

TUSCOLA TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

March 18, 2025

Meeting Minutes

Present were Board Members: Randy Hastings, Drew Hoel, Bill Hill, and staff Alta Long and Stepheny McMahon. Jennifer Reifsteck was visiting. Devon Flesor-Story arrived after 9:00 a.m.

Drew called the meeting to order at 8:29 a.m.

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

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

The Board reviewed the Oddfellows Market grant application. All really like this event and are glad to support it. Randy requested a proposed budget for 2025 to see where the additional funds would be spent. Steph will request this information and bring to the April board meeting.

Alta presented the proposed 2026 tourism budget. She shared that hotel tax is declining this year though we aren't sure why. Jennifer stated that she felt the Emerald Acres sports complex in Mattoon would add to our hotel room nights. Bill added that Mattoon is also building two more hotels. Alta reviewed the proposed expenses and noted that the budget is at a deficit as there is currently a surplus of tourism funds due to them not being spent during Covid. The budget is meant to be a guiding document for projects we hope to accomplish in fiscal year 2026. Steph has a detailed work plan built off of this budget so she can monitor expenses and balances. A vote was not required by the board approved of the proposed budget.

Steph reviewed the data she had learned in relation to IDOT signage including which businesses are already on the signs, which could be added versus those that are eligible and the cost to add and maintain the signage. Bill proposed that the ATTRACTION sign is the most important to add to as Flesor's is currently the only attraction listed on that sign. Other possible additions include Ironhorse Golf Course, Historic Downtown, Sweet Petunias, Douglas County Museum, Winterberry Antiques and The Vault. Steph's understanding is that the attractions must be open 6-7 days per week but she will gather more detailed information specifically on the attractions to bring back to the board for consideration.

In regards to signage, Alta stated that she felt the tourism signs were mostly noticed by travelers wanting to stop and brands they recognize for a quick stop of gas and food. Bill added that sometimes you might see something of interest while passing north that one would plan to visit on their return trip. Alta also asked if it wouldn't be more economical to look for appropriate billboard sites. Steph has Lamar watching for billboard availability that would be appropriate for Tuscola to consider.

Steph shared that the new graphic has been installed on the Route 36 billboard. Devon added that we might want to include an arrow directing west towards the downtown when reprinted.

Steph shared that print ads with new designs are beginning to be placed including DISCOVER Magazine, the Arthur-Amish Country Magazine, Illinois Times and Effingham Day Away. There will be

others in the near future. The group discussed that tourism marketing needs to be a diverse mix of print ads, signage, and online.

Clanin Creative will be designing a new tourism brochure for Tuscola. Once complete locations for distribution will need to be determined such as gas stations, restaurants, and retail shops. Steph recently learned that Emerald Acres will have a brochure rack, as well as, sponsorships that perhaps should be considered.

Devon had requested that the City reimburse her for the \$140 Tourism Directional Signage that directs people off of Route 36 towards the downtown. The group discussed but did not have a quorum to vote and so asked that it be tabled for the April meeting.

Bill had spoken to Lance Little who agreed to provide a flat bed for the Sparks bands. Steph will follow up with Lance.

Community wide garage sales are April 25 & 26. Devon said she is aware of vendors who would like to set up on the gazebo corner and sell items. Steph asked the board to help come up with someone who would facilitate that event on those days. Devon suggested just allowing on Saturday, April 26th. Suggestions were to reach out to Kathie Clapper, Becky's Buddies, or Lynnita.

Randy asked if the city and other businesses ever coordinate activities around Kelsey's Furniture bi-annual sales events. No one on the board is aware of when those sales will take place. Steph will check.

Devon had suggested tourism create a coupon book for new residents. Steph will add that to Michelle Black's summer project list.

Bill reported that the Rural Life Antique Show was once again a great success with lots of sales.

Signage directing visitors to Sale Street to the new park was discussed. Suggestions for a barricade with a slip in sign, a bracket sign, or tall thin flag signs were considered. Steph will research and proposed that any signage coordinate with the proposed lighted arches and mural for the alley.

Devon reported that Hardy's Reindeer Ranch is no longer for sale. The owner stopped in and shared several dates she intends to bring tour groups to Flesor's. Devon will share that list with Steph.

The Galentines event was very successful this year. Shops were so packed on Friday night than some shoppers came back on Saturday. Devon said the event was huge for them and was thankful for the work done on the event.

Flesor's has purchased a cotton candy machine.

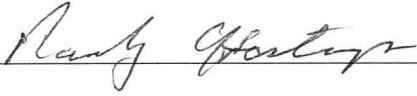
The Vault was featured in the Illinois Farm Bureau magazine the same week that Flesor's was on CI Living.

Steph shared that DCEDC will be creating a Business Bootcamp to support entrepreneurs in an effort to fill downtown spaces in all Douglas County communities and space at the mall. Jennifer shared that they are preparing to try and lease the Shimmer & Sheek Annex which is 1400 sf with one bathroom.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Stepheny McMahon, Tourism Director

Approved  Date 2-17-26