's Witness Convention at Pinnacle Bank Arena on July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend. They canceled too soon, in our opinion, Feyerherm said. Maul added that some are wanting virtual hybrid options and we are trying to stay away from that. In upcoming tradeshows, Feyerherm talked about the Small Market meetings geared towards the

association market held in September in Cheyenne. Also, we'll send Derek Bombeck to the TEAMS show in September in Atlantic City, NJ, as part of Sports Nebraska. There is also a Sports ETA Symposium in October in Birmingham. We have seen sports planners' attendance similar to pre-pandemic during these tradeshow.

Site visits/inspections continue at 2019 levels, which is great news. We have our Sports Nebraska annual meeting next week in Columbus to see what's our next steps to promote sports in the state. We are looking at other tradeshow that we should attend as part of this coalition. Sen. McDonnell is eyeing sporting events and looking for funds for this; ways to be more competitive. There is also expanded focus on the Religious Advisory Committee and the desire to broaden this back out and not just focus on women's ministry. We have seen the religious market being the slowest to rebound. One thing Kelsey McGreer is working on is reaching out in the faith-based community to recruit more to this group. Feyerherm said we are also beginning market segmented automation in e-marketing. Staff will be trained to read analytics of these campaigns and our communications team is helping with this. The metrics will show who opens the emails, what they click on and determine their interests. Also, Apple Mail Privacy changes will be changing the way we use metrics. Feyerherm said there are new changes to the MINT system the CVB uses for prospecting and staff will be trained on this. We have Fam Tours through state tourism scheduled in late September and the spring that will bring good exposure.

Feyerherm asked if anyone had questions. Barclay asked if other cities are seeing hesitation with groups signing contracts. Feyerherm said yes and he wishes planners would be more forthcoming and would like to have conversations, so we aren't at such a risk of cancellations. Feyerherm said we have had less cancellations than some cities because of our population and regulations. We can promote Lincoln as a safe community to host events. Barclay asked if planners were worried about the rules and terms in contracts. Feyerherm said many are and are waiting to sign contracts. Maul said there are so many contracts that we want a force majeure clause that mentions Covid, guidelines, etc., so we aren't just dealing with a handshake deal. He said we will see a lot of changes in contracts from here on out. Feyerherm said we are spending a lot of time working on forming relationships with new meeting planners as many organizations are using third party planners now due to layoffs and furloughs.

Dickerson asked the Committee if they are seeing a lack of sales due to the lack of staff. Barclay said yes and they are trying to attain staff. They need people in every department. They have seen catering cancellations because of delta. They aren't saying no to anyone on orders; they are just letting them know they may be a little slower. Maul asked if the hoteliers have had to close floors in their hotels. Hoehne said they have not, but they have been increasing their pay and even paid double time the weekend of the Garth Brooks concert. He said low staffing has not hurt their sales. They have all worked harder. Stitt said they are trying to hire a few more and have been increasing their pay, too. A good discussion continued.

### **New Business:**

Maul reminded the Committee our next meeting is November 17<sup>th</sup> and asked everyone to mark their calendars. Stitt said he'd like to thank each of you and it's an honor to chair this committee. He said he feels honored and blessed. Stitt also thanked Knuth for vice-chairing and again welcomed Jeff Barclay and Jason Hoehne to the group.

### **Adjourn:**

Aaron Stitt adjourned the meeting at 3:07 p.m.