

**Visitors Promotion Committee  
Meeting at Hilton Garden Inn Hotel  
February 17, 2021  
MINUTES**

In Attendance: Amy Dickerson, Susan Madsen, Roland Morgan, Becky Perrett, Aaron Stitt, Dave Derbin, Tammy Ward, Tara Knuth and Kate Bolz

Absent: Roma Amundson, Jeff Cunningham and Michelle Waite

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

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

Becky Perrett called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. and said she was happy to see so many of the group. Jeff Maul thanked Roland Morgan for hosting the meeting and thanked everyone for keeping the city afloat and for their resilience. Perrett asked everyone to do introductions next and for those to serve as the roll call. She did give a special introduction to the new member, Kate Bolz, from the Mayor's office.

**Approval of November Minutes:**

Perrett asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the November minutes that had been sent out ahead of time in an email to the group. With no questions, she asked for a motion to approve the November minutes. Roland Morgan made a motion to approve the minutes and Aaron Stitt seconded the motion. There being no further discussion, Perrett called for a vote. Dickerson, Knuth, Madsen, Morgan, Stitt and Perrett voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

**Approval of January Financials:**

Ron Kalkwarf presented the financials showing the CVB Profit and Loss statement covering fiscal year July 2020 through January 2021. Total Income was \$691,215, under budget of \$964,667 and noted the CVB asked for reduced funding from Lancaster County. Moving down to expenses and looking at salaries, they were at \$327,402 and under budget because it was planned to bring back the services team by January, but that just wasn't the case. There was also an employee out on maternity leave and being paid through short term disability. Printing expense was \$786 compared to budget of \$25,000 because we didn't print the 2021 Visitor's Guide as we are going to recycle and use our remaining 2020 guides. Kalkwarf said Public Relations, Advertising-CVB, Event Promotion-CVB and Sports Event Promotion-CVB were all down because of reduced spending due to COVID-19. Total expense totaled \$693,088 and net income was a net loss of (\$1,873). Kalkwarf asked for questions. Maul added the comment that the part-time sales staff has been very understanding through this process. One of the full-time CVB staffers, Tracie Simpson, has been working at the Visitors Center and has been able to have it open. Four of the eight part-timers are willing to return to work. Maul said the first services event will be very soon at the Lancaster Event Center (LEC) and the services staff will work the registration table. Perrett asked if there were any questions regarding the financials. There being no questions, Perrett asked for a motion to accept the financials. Morgan moved to accept the financials as presented. The motion was seconded by Amy Dickerson. With no further discussion, Perrett called for a vote. Dickerson, Knuth, Madsen, Morgan, Stitt and Perrett voted yes. Cunningham was absent. Motion carried.

### **Directors Report and CVB Update:**

Maul gave a VPC director's report. He started saying the office has opened and closed several times, but the doors are open once again. Staff has the option to come in the office or work from home. Many work from home but everyone is working hard and keep moving ahead. Maul said the Visitors Center is now open on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 9am-1pm. A few people have been coming in and we think people want things to do. Next, Maul presented a Lodging Tax Report comparing the 2% room tax for the budget year by month for 2019 vs. 2020. He said it is not as bad as he initially thought it would be, but still bad. April, May, June, July and November were the only months that required us to use reserves from Lancaster County. Maul explained how the reserves work and why we have them. He talked about Kearney having to use some of theirs when they had the flooding and had conversations with County Commissions then saying that was the kind of event a community should use the reserves for. At that time, Maul said we were saving ours for a "rainy day" or a similar emergency. The CVB have had to make budget cuts. We receive tax two months after they are collected so this month will be December collections being used. The reserves are still in good shape at the County, Maul said. The CVB qualified for PPP dollars as a 501C (6) and the timing was very good. As of February 2, the CVB received funds that should help for the next four or five months getting us to the end of our fiscal year on June 30. The 2020 Visitors Guides will be used in the first half of 2021 and the goal is to have a 6- or 18-month guide out in July or August of this year. The CVB and Chamber is continuing advocacy for tourism with Legislature supporting LB59, a merchandising initiative with Maul testifying in support of it. They have also been following and supporting LB39, a turn back tax bill for sports facility renovation/construction, and LB181 and LB479 supporting convention center finance.

