



Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 02, 2026 at 6:30 PM

Columbus City Hall – 105 N. Dickason Boulevard

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:31pm. A quorum in attendance consisted of Hammer, Roelke, Walcott, and Walker. Staff liaison Bennett was also present.

Notice of Open Meeting

Bennett confirmed the meeting was noticed according to law.

Approval of Agenda

Roelke motioned to approve the agenda for February 2, 2026. Hammer seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion was carried by unanimous vote.

Approval of Minutes

1. Consider and take action to approve the Tourism meeting minutes from January 5, 2026.

Walker motioned to approve the meeting minutes as presented from January 5, 2026. Roelke seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion was carried by unanimous vote.

Public Comment

There were no members of the public in attendance for comment. There was no correspondence received.

New Business

2. Consider and take action regarding 2026 Tourism marketing activities

Bennett presented tourism financials to show a 3-year comparison for spending along with finding an accounting issue that the Room Tax Fund account was only distributing to the CDA contribution account and not the Tourism contribution account. Bennett will work with Finance to fix the issue.

Bennett also presented analytics comparison between 2024 and 2025. The comparison highlighted views and clicks among Google Ads, Google Analytics, Facebook, and Events.com. A consistent Google Ads campaign significantly increased the views and clicks year-over-year. Bennett planned to add more call-to-action posts to the Tourism Facebook page to increase clicks, while continuing an organic growth strategy that has allowed the page to surpass 1,000 subscribers. Events.com saw a decrease in both metrics due to more participation by local organizations and less direct input from Chamber. The platform does not keep track of stats from calendar contributors, only the original account owner.

Bennett then presented a list of current and recently used paid marketing products that Tourism may employ in 2026. Staff will continue the travel guides for Columbia and Dodge Counties and the 2025-approved campaign from The Greater Valley Guide that advertises in the Appleton-Green Bay-Fond du Lac areas. Bennett planned to continue a consistent Google Ads campaign along with generating itinerary marketing content, sending media releases to local media outlets and leveraging state tourism resources.

There was discussion about possibly contracting out with Good Karma Brands for live event coverage or assisting an event host as they broadcast the 4th of July Parade. Although no exact pricing was given, it was estimated that the cost would be about \$3,000. Additional discussion involved improving collaboration for both the Holiday Train and Redbud Day. Roelke asked Walker how much a trolley would cost in order to shuttle visitors to help alleviate parking / traffic during the Holiday Train. Walker estimated the cost was around \$2,000. Walcott addressed improving Redbud Day by possibly bringing back the BBQ competition or have something similar. A possible chili cookoff or hot cocoa competition was brought up for cold weather events.

The Tourism Commission and staff would like to coordinate with local groups on events and get ahead of events to better promote to local media outlets.

3. Discuss developing a plan to contract a designated local tourism entity per State Statutes

Bennett presented some research into Wisconsin State Statute 66.0615(1m)(b) that states the Tourism Commission shall contract with another organization to perform functions of a tourism entity if no tourism entity exists in Columbus. Staff was at a late 2025 tourism conference that addressed funding resources that tourism entities could tap into, but not municipalities. Although, there was nothing listed in the statutes as to creating a deadline for contracting with a designated tourism entity, the City would have two options to do so. One option would be to contract with a non-profit entity that spends at least 51 percent of its own revenues on tourism and provides tourism staff. The other option would be to contract a non-profit entity that existed before January 1st of 2015 that would spend 100 percent of received funds from the City on tourism and tourism staff. Bennett mentioned an example of Marshfield that has the Council contract with Visit Marshfield to perform tourism activities. Bennett noted some issues with the arrangement.

Initial discussion involved identifying possible partners to contract with and needing additional research to see if they were feasible. More research would be needed specifically looking how other communities have dealt with this issue. This would look at those in our area along with similar sized communities. Bennett was asked to reach out to the area's State Representative for more clarification. Staff will try to have additional information at the next meeting.

Adjourn

Topics to be added to the next meeting would include continuing discussion regarding contracting with a tourism entity, marketing activities, and revamping the Redbud Day event.

The next meeting is scheduled to take place Monday, March 2, 2026.

Roelke motioned to adjourn the meeting. Hammer seconded the motion. There was no discussion. The motion was carried by unanimous vote.

*A quorum of city committees and/or commissions may be present at this meeting. No action will be taken or considered by those committees and/or commissions.

** These minutes will be approved at a future meeting and may be amended. These minutes are respectfully submitted by David Bennett, Communications and Economic Development Coordinator **