

TUSCOLA TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

February 17, 2026

Meeting Minutes

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

Stepheny called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m.

The minutes of the January 20, 2026 meeting were presented. Jennifer made a motion to approve the minutes with suggested edits. and Randy seconded. The motion passed.

Steph presented the financials from January 2026. Jennifer made a motion to approve, Bill seconded, and the motion passed.

Steph reported that she is working on the 2027 budget and will present it to them at the April meeting.

She reported that she has scheduled a FAM (familiarization) tour with members of the Experience CU team to come to Douglas County on the morning of March 19th to see the new businesses and attractions in Douglas. She explained how Tuscola is an affiliate member of Experience CU and that they work to promote our community.

Steph presented the updated 2026 calendar of events. Highlighted items have dates that have not yet been confirmed. She mentioned a few new events that are in the works:

1. Plans for Small Shop Stroll are underway for March 13-14. Last year tourism voted to waive the cost of \$40 for participating businesses and Steph asked if they would like to do the same this year. There is a \$20 fee for restaurants who want to be listed during the event although they won't have to keep the same hours. Devon made a motion to waive the fee, Jennifer seconded and the motion passed. Devon asked what plans are for marketing the event which led to discussion of several ideas.
2. Rural Life Antique Show – March 6-7. Donna is working on the event for her two locations at the Community Center and Main Street Building. The Country Spirit Antique Show lost one of its location in Arcola and will be setting up at the Outlet Mall so Tuscola will have three locations this year. Bill suggested we make sure the organizer for the show at the mall sends people into town to the other antique locations and downtown businesses.
3. Bookies is planning a Bourbon, BBQ and Blues festival for downtown Tuscola on July 4th. There will be live music, a mechanical bull, putt-putt golf, and a bags tournament plus a beer tent and whiskey tasting. This event has yet to be presented to city council so there are still logistics to be worked out. Bookies plans to invite BBQ food trucks including Pauly's and Log Cabin.
4. Amanda, Jennifer and Steph are working on two more "girls night" events similar to Galentines, scheduled for June 5th and October 16th. Downtown businesses will be invited to participate.
5. Ainslie reported that plans are underway to keep the Odd Market downtown Tuscola with a Plan B to have tattoo artists in Vintage Karma and vendors on Sale Street. This back-up plan is

being put in place in case construction on North Central. The Odd Market still has the Community Center booked for September 18-20. Ainslie has made contact with a carnival who is working with another local Odd Fellow group and asked if Tuscola would like a carnival downtown. All tourism board members felt this was a great idea. Steph will share with Drew to confirm this is ok.

6. Galetines was wonderful this year, it's 5th and continues to grow. Amanda, Devon and Sam Shelmadine who was present all said it was a very successful day for all. Comments were made about how little parking was available.
7. Hometown Grounds is hosted dueling pianos on 4/17/2026

On the second page of the Calendar of Events Steph is tracking regional events which may bring additional visitors through Tuscola and for which we might want to do some Google and Facebook advertising. It was suggested that local high school events, especially tournaments, be included. Steph mentioned that perhaps we should advertise on HUDL the high school sports streaming service and also mentioned that Loves Gas Station has advertising opportunities she will research.

Devon shared that WAND TV contacted them for a 1.5 minute feature and they received increased business because of it. The WAND TV market may be a good option for us to try along with Terre Haute and Radio. It was also suggested that the News Gazette business section which announced changes on Sat/Sun might be worthwhile.

Sam Shelmadine and Amanda asked about signage on the Interstate. Steph will send them each information along with tourism grant applications.

Steph explained she is looking into applying for a sign announcing an "Entertainment" District downtown but wants to make sure we are eligible and that the promotion wouldn't cause any negative consequences.

In regards to murals, Steph has submitted a DRAFT contract between the city and private property owners for review. Ainslie has dates in early May held for painting of the murals and would hate to be held up by paperwork. Steph agrees and will try to keep the process moving. If painting were done on a building owned by the City the process could move faster.

Amanda asked if we could look into string lines over Sale and Main Streets, similar to what Decatur does on Merchant Street. Steph will discuss with Drew to see what possibilities exist.

For America/Illinois 250 the group is working on a small event for the public reading of the Declaration of Independence on July 8th. Tuscola High School choir has agreed to perform and Steph has reached out to the theatre class to see if they would read. It was suggested that a five man group who runs a Podcast including Dave Porter and Judge Carroll might be interested and willing. During the event we will also be inviting people to visit the GAR Room at the court house if allowed.

Steph shared some examples of patriotic flags and the group approved one design to order. Steph will distribute when they arrive and encourage people to put them up for Memorial Day.

Sam asked if there is additional overflow parking anywhere for when there are many events downtown. Ideas were discussed. Steph will see if the City has a map of public parking lots anywhere.

Amanda made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:27. Jennifer seconded and the motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Stepheny McMahon

Tuscola Tourism Director

Approved:  Randy Hastings, President