

TUSCOLA TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

January 20, 2026

Meeting Minutes

Present were Board Members: Devon Flesor-Story, Randy Hastings, Ainslie Heilich, Bill Hill, Jennifer Reifsteck, and staff Alta Long and Stepheny McMahon.

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

The minutes of the November 18, 2025 meeting were presented. Jennifer made a motion to approve and Randy seconded. The motion passed.

Steph presented the financials from November and December. Alta explained that the financials don't include the \$15-16,000 that will be transferred to the general fund to cover Steph's salary. Randy asked about the ASCAP invoice which Alta explained is for the licensing rights to use music in public settings. Randy made a motion to approve, Bill seconded, and the motion passed.

Steph had intended to welcome Amanda Hogue of Cast Iron Pub who was appointed to the board but she wasn't present. Bill suggested that when we need additional members we consider inviting Ellen, the owner of Petals & Plants.

Steph shared that the new replacement "Open" flags have arrived and are available to any participating business whose flag is getting frayed.

Christmastown 2025 – Steph reported that all went well. The group said they are hearing positive feedback about the downtown windows being painted and that people are still walking around participating in the scavenger hunt. Steph shared that the windows will be cleaned off sometime after February 1st. Jennifer complimented Steph for a great job planning and hosting the Jingle & Mingle Market. Bill reported that the kids shopping event hosted by Becky's Buddies was very busy and successful. The group discussed different marketing for next year including collaborative marketing with Edgewood Market in Atwood.

Steph shared that her 2025 Annual Report is in the packet to share with City Council all of the work done last year. She asked the group to review and share edits or additions.

Flesors has asked for a reimbursement of \$660 for the annual fee for IDOT signage. After discussion Randy made the motion to approve, Bill seconded and the motion passed. Steph will submit the invoice for payment.

Devon shared that Jenny Boyd is planning to host a Christian Band at the Community Center to raise money to fight human trafficking. Devon suggested she apply for a tourism grant. Jenny was not aware the grant even existed. Steph will bring to the board for consideration when the application arrives.

Bill brought up the need for vertical signage in the downtown at the walkway directing visitors from Sale Street to Kleiss Park. Steph will look into. He also proposed we research America 250 flags for use during the summer months to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration

of Independence. Bill also shared that the icicle light clips on the gazebo are in disrepair and perhaps we could look into changeable LED lights so that the colors of the lights could be changed per the holidays.

Steph shared the DRAFT 2026 Calendar of Events. Several dates have yet to be confirmed. Galentines, hosted by Shimmer & Sheek, will take place on 2/6. Jennifer shared that the event typically welcomes 1000-1500 women participants. Shimmer & Sheek will also be hosting 5-6 vendors next door to them previously the site of a hair salon.

Steph is beginning work on Small Shop Stroll. Devon suggested we consider doing some television promotion for this event as Flesor's didn't receive any benefit from the event last year. Jennifer said that Shimmer & Sheek did very well during the event. Steph is meeting with Jerry Hall on Thursday to discuss promotion.

Bill asked if the fall date for Rural Antique show (11/13-14) is correct. Steph will double check. Steph asked Devon about a date for Family Fun Day and she said it is still up in the air.

Steph is working on the 2026 tourism budget and is wanting to consider more online promotions versus print as she thinks we can gain more publicity for our dollar. Other suggestions for promotions to consider included:

- Ads on digital TV screens and signs in banks, restaurants, etc.

- Shopping and dining guide in hotels (Plus our tourism guide)

- I57 southbound billboard promoting gas, restaurants, and the ease of on/off ramps

Ainslie asked about the closure of North Central road for construction this fall as the Odd Fellows are starting to plan their event. Alta said it would probably be wise to have a contingency plan just in case the road will be closed at that time. Ainslie asked for Zena's contact info to explore hosting at the mall.

Ainslie shared there had been some chatter on Facebook about the "dead" Tuscola mall and said these conversations gain a lot of comments. He suggested we have a positive rebuttal to add to the narrative. Steph will discuss ideas with Clanin.

Bill shared that Casey's on Main Street told him they would be closing two weeks after the Lambo's is converted to Caseys. Brian and Steph are unsure about the future of the Main Street gas station. Ainslie is aware of a deadline to upgrade the tanks to a double wall which may be coming closer leading to this transition and could be a negative for another prospect to keep the station open.

Devon asked what will happen with Kelsey's buildings which are for sale. This news led to discussion about the detriment of losing Kelsey's to the downtown.

Bill brought up that Tuscola used to have an ironing board factory. Fun "Unexpected" fact.

Steph shared a Placer.ai tourism report about visitation to Tuscola throughout 2025. We discussed the top three origins of visitors with Chicago the first, St. Louis the second and Minneapolis the

third. Alta suggested that the Minneapolis travelers could be passing through on their way to Florida and everyone agreed that was most likely.

Steph asked to reschedule the next meeting scheduled for 2/17/2026 as she has a conflict. The group could not agree on a different date in February and so will just cancel and meet again in March.

Randy made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:29. Jennifer seconded and the motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Stepheny McMahon
Tuscola Tourism Director

Approved:  Randy Hastings, President