Next, with excitement, Maul told the group NSAA High School State Basketball is back! He said he and Bolz have spent a lot of time working on keeping the tournaments in Lincoln and looking at several options and alterations to the norm. A couple of journalists made comments that we didn't want it to stay in Lincoln, that our health directives were too strict and to move it to Omaha. There were a lot of obstacles in the way including the BIG 10 not wanting anyone in Devaney. LPS was called on to help and continued talking to city and the health department. We ended up with a five-day format that will be Tuesday-Saturday with all games in Pinnacle Bank Arena (PBA). We aren't sure how that will affect the hotels as some teams may come for a day or two and then come back for the weekend. Both Madsen and Stitt said they are seeing some of that, but very hopeful for a good week/weekend. This is a big deal, Maul said, with PBA allowing 75% occupancy, concessions and student/family fans. He gave kudos to everyone involved in making this happen.

NSAA High School Bowling was very successful last week. The CVB had staff there every day and competitors and visitors were happy to be there and the team saw a lot of smiles. NSAA Swimming and Diving is up next, February 25-27. Activities are increasing locally through cooperation with the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD) and the Mayor's office. That has been key as many communities do not have as good a team to work with. The CVB staff activity and their dedication are greatly appreciated. Maul thanked all his staff for being so actively involved during the pandemic, serving on 19 Boards and advisory committees either in-person or through Zoom, not just locally and statewide, but also nationally. They have continued to seek bid opportunities and continue to be creative and brainstorm for social media ideas and have found it can be fun. The new term you'll start hearing, Maul said, is "vaxication". This is when you have your second vaccine and the confidence to travel and take a vacation. The marketing team is continuing efforts to be creative and working on ways to target those travelers. According to U.S. Travel, 60% of American travelers need a vacation after the stress of living

through a pandemic. 22% of those who altered their travel plans in the last year, will travel even more in 2021 and will have return visits and multiple vacations in the calendar year. Lincoln is a great drive destination for people in surrounding large cities. Taking a look back at marketing and outreach next Maul said the CVB has been zany and very creative in its efforts. The CVB was recognized as a finalist for an award by State Tourism. Early on, the sales team offered local product gift cards to clients statewide and nationally. The marketing team used the #Don'tCancelPostpone messaging for US travel, City of Red, #GetARoom partnering with hotels and various companies, Windshield Bingo and restaurant features, National Plan for a Vacation Day on January 26 and now focusing on snow day fun. The CVB is still planning on the social media influencer tour this fall where they will come into Lincoln and spend time on their phones and social media posting about different things to do and place to go in our city. Maul said they are trying and wanting to get back to our usual marketing plans where we remind people to be a tourist. The CVB saw so many advertising and marketing cuts in 2020 and currently only have two billboards and radio spots to work with. Association, religious and group tours will take a while to feel comfortable with in person meetings. Sports, especially youth sports, has kept us afloat. Next, Maul talked about some upcoming events planned. There will be an Ag Expo at the LEC and NSAA Swimming and Basketball. He said thanks to youth sports, high school tournaments and the LEC we have kept going. Looking to the second half of 2021, it will feel closer to normal for all events. In discussion, Madsen said they are seeing groups pushing into 2023 and 2024. They are starting to see weddings again with 1/3 the guest list. Things are picking up a bit, Madsen stated, working with what and who they can make work. Stitt agreed saying he's seeing the same groups and 1/3 the usual number per group. Tara Knuth commented people may be a little pulled back because they're afraid of another wave. She said, we all need to learn to trust again. Morgan added the sports market is strong and places like Denver and Omaha are open and running with success. Morgan said we need to keep our venues open and some are still doing that. Maul said we need to continue to work together to develop our facilities, conventions centers and ball fields. Madsen asked if we used up our reserves and Maul replied that there are still about \$800K and the PPP for CVB will allow the reserves to rebuild and grow.

