



Tourism Commission Meeting Agenda

Monday, March 02, 2026 at 6:30 PM

Columbus City Hall – 105 N. Dickason Boulevard

Call to Order

Notice of Open Meeting

Approval of Agenda

Approval of Minutes

1. Consider and take action to approve the Tourism meeting minutes from February 2, 2026

Public Comment

New Business

2. Discuss and possibly take action regarding the designation of a tourism entity
3. Consider and take possible action regarding tourism marketing activities
4. Discuss and possibly take action regarding assisting with the Redbud Days event

Adjourn

*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.



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 **



Agenda Item Report

Meeting Type: Tourism Commission

Meeting Date: March 2, 2026

Item Title: Discuss and possibly take action regarding the designation of a tourism entity

Submitted By: David Bennett, Communications & Economic Development Coordinator

Detailed Description of Subject Matter:

Staff introduced information regarding Wisconsin's room tax law (Wis. Stats. 66.0615(1m)(b)) regarding the City contract with an organization to perform tourism functions. Two options are presented in the Statutes and discussion involved option b: contracting with a non-profit entity that would spend 100 percent of tourism funds received from the City on tourism activities. The organization would have to have existed prior to January 1, 2015. Staff was directed to gather more information about the Statutes and find examples of other communities handling of it.

At the direction of the Tourism Commission at the previous meeting, Staff have found that in the budget year 2015 – 2017, Wisconsin updated the room tax statutes to include the contracting of a tourism entity due to concerns of municipalities using room tax revenues for operational uses rather than the benefit of the lodging industry and has remained in effect since. Most municipalities follow the change and contract out either individually or as groups of communities. Staff has noted local, some similar sized, and other communities in handling the updated rules.

List all Supporting Documentation Attached:

- Tourism entity clarification and notes

Action Requested of the Tourism Commission:

Discussion, staff direction

Strategic Plan Objective(s):

Tourism Entities (Destination Marketing Organizations) in Wisconsin

Municipalities contracting with a Tourism Entity was created to address concerns that municipalities were “making money” from the lodging industry in the state. As room taxes are meant to benefit local lodging establishments by aiding in marketing and tourism development which in turn, increase “heads in beds”. Some establishments felt that they would benefit more if a 3rd party were performing tourism duties rather than the municipalities. The law was changed in the 2015-2017 state budget legislation to manage how room tax revenues are handled beginning January 2017.

There is no clear deadline or punishment for a municipality. However, most municipalities that collect room tax either individually or as a group (referred to as a zone) contract with a tourism entity/destination marketing organization or some other non-profit organization such as a chamber of commerce.

Local:

- Sun Prairie has a Tourism Commission, but partners with the Madison Area Sports Commission and meets “as needed”.
- Beaver Dam does not have a Tourism Commission, but the Council acts as a Tourism Commission and directly contracts with the Beaver Dam Chamber and Visitor Center for Tourism.
- Watertown has a Tourism Commission that works with the Watertown Area Chamber of Commerce to provide tourism services.

Similar Size:

- Berlin utilizes the Green Lake Area Chamber of Commerce for both its Chamber and designated tourism activities. Berlin has a Travel and Tourism Commission that meets “as needed”.
- Ripon utilizes a combination of organizations despite designating the Ripon Chamber of Commerce for tourism activities. Ripon Main Street, Green Lake Area Chamber of Commerce are involved as well. Ripon’s Council acts as the Tourism Commission.
- Dodgeville has a Tourism Zone Commission where it partners with the Town of Dodgeville and like us, has not designated a tourism entity yet, but it regularly partners with the Chamber of Commerce for tourism activities.

Other Communities:

- Marshfield directly contracts with Visit Marshfield who runs the day-to-day Tourism and the City's Council acts as the Tourism Commission. Marshfield Main Street and the Recreation Department receive some room tax funding for tourism events.
- Port Washington does not have a Tourism Commission, with the role fulfilled by the Council who contracts with Visit Port Washington for Tourism efforts.
- Fox Valley communities (Appleton, Kaukauna, Grand Chute, etc.) work jointly as the Fox Cities Area Room Tax Commission and appoint the Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau to perform tourism duties.
- The Town of Rome designates Visit Rome Wisconsin as its Destination Marketing Organization.
- Bayfield formed a Tourism Commission and uses its room tax contribution to make payments the Bayfield Chamber & Visitors Bureau. The Tourism Commission oversees the tourism fund, allocates a portion to the BCVB, but oversees tourism-related development projects.
- Mount Pleasant has a Tourism Commission that had its contract expire in 2020 with its tourism entity and has instead developed an internal tourism department, expanded special event grant programs, and engaged in regional partnerships. It is a unique case in Wisconsin as its partnership with Visit Racine County includes funding support and board representation, but not as a formal tourism entity contract.



