INDEPENDENCE
MISSOURI
A GREAT AMERICAN STORY

INDEPENDENCE TOURISM COMMISSION Minutes

May 6, 2025 8:30 AM

Veterans Hall, Truman Memorial Building, 416 W. Maple

CALL TO ORDER

Commissioners Present: Sam Rushay, Lynne Baker, Mike Calvert, Jeff McLaughlin, John Thornton
Staff Present: Frank Buhro, Kimberle Franks, Morris Heide, Mike Hicks, Jennifer Kim, Candi Laster, Melissa Brown

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

1. January 28, 2025 Minutes

Commissioner Baker motioned to approve. Commissioner Thornton seconded the motion. Minutes approved as presented.

STAFF REPORT

1. Budget

Parks, Recreation & Tourism Fiscal Administrator Kimberle Franks presented the third quarter department budget report. Accounts are under budget at 66%.
Discussion followed about vacant positions at the National Frontier Trails Museum and in Visitor Services & Promotions; unspent budgeted funds, and the budget for the newly formed Convention and Visitors Bureau.

2. Tourism, NFTM, and Historic Sites

Assistant Director Frank Buhro referenced the written report given to the Commissioners. He noted that tax revenue is holding steady even though the average daily rate was lower, staff

continue to follow up on all leads, and stated that the third quarter historically is always slow. Assistant Director Buhro mentioned NFTM visitors continue to come from other states and countries, and volunteers assist with tours. He reported that the City-owned Missouri Pacific caboose has been moved from the Truman Depot to the Missouri Model Railroad Museum and Chicago & Alton Depot location where it will be painted in the fall.

Discussion followed about the history of the log cabin between the MMRM and C&A Depot. Assistant Director Buhro stated the consultants will be making a recommendation about it in the parks and recreation master plan which will be shared with the City Council.

3. Marketing and Social Media

Community Relations Coordinator Candi Laster reported that the Visit Independence Facebook page stayed consistent during the slower winter season with the top post being the surprise visit by Tyler Hynes. Future posts will be content from the recently published visitor guide. Discussion followed about the geographic reach of the Hallmark movie and the improvements to this year's visitor guide.

Ms. Laster reported there were 13,000 views on the Visit Independence website which was similar to last quarter. Control of the website will be transferred to the new CVB. Ms. Laster stated that paid media contracts are being completed with Visit KC, MO Travel Guide, MO Life, Cable Dahmer Arena, and Overland Journal.

Discussion followed about the National Train Day events at the MMRM and C&A Depot, admission fees at MMRM and NFTM, marketing plans for America's 250th anniversary and the FIFA World Cup, length of views on the website, ways to obtain feedback from visitors, and how the City is tracking lodging establishments for Transient Guest Tax payments. Commissioners commented that the TGT could spike during FIFA although the current presidential administration could have an impact on the number of international travelers for FIFA and the Community of Christ World Conference.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Truman Depot Renovation and Caboose Restoration Update

Director Heide reported that the contract was extended to June 30, 2026. The majority of work is completed, which includes improvements to the trail from the Depot to MMRM. The depot will have air conditioning for the first time. Park, Recreation and Tourism staff has been cleaning up the depot site by clearing brush and trees, and removing debris. Discussion followed about the recent road closures on Pleasant & Pacific streets due to relocation of utilities for the project, maintenance oversight once the project is finished, and Amtrak enhancement grant funds.

Union Pacific donated and installed rails and ties for the MO Pacific caboose. The City contracted with Belger Cartage to move the caboose. Discussion followed about the history

of the caboose, restoration work, security, and landscaping.

2. Tourism Reorganization & Visit Independence CVB

Director Heide reported that the Convention and Visitors Bureau will be known as Visit Independence. The first meeting was held in April. There is a 13-member board, with Commissioners Rushay and Thornton appointed from the Tourism Commission. The CVB is in the process of hiring an Executive Director. Beginning July 1, 2025, marketing and promotions will transition to the CVB.

Discussion followed about the CVB office location, officers listed, term limits, meeting schedule, and how the transient guest tax will be split between the CVB and the NFTM and historic sites. Director Heide stated this is the final meeting of the Tourism Commission and presented proclamations from Mayor Rowland thanking the commissioners for their service.

Director Heide gave an update on the National Park Service Harry S Truman Visitor Center. Design is to be completed later this summer. The project will be bid this fall/winter, with construction scheduled to start May 4, 2026 and be completed in June 2027. The NPS has been at Old Firehouse #1 for 42 years with the city providing all maintenance and utilities.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Baker motioned to adjourn; Commissioner Calvert seconded. Meeting adjourned at 9:43 AM.