Derek Feyerherm gave the sales update next saying the CVB has seen advances in the state market. 2020 started out looking like it would be a record-breaking year with a very strong first quarter but didn't turn out as he'd hoped. Lincoln was better off than some communities and he is optimistic we will see some movement for 2022 and 2023. Where the CVB usually books five and six years out in advance, we hope for that again here in 2021. The tourism market was going great at the start of 2020. Omaha hosted the American Bus Association in early 2020 which brought tourism organizations to Nebraska to see what we had to offer and the CVB participated in both pre- and post-familiarization tours. The sales team is hard at work and booking for the years ahead. There has been a lot rescheduled and they have continued to be a resource for event planners and venues. For a sales breakdown, the CVB issued 102 sales leads for 64,515 rooms, compared to 151 leads for 77,168 rooms in 2019. There were 82 booked events for 44,665 rooms, compared to 116 events and 44,193 rooms in 2019. 50% of the room nights bid out and 38% of room nights booked were regional/national events. Traditionally, the CVB shoots for these to be around 75%. The last time that percentage dropped this low was in 2013. 82% of all room nights booked were for the sports market, up from 63% in 2019 because we are able to do baseball and softball tournaments. The tourism market was second strongest at 6% of total bookings, up from 1% in 2019 and we found 60% of lost business was due to health concerns and COVID-19. Feyerherm said he believes the religious market will be the last to rebound as a result of the demographics of the group and also because donations are down due to caps on capacities at places of worship which has affected the finances of those organizations. The religious market had been our fastest growing market over the last five years. In 2019, it was our 2<sup>nd</sup> largest market making up 14% of our booked hotel room nights. In 2020, it made up 0%.

For calendar year 2021, 25 sales leads have been issued for 3,470 room nights and 4 booked events for 185 room nights. Feyerherm said again there has been increased activity with statewide organizations discussing returning to in-person events. The CVB annually participate in 14 national tradeshows and more have been done virtually. Most of the 2020 tradeshows had been pre-paid before budget cuts were needed which allowed the CVB to continue participating throughout the year. Feyerherm said he and Maul will have to look at the upcoming budget to see what tradeshows they can continue with into 2022. Derek Bombeck participated in an E-Sports Virtual Summit in November and was pleased about how it went. This was the first time Lincoln participated in this tradeshow and there was interest in Lincoln since it is a designated Gig City. Feyerherm said the Religious Advisory Council is being retooled. There has been a focus on booking women's ministry events, but he feels the need to go back to the table and broaden this some. The Cities of Big Ten organization is getting re-energized. When Lincoln moved into the Big Ten, there was a desire to emulate what we did in the Big 12 because it was so successful. The organization lost steam in the last few years due to staff turnover at nearly 75% of the other CVB and sports commission organization. Feyerherm said the group will be looking at marketing to see if they can get momentum.

There were a few questions with Maul asking Feyerherm to give a brief update on USA Roller Sports. Feyerherm said they have been affected by the pandemic with fewer members and no national championships in 2020. They had to make cuts and had turnover on their Board and with staff. Lincoln was scheduled to host them in 2021 and 2022, but after reworking their schedule they asked us to let Cedar Rapids, Iowa host it in 2021 and have us host in 2022 and 2023 and we agreed. This could actually help us, he said, as this will spread out bid fee events in the lodging tax budget. Dickerson asked about the Sports Car Club of America. The group canceled their 2020 tour but are planning to have their 2021 tour as usual over Memorial and Labor weekends.

**New Business:**

There was no new business.

**Adjourn:**

Chair Perrett again welcomed Bolz and thanked everyone for their work and said we hope Lincoln rebounds fast. She adjourned the meeting at 2:40 p.m. Maul thanked Morgan and Perrett for their extended terms on the committee and thanked everyone for what they're doing.