



INDEPENDENCE TOURISM COMMISSION Minutes

August 27, 2024 8:30 AM

Veterans Hall, Truman Memorial Building, 416 W. Maple

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Rushay called the meeting to order.

Commissioners Present: Sam Rushay, Lynne Baker, Mike Calvert, Scott Forsyth, Bobby McCutcheon, Jeff McLaughlin, John Thornton

Commissioners Absent: Jodi Krantz

Staff Present: Frank Buhro, Melissa Brown, Lydia Calderon, Kimberle Franks, Rebecca Gannon, Morris Heide, Mike Hicks, Jennifer Kim, Madeline Rincon, Wendy Shay, Tabitha Williams

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

1. May 28, 2024 Minutes

Commissioner Forsyth motioned to approve, Commissioner Baker seconded. Minutes approved as presented.

STAFF REPORT

1. Budget

Parks, Recreation & Tourism Fiscal Administrator Kimberle Franks presented the fourth quarter department budget report showing expenditures at 87% of budget for the year.

Historic Sites were slightly over budget due to repairs and NFTM finished FY 2023-24 under budget due to staffing positions held vacant. Discussion followed concerning unexpended funds.

2. Tourism, NFTM & Historic Sites

Assistant Director Frank Buhro referenced the written report and highlighted sponsorships to the Mavericks and Comets teams, staff assistance with tourists and group conferences, STR figures, historic sites attendance, NFTM attendance, group tours, and positive visitor comments.

Discussion followed about increased attendance at the Vaile Mansion, National Frontier Trails Museum artifacts, school group attendance and cost, potential subsidies from the Truman Library and Independence School District foundations, charging admission versus accepting donations, Missouri Model Railroad Museum schedule, methods of donations in addition to cash, AirBnB reporting and occupancy percentage for the year.

3. Marketing & Social Media

Public Relations Manager Madeline Rincon introduced Lydia Calderon as the City's new Multimedia Coordinator. Ms. Rincon referenced the written marketing report and highlighted higher engagement numbers, explained the slight dip in reach for some of the Facebook pages, noted the top performing posts and stated their goal is to use more photos and videos and fewer graphics.

Discussion followed about website analytics, reinstating the department's newsletter, paid print & digital ads, Visit KC contract and performance, the annual Visitor Guide, survey information from consultant Karen Hibbard, and possibly advertising with billboards on major highways.

It was noted that the Hotel & Lodging Alliance appears to have disbanded due to minimal participation.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Tourism Video Contest - Brent Schondelmeyer

Chairman Rushay introduced Brent Schondelmeyer who gave an overview of the contest and thanked Mayor Rowland for attending the commission meeting. Mr. Schondelmeyer stated this is a free community project funded by the Missouri Humanities Council, and encouraged everyone to submit a video. The deadline was extended to Oct. 31st due to lack of submissions. Monetary prizes will be awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place.

2. Wayfinding Signage Update

Director Heide reported that staff has a meeting scheduled with PGAV Architects on Sept 5th to discuss design revisions.

The status of welcome signs along I-70 was discussed. Mayor Rowland reported the Noland Road CID is funding a monument sign to be placed behind Five Guys restaurant on MoDOT property but MoDOT has not given approval yet.

3. Truman Depot Project Update

Director Heide reported the City Council approved a change order and the contractor is working again. Nov. 14, 2024 is the new completion date. The middle portion of the sidewalk is finished but the ends are not due to issues with easements. Those issues have now been resolved.

Discussion followed concerning use of the depot once the renovations are complete. The City intends to issue a Request For Proposals for private use of the facility. Options are limited due to the small size and few parking spaces.

4. NPS Harry S Truman Visitor Center Project Update

Director Heide reported that a second public stakeholder meeting was held June 22, 2024. Design Development will begin in October with construction scheduled for 2026.

5. Statues at MO Model Railroad Museum

Chairman Rushay emailed the City Clerk and is waiting for a response from the Mayor and City Council. Discussion followed about possible vandalism in the current locations and remediation of the sites once the statues are moved.

NEW BUSINESS

1. General Obligation Bond Proposal - Lois McDonald & Jason White

Chairman Rushay introduced Lois McDonald and Jason White, members of a volunteer citizens committee promoting the proposed general obligation bond issue. Ms. McDonald spoke about the need for the bond and the projects currently included in the proposal. At this time, \$10 million is included for the City's historic sites.

Mr. White stated that every other neighboring city and school district has used general obligation bonds. He spoke about the financial impact on residents, stating there will be no impact on seniors, and the bond issue will cost \$13 per month for every \$100,000 of assessed value for other Independence homeowners.

2. Tourism Reorganization - Mark Scherer, Heritage Commission Chairman

Chairman Rushay introduced Mark Scherer, Heritage Commission Chairman. Mr. Scherer noted the commonality and parallel paths of the Tourism and Heritage Commissions, and expressed appreciation for the service of the Tourism Commission. The Heritage Commission is aware of potential administrative changes affecting the Tourism Division and offered their support for change, as changes bring opportunities.

Discussion followed concerning the time frame for potential reorganization. Director Heide stated the City Manager will report to the City Council with his recommendation concerning the formation of a Convention and Visitors Bureau no later than Nov. 12, 2024.

3. Chamber of Commerce Tourism Subcommittee - Lynne Baker

Commissioner Lynne Baker served on the Chamber of Commerce Tourism Subcommittee. She reported the subcommittee reviewed tourism operations of other cities and met with consultant Karen Hibbard.

The Subcommittee recommends a standalone tourism department, not affiliated with the Chamber or the City, to allow access to more funding and grant opportunities.

4. Meeting Schedule

Chairman Rushay noted the length of recent meetings and suggested the Commission meet every two months rather than quarterly. Discussion followed.

Commissioner Baker made a motion to change the schedule to meet every other month. Commissioner Thornton seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

The Commission decided to keep the scheduled meeting in November to have results from the City Council concerning possible changes in the Tourism Division and to avoid meeting in December. Bimonthly meetings will begin in January 2025.

Commissioner Baker reported that Jodi Krantz has resigned from the Chamber of Commerce and is in the hospital. Chairman Rushay will send a card on behalf of the Commission.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting Schedule - 8:30 am on the 4th Tuesday of February, May, August, November

1. Next Meeting - 8:30 am, Tuesday, November 26, 2024