

TUSCOLA TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

February 18, 2025

Meeting Minutes

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

Drew called the meeting to order at 8:34 a.m.

Randy made a motion to accept the minutes of the January 21, 2025 meeting. Bill seconded and the motion passed.

Randy made a motion to accept the financial statements and tourism bills. Drew seconded and the motion passed.

The Board reviewed the Proposed changes to the Tourism Grant Application. Randy shared thoughts on making the deadline for applications 30 days before and event AND time for a meeting. Drew supported the idea of it remaining 60 days prior to the event minimum so we can begin to formalize the requirements. Steph shared that once this document is approved she will be sharing it more widely and letting potential applicants know they must apply in advance of the event. Consensus was to leave it at 60 days.

Randy brought up that one of the ineligible costs is fireworks which he felt was a conflict as tourism dollars pay for the city's fireworks. Drew shared that the city didn't apply for a grant from tourism funds. Steph wondered about liability if the city grant were to fund fireworks. In the end all agreed if an event had fireworks there would most likely be many other eligible expenses that a tourism grant could cover.

Randy brought up the verbiage about advertising 50 miles away to attract tourists and felt that was limiting as most events are advertised in the Tuscola region and even Champaign is less than 50 miles away. Steph shared that as the tourism board, the mission is to bring in outside visitors and dollars. Drew shared that Champaign media's reach is well beyond 50 miles from Tuscola. Also the verbiage says that tourism advertising should be placed "primarily" 50 miles away which leaves some room for flexibility.

Concerns about the grading rubric were raised. Steph admitted it was probably overkill but was designed to be a tool only for use by the tourism committee to create some continuity when rating grant requests so as not to be only led by emotions. Devon felt the scoring for the new versus annual events was backwards as annual events attract more people. Steph will revise the rubric which will only be used internally as a guiding document to not have actual scores.

It was suggested that Steph market the tourism grant application more including handing out hard copies to businesses who may host events. Steph will also be researching the interstate signage and sharing that information along with the tourism grant to businesses who are eligible.

Steph presented the Starry Night mural proposal from Ainslie and shared the highlights. Everyone really liked the design. Steph also shared that the timeline is to have the mural done the first or second week in May culminating in a small event on Saturday, May 10th to present the completed mural. She is looking into creating an Entertainment District whereby alcohol could be carried

freely during the event. Randy will check with township this week to make sure they have no concerns. Bill asked about sprucing up the other wall on the back of the Vault. Drew shared it definitely needs attention. Bill shared a concept for a free-standing picture frame where individuals could stand to “frame” themselves with the mural. Devon made a motion to approve the mural concept. Drew seconded and the motion passed.

Steph shared more information about the Small Shop Stroll and that businesses and pop-up vendors who participate have a fee of \$40 to be included on the map to help cover marketing fees. Randy suggested that even though it isn't much money perhaps Tourism could pay the \$40 fee. After discussing, Bill made the motion for Tuscola Tourism to pay the \$40 fee for any Tuscola business or any pop-up vendor who locates in Tuscola. Devon seconded and the motion passed.

Bill brought up that he and Devon would like to see the downtown Saturday Market in the Gazebo revived and felt this brought a lot to the downtown on Saturdays. Steph asked if they were aware of anyone who might take that on to be present on Saturday mornings to greet vendors. Suggestions included Sheldon Raber of ABC in Arthur, someone from Becky's Buddies, Michelle Black, Kathie Clapper. Devon also wondered if Molly Oberg might have some interest or produce they could sell. Bill reminded the group of a push cart in the city's storage that the museum used previously at the Saturday market. Bill also mentioned that live music would be a great addition to the event. Steph will look into.

Steph shared we have booked the band Battle Creek for Sparks in the Park. Ryan Tabeling suggested they be located on the NW baseball field. Steph thinks on a flatbed. It was suggested that Lance Little has provided flat bed trailers in the past.

The 2025 Tourism Budget is drafted. Steph and Alta will review and share with the Tourism Committee at the March meeting.

The Route 36 billboard will be getting a new graphic very soon.

Movie nights for 2025 have been scheduled for May 30th and June 27th. Devin Black at the Tuscola Library will be organizing once again.

A Wine Walk is in the works for 7/25. Steph explained how this concept and is similar to Galentines in its efforts to bring people out to shop.

The Odd Fellows have submitted a grant for their October 2025 event. Steph will bring to the March meeting for consideration.

Steph shared that she has pulled together a group of regional tourism professionals who will be meeting this Friday to discuss regional tourism collaboration efforts. Devon reminded to discuss bus tour operators and to reach out to Hardy's Reindeer Ranch (Julie Hardy)

Bill brought up interstate signage. Steph will be researching requirements and taking to businesses along with new revised tourism grant.

Randy made a motion to adjourn. Bill seconded and the motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Stepheny McMahon, Tourism Director

Approved Randy Gertys Date 2-17-26