

TUSCOLA TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

November 19, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Present were Board Members: Randy Hastings, Drew Hoel, Devon Flesor-Story, Bill Hill, Donna Kidwell, and staff Stepheny McMahon

Drew called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m.

Devon made a motion to approve the minutes from the October meeting. Donna seconded and the motion passed.

Drew made a motion to approve the financials including the report of payments made in October. Donna seconded and the motion passed.

Devon asked about the window painting for the Winter Window Walk, how much it cost and if the funds were coming from tourism, shouldn't the Tourism Board have voted on the expense. Drew explained that the expenditure was within the tourism budget and therefore a vote was not required. He mentioned that the City Council would not have been required to vote on an expenditure such as this if it were under the approved budget. However, Drew made a motion to approve \$5,000 for window painting. Randy seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Stepheny brought up old business that Devon had requested reimbursement of a \$660 payment to IDOT to pay for the attraction signage on the interstate. Steph said no other business had requested reimbursement. Randy asked if we could reach out to other businesses on the signs and let them know they could request reimbursement. Devon reminded the group that Flesor's is the only attraction. Bill made a motion to approve the reimbursement request. Randy seconded and the motion passed. Steph will confirm that Flesor's is the only listed attraction.

Steph asked the group for feedback on trick-or-treat and trunk-or-treat activities. Everyone thought it seemed very busy and that it was a successful event. Devon suggested it would be nice if there was a way to capitalize more on the event. Randy suggested adding a coupon to the candy buckets and then tracking if it were used. Steph wondered if trick-or-treater's families don't go out for fast food on the east end of town after the event and wondered if there was a way to track that in future.

Steph asked Donna how the Rural Life Antique show went. Donna said it was great and attendance was up for this 10th year. She and Bill shared that attendees began arriving at 1:00am and sat in their cars until 6:00a.m. Said the line to get in was a 90 minute wait. The Editor of Maine Digest out of New England came to do a story on the event. Sandy Decker had reported that Sweet Petunias also saw traffic and large items were sold. The Spring Rural Life Show will be held February 28 and March 1.

Steph brought up the Tuscola Tourism Grants explaining that Kenny Hough had inquired about one to be reimbursed for Homecoming expenses which occurred in September of 2024. Steph would like to set some guidelines beginning in 2025 that people must apply in advance of the event or expenditure and then be reimbursed after the event when receipts were submitted. Drew agreed it wouldn't hurt to tighten the guidelines a bit as the current awarding of grants allows room for auditing and error. He suggested that those interested in grants apply a minimum of 30 days prior to the event and submit receipts no more than 90 days after the event to be reimbursed. It was suggested that Steph update the current tourism grant application for the board to approve with new guidelines to begin in January 2025. If Kenny applies for a grant for 2024 expenses Steph will bring it to the board for consideration.

Steph shared that Rod Hardwick will be in charge of the downtown decorations as Denny has retired. Bill spoke with Darla and they are suggesting that Frosty be placed by the planter nearest the Vault in the new park and that Santa be placed by the planter behind that. He suggested that he purchase some additional decorations from Hobby Lobby for approximately \$100. All agreed. Bill asked that Steph call him when Rob is ready to set up the display. Steph reported that she and Alta are working on a lighted archway for the pathway from Sale Street to the new park and a lighted panel Christmas Tree. The main drawback for the tree is storage space to which Drew shared that some areas are being cleared out so there may be new storage space available.

Steph shared a flyer of the plans for Christmastown 2024 and gave a brief update.

The Odd Market will be this coming weekend and will be held at the Tuscola Community Center.

Flesor's will be featured in Preservation Magazine. Very cool.

Hardy's Reindeer Ranch is up for sale. Devon and the group hope that whomever buys it will also continue coordinating bus tours. Devon also reported that Stella Eads plans to start coordinating bus tours again. Steph will reach out to her.

Steph, along with Cassie Yoder, will be attending an Experience CU event on Saturday morning to sell Amish Country to four operators who sell bus tours to Europeans.

Someone asked about the Emerald Acres sports complex in Mattoon. Steph, Brian and Dale Boyer intend to attend a Chamber breakfast there in December to learn more about the facility. Steph hopes to invite the director to come speak in Tuscola.

Steph and Brian will attend Retail Live! in Indianapolis on Thursday to meet potential retail and restaurant owners who might consider locating in Tuscola.

Drew gave an update that he is working with a micro-brewery who would like to locate in downtown Tuscola. They are interested in The Vault space. The Vault currently rents space from the City at \$150 a month which does not cover taxes and utilities. Drew has let members of The Vault know about the brewery and that ideally there could be a cooperative agreement. The City would prefer not to own the building but would consider a lease to own.

Devon asked if we know the company who did the decals on business doors listing new open hours. She has a new door and needs a new decal. Steph will look into.

Jean Paul Boussard is moving his pipe organ and chocolate business to Rantoul. He called Devon to ask if she was aware of any grants.

It was decided that we will not have a December meeting and will next meet on January 21, 2025.

At 9:25 Randy made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Drew seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Stepheny McMahon, Tourism Director

Approved Randy Hartley Date 2-17-26