

RED WILLOW COUNTY VISITORS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, February 6, 2024

3:00 p.m.

2nd Floor Boardroom, Keystone Business Center

Minutes

Presiding: Daniel Stramel
Present: Bill Lesko, Kerri Unger, Andrea Harms and Carol Schlegel
Absent: Tyler Loop
Guest:

Call to Order: **Daniel Stramel** called the Red Willow County Visitors Committee (RWCVC) meeting to order at 3:01 p.m.

Open Meeting Act: Open Meeting Act was available for review.

Minutes: There was a motion made by **Bill** and seconded by **Kerri** to approve the January 2, 2024 minutes. Motion carried 4/0.

Financial Status: Balance in Promotion Fund as of January 31, 2024 = \$ 57,951.03
Balance in Improvement Fund as of January 31, 2024 = \$ 252,561.12
Balance in Promotion Fund Budget as of Jan 31, 2024 = \$ 90,800.13
Balance in Improvement Fund Budget as of Jan 31, 2024 = \$ 280,623.00

Old Business: **Kyle's Shared Salary** – Over the past year the Visitors Committee has been equally sharing the cost of Kyle Kinne's salary with the McCook Chamber of Commerce and McCook Economic Development Corporation. A review of the arrangement showed that the majority of Kyle's time was spent on Chamber projects and minimal time was spent on Visitor Committee activities. As a result the contributions to his salary have been adjusted so that the Chamber is paying 60%, MEDC is paying 30% and Tourism will cover 10%. The amount has also been divided into equal monthly payments and the Visitors Committee will be paying quarterly, as we do with the office rent. The quarterly amount for the Visitors Committee will be \$894.

Director's Report: **Prairie Chicken Dance Tours** – **Carol** distributed a revised calendar for the tours. She had a couple of groups cancel due to lack of participation so another general population tour was scheduled. Reservations continue coming in. She also distributed brochures to Kearney, North Platte, Grand Island, Rowe Sanctuary and the Crane Trust. She also extended an invitation to the staff and volunteers at both Rowe Sanctuary and Crane Trust for complimentary tours to familiarize them with the program and what we offer so they can more confidently recommend Prairie Chicken Dance Tours to their guests.

New Business:

LB 1067 – Eliminate the inheritance tax, adopt the State Prisoner Reimbursement Act, and change the authorized uses of certain county funds – If passed as is, this legislation states, “If the governing body of the county determines, in its sole discretion, that the proceeds of the County Visitors Promotion Fund or the County Visitors Improvement Fund are needed for any other county purposes, the governing body may use such proceeds or such purposes.” According to statute, the promotion and improvement monies generated by lodging tax collections have been a designated funds to be used for marketing or capital investments in the county. As written, this legislation would strip that designation away. LB 1067 also covers adopting the State Prisoner Reimbursement Act to reimburse counties for housing state inmates, to eliminate the inheritance tax and change provisions relating to inheritance tax reporting and refund procedures. Due to the complexities of the unrelated provisions of LB 1067, the Nebraska Travel Association (NETA) lobbyist does not believe this will proceed as introduced but definitely needs to be closely monitored going forward.

The introduction of this legislation prompted another discussion concerning the vulnerability of the monies that have accumulated in the Improvement fund. **Carol** offered suggestions in revising the Improvement Fund Grant designed to make the monies more accessible to those that could utilize them within the county. The suggestions are as follows:

- Change the matching funds requirement from 50/50 to 25/75 so that the grantee would be responsible for 25% of the total cost of the project. This was based on researching other counties grant policies.
- Establishing a financial hardship policy to address two issues.
 1. Based on verbiage from the Nebraska Tourism Commission Marketing Grant program, there is precedence to waive the match requirement should it make it impossible for a nonprofit organization to utilize the grant. The policy reads as follows:
Note: Nonprofit organizations who cannot meet the match requirement can qualify for grant funds by including hardship financial documentation in their application, describing their financial situation and budget.
The Committee may want to consider a similar policy with the Improvement Fund Grant.
 2. There are nonprofits that could benefit from an Improvement Grant but do not have the financial standing to pay for the project and then be reimbursed afterwards. Carol suggested that we explore a policy and corresponding procedure where, under the financial hardship criteria, bills for projects be submitted to the Visitors Committee for payment rather than on a reimbursement basis.
- Utilize more fully the “Payment” criteria already in the Grant Guidelines. It states, “Upon receipt and acceptance of the final project

report or the end-of-year progress report, the Red Willow County Visitors Committee will request a check from the Red Willow County Clerk or the annual payment of grant funds. This check will be sent by the Clerk directly to the grantee, or vendor, based on prior arrangements.” This allows us to pay the vendor directly with an end-of-year progress report. We may want to consider a payment program for when vendors require payment as well.

- Actively solicit Improvement Fund Grant applications from known projects around the community and county. We would need to identify projects that fit our criteria and contact them, encouraging them to apply.

Carol will prepare revisions to the grant application to reflect these changes to be reviewed at the March meeting.

LB 624 – Change provisions relating to Nebraska Tourism

Commission – This legislation would put the Commission back under the umbrella of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. This would give DED the authority to hire the executive director and determine direction of the tourism marketing campaigns. NETA is opposed to this legislation.

- **AM688** – Amendment to LB 624 allows for the Commission to remain independent of DED but expands the number of Commissions to thirteen (13). This would include eleven (11) members representing geographic districts, one member representing a state chamber of commerce and the Director of Economic Development. Commissioners would also be limited to two (2) consecutive terms. NETA is supporting the amendment so should it be adopted, the tourism industry will support LB 624.

Carol will stay informed on both of these legislative bills.

Correspondence

- **MEDC – Office Rent** – With the ending of the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for the Keystone Business Center, it has become necessary to increase the rent for the tenants. We are currently paying \$277 a month for the 3rd floor office and front desk area, which includes telephone, internet and housekeeping as well as use of the meeting rooms. As of January 1, 2024 the rent was increased to \$517 per month. Since we pay on a quarterly basis, the increase will be from \$831 a quarter to \$1,551.
- **McCook Chamber of Commerce – Membership Investment - \$2,500** – A membership investment notice was received. A motion was made by **Kerri** and seconded by **Bill** to pay the \$2,500 we have in the past for an annual membership investment for 2024. Motion carried 4/0.

Approval of Claims: The following claims were submitted for payment:

Claim Summary – Promotion Fund 0990 879

Visa Statement

• 2-6050 Freeman Decorating – Omaha Show	433.35	
• 2-1751 Adobe Subscription	64.49	497.84
2-1751 HonorboundIT Service Plan		25.00
2-1751 McCook Chamber of Commerce – Membership		2,500.00
2-6000 January Wages		4,091.67
Maly Marketing		
• 2-6030 SWNebraska.com	330.00	
• 2-6030 VisitMcCook.com	<u>330.00</u>	660.00
Nebraska Game & Parks Game Guide		
• 2-6030 2024 Fish Guide	625.00	
• 2-6030 2024 Turkey Guide	<u>625.00</u>	<u>1,250.00</u>
		9,024.51

A motion was made by **Bill** to pay the claims as presented. The motion was seconded by **Kerri**. Motion carried 4/0

Meeting was adjourned at 3:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Carol Schlegel