

**Tourism Board Meeting
Tuscola City Hall – 214 N Main ST
March 19, 2024**

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 am. In attendance: Drew Hoel, Bill Hill, Randy Hastings, Donna Kidwell, Brian Moody, Alta Long and Stepheny McMahon.

Drew presented the minutes of the October 17, 2023, meeting. Randy motioned to approve the minutes as presented and Donna seconded the motion. All were in favor of the motion, the motion passed.

Donna motioned to approve the financial reports through January 2024 and bills list from 10/13/2023- 02/23/2024 in the amount of \$33,098.31. Bill seconded the motion. All were in favor, motion passed.

Old Business:

Drew expressed appreciation to the board for their patience in the last 6 months as we have been working to reorganize the tourism efforts of the City and formulate a plan for moving forward. As part of that discussion, he explained the reorganization of TEDI as a county wide economic development organization working specifically with Douglas County, Tuscola, Villa Grove and Arcola. As part of the new organization funding and goals, Brian hired Stepheny McMahon to help with economic development activities. In addition to her economic development role, Stepheny brings Chamber of Commerce and tourism experience to the organization. Tuscola Tourism proposes to partner with TEDI for tourism services, in the amount of \$35,000 per year using Stepheny's tourism and marketing expertise. An agreement has been drafted to include the specific tasks TEDI would perform for tourism. That agreement will be presented to the City Council for their consideration. Introductions were made to and of Stepheny McMahon. Discussion was held on the merits of the proposed agreement, with members generally in favor of the arrangement.

New Business:

A grant request from Becky's Buddies was discussed. The group is having a fundraising event on September 21, 2024 where they would like to host a dueling pianos group called Ivory Bros. The booking fee for the entertainment is \$2,700, and Becky's Buddies is requesting a tourism grant to pay for the fee. They would like to charge a fee or ask for donations, but are open to other ideas. Much discussion was held on how the request fits with the grant guidelines and other grants tourism has funded in the past. The board expressed much appreciation for Becky's Buddies, who do so much in and around the community and for cancer research fundraising. However, in this instance the event is more of a stand-alone event and not tied to a more community wide festival. The board did not feel that paying for the cost of entertainment for a stand-alone, organizational fundraising event was consistent with the guidelines of the tourism grant program. Randy motioned to deny the grant request, Bill seconded. All were in favor, motion to deny passed.

The FY 25 Tourism department budget draft was presented for discussion. The budget includes funding for TEDI's assistance with the tourism efforts, as discussed. Also included are website,

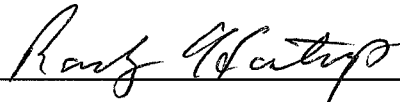
branding and ad updates, increased advertising budget, and potential part-time community ambassadors. Community beautification, including flower planting & history walk signage is accommodated in the budget also along with other typical expenses. After some discussion, Randy motioned to approve the budget and the funding arrangement with TEDi for tourism services, Bill seconded the motion. All were in favor, the motion passed.

Alta updated the board that Sparks in the Park planning is under way and on schedule. Stepheny has already been working on entertainment options and the fireworks contract will go to Council at the next meeting.

Discussion was held on the subsidized advertising in the Champaign News Gazette newspaper know as Community Pages. The board has subsidized local business ads on that page for 3 quarters. The cost to the tourism fund has been significant at \$2,400-2,700 per quarter, compared to other types of ads. Stepheny has talked with some of the businesses about the effectiveness of the ads. While there have been some mentions of customers seeing the ad, businesses are not sure of the effect on increased traffic. Some businesses expressed an interest in doing this occasionally, but not continually. The way the pages are presented in the paper every day, and along with several other communities, is seen by some as background noise. The board would like Stepheny to look at other cooperative advertising opportunities to pursue with local businesses.

Randy made a motion to adjourn, and Drew seconded. All were in favor, motion passed.

Next Meeting Date: **To be determined as needed and notice provided as necessary**

Approved:  Randy Hastings, President