



Tourism Commission Meeting Agenda

Monday, August 12, 2024 at 6:30 PM

Columbus City Hall – 105 N. Dickason Boulevard

Call to Order

Roll Call

Notice of Open Meeting

Approval of Agenda

Approval of Minutes

1. Minutes from July 15, 2024

Public Comment

Unfinished Business

2. Election of Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary.
3. Kayak Rental Update
4. Print Flyers for Handout During Events Update

New Business

5. Discuss and Draft Policy for Assisting Local Organizations to Promote and Enhance Tourism
6. Develop 2025 Tourism Budget

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.



Agenda Item Report

Meeting Type: Tourism Commission

Meeting Date: August 12, 2024

Item Title: July 15, 2024 Tourism Minutes

Submitted By: David Bennett, Communications & Economic Development Coordinator

Detailed Description of Subject Matter:

Recap of discussion, motions, and any action taken during the Tourism Commission meeting from July 15, 2024.

List all Supporting Documentation Attached:

Minutes from July 15, 2024 meeting

Action Requested of Tourism Commission:

Review and make any corrections and approve the minutes from July 15, 2024

City of Columbus, WI
Tourism Commission Minutes
July 15, 2024
City Hall Council Chamber

1. Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order at 6:31 PM.

2. Roll Call

- Famularo, Hammer, Walcott, and Walker were present and made quorum. Staff member Bennett was present.

3. Notice of Open Meeting

- Bennett stated the meeting was properly noticed.

4. Approval of Agenda

- Motion to approve the Agenda for July 15, 2024 as written by Famularo. Second by Hammer. Motion passes unanimously.

5. Election of Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary

- Hammer proposed to postpone the nominations until the next meeting due to all the commission members not being in attendance. The other commission members agreed to postpone nominations again.

6. Approval of Minutes

- Review minutes from June 3, 2024, make any corrections, changes, etc. if needed and approve
- Motion to approve the June 3, 2024 Minutes as written by Hammer. Second by Famularo. Motion passes unanimously.

7. Public Comment

- There was no public in attendance for comment. Staff and the Tourism Commission did not receive any correspondence.

8. Discussion and Direction for Staff Assisting Non-Profit Organizations with Tourism-related Grants

- Randy Koehn, representing the Columbus Area Historical Society presented the organization's capital campaign to purchase the Bellack's building for a new museum. Koehn added that the space will serve to host the George Hasey Popcorn Wagon and small event venue. After some discussion about the property, Famularo asked Koehn what the Historical Society is requesting from Tourism. Koehn is requesting staff assistance with any possible tourism grants and possibly a financial contribution from the commission. The deadline would be August 17 unless the purchase contract is extended.
- The Tourism Commission discussed the commission's options after the presentation. Famularo would like to further discuss potentially allocation a set amount of time for staff to help non-profits with apply for appropriate tourism grants. The commission would like to create a policy that outlines staff grant research and other resource availability to local groups. Bennett will have a draft for the next meeting. Walker will connect Bennett with a colleague at Prairie Ridge Health regarding grant writing. Walcott expressed desire to possibly make a financial pledge to the Historical Society for their new museum.

9. Financial Report

- Bennett presented updated revenues and expenses for 2024. No new revenue was reported. Walcott asked if the City can charge a late fee for the delayed room tax contributions. Famularo was not sure that's allowed in State Statutes. Bennett will look into it. B
- Bennett stated that \$702.46 was spent in June for the quarterly contribution to the City's website. \$37,262.46 remains in the 2024 budget. The commission asked about the Special Events line item. Bennett stated that currently nothing has been spent from it, however there's a pending room tax funding request by the Columbus Historic Landmark Preservation Commission (CHLPC) for their summer concerts. This request was for \$1,000 but Bennett will double check the actual amount and would be granted pending a final report. There was concern of the CHLPC not fulfilling promised sponsorship on banners and flyers. Bennett was asked to follow up with them.

10. Website and Calendar Update

- Bennett has converted the Visitor page on the City website as the new landing page for the VisitColumbusWI.com website. It now features a seasonal banner picture, a smaller list-like calendar, a welcome intro, a featured events section, and a featured restaurants section. Other featured sections and a dining page will be added later.
- Staff has been running Google Ads campaigns in the run up to the 4th of July events and more ads to run over the summer.
- Staff has attempted to reach out to local churches again regarding adding events to the calendar, but has not had any responses. Varsity sports have been added as in the previous year.

11. Kayak Rental Update

- Staff has submitted the \$19,000 activation fee to Rent.Fun to the Finance Department. The City will send Rotary an invoice for their contribution after July 1st to fulfill a grant requirement Rotary is applying for. A new line item was created by Finance in the Tourism budget to handle the revenues earned from the kayak rental. Staff is working with Rent.Fun to determine the exact location in Rotary Park for the units. The commission would like to hold a ribbon cutting for the kayak rental and release a media announcement.

12. Digital Signage Including Possible Kiosk in Davies Park

- Staff has been researching various digital signage options including kiosks from Redyref priced at \$16,416 and Advanced Kiosks priced at \$25,817. The Economic Development Department along with Administration is interested in possibly partnering with