Agenda Item Report

Meeting Type: Tourism Commission

Meeting Date: March 2, 2026

Item Title: Consider and take possible action regarding tourism marketing activities

Submitted By: David Bennett, Communications & Economic Development Coordinator

Detailed Description of Subject Matter:

At the previous meeting, there was discussion regarding possible various marketing opportunities, event collaborations, and improvements to local event marketing. Based on Staff notes, the following were highlighted:

- Continue marketing with Google Ads, County Guides, and targeted opportunities
- Utilize State Tourism resources
- Research Placer.ai
- Contracting with Good Karma Brands to livestream events
- Collaborate with Redbud Day and Holiday Train
- Getting ahead of marketing local events – especially recurring events

The biggest challenge to the additional marketing activities is funding. Currently, \$6,000 is budgeted in 2026 for general tourism marketing and \$10,000 is budgeted for room tax grant funding to assist local tourism events, marketing, and development. Marketing spend will already include Google Ads, Columbia and Dodge County Guide ads, and The Greater Valley Guide ads. A possible discussion point might be looking to align the 2027 budget for additional marketing opportunities.

List all Supporting Documentation Attached:

- 2026 Budget Highlights

Action Requested of the Tourism Commission:

Discussion, staff direction

Strategic Plan Objective(s):

Tourism Budget Statement

3-Year Snapshot Comparison

Revenue Accounts	2024 Actual	2025 Actual	2026 Budget
250-414135-000 Room Tax Fund Contr.	\$ 34,705.02	\$ 34,216.05	\$ 33,000.00
250-424218-000 State; Grant	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
250-484810-000 Misc. Revenues	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
250-484820-000 Interest Income	\$ 229.34	\$ 101.11	\$ 75.00
250-484830-000 Kayak Rentals	\$ 0.00	\$ 128.95	\$ 1,000.00
250-494990-000 Carryover P.Y. Funds	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 20,000.00
TOTAL REVENUES	\$ 34,934.36	\$ 34,446.11	\$ 54,075.00

Expense Accounts	2024 Actual	2025 Actual	2026 Budget
250-511000-249 Materials & Services	\$ 9,962.50	\$ 500.00	\$ 20,325.00
250-511000-310 Web/Media	\$ 1,671.21	\$ 1,634.42	\$ 2,000.00
250-511000-313 Marketing/Advertising	\$ 6,927.99	\$ 6,009.22	\$ 6,000.00
250-511000-345 Special Events	\$ 229.34	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
250-568000-610 Contr. to Gen. Fund	\$ 13,567.16	\$ 15,936.08	\$ 15,750.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 32,358.20	\$ 34,079.72	\$ 54,075.00

Balance Account	2024 Actual	2025 Actual	2026 Actual
250-342000 Tourism Fund Balance	\$ 62,999.29	\$ 63,365.68	\$ 43,365.68

YTD Budget Activity and Previous Year Comparison

Revenue Accounts	2025 Actual	2026 Budget	2026 Actual
250-414135-000 Room Tax Fund Contr.	\$ 34,216.05	\$ 33,000.00	\$ 313.08
250-424218-000 State; Grant	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
250-484810-000 Misc. Revenues	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00	\$ 0.00
250-484820-000 Interest Income	\$ 101.11	\$ 75.00	\$ 0.27
250-484830-000 Kayak Rentals	\$ 128.95	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 0.00
250-494990-000 Carryover P.Y. Funds	\$ 0.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00
TOTAL REVENUES	\$ 34,446.11	\$ 54,075.00	\$ 20,313.35

- Fund Balance carryover of \$20,000 was added
- \$313.08 was added from the Room Tax Collection account

Expense Accounts	2025 Actual	2026 Budget	2026 Actual
250-511000-249 Materials & Services	\$ 500.00	\$ 20,325.00	\$ 0.00
250-511000-310 Web/Media	\$ 1,634.42	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 483.92
250-511000-313 Marketing/Advertising	\$ 6,009.22	\$ 6,000.00	\$ 1,676.91
250-511000-345 Special Events	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 0.00
250-568000-610 Contr. to Gen. Fund	\$ 15,936.08	\$ 15,750.00	\$ 0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 32,358.20	\$ 54,075.00	\$ 2,160.83

- Materials & Services received carry over from 2025 of \$20,000
- \$1,490 from Marketing/Advertising on general tourism Google Ads
- \$22.19 from Web/Media for domain renewal
- Special Events supports the Room Tax Grants and is reported after disbursement
- Contr. to Gen. Fund goes towards City staffing for tourism activities



Agenda Item Report

Meeting Type: Tourism Commission

Meeting Date: March 2, 2026

Item Title: Discuss and possibly take action regarding assisting with the Redbud Days event

Submitted By: David Bennett, Communications & Economic Development Coordinator

Detailed Description of Subject Matter:

At the previous meeting, there was a little discussion regarding revamping Redbud Days. Currently the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce hosts the event that consists of the Redbud Prince and Princess Pageant along with a redbud tree giveaway. The pageant takes place on the same weekend as the city-wide garage sales and the Odd Fellows host a food truck gathering in Fireman's Park.

The Chamber of Commerce will host the tree giveaway and pageant on Saturday, May 9, 2026. The Chamber has discussed improving the event and possibly collaborating with the Odd Fellows.

Any recommendations for "revamping" Redbud Days would have to be implemented in 2027 or 2028.

List all Supporting Documentation Attached:

Action Requested of the Tourism Commission:

Discussion, staff direction

Strategic Plan Objective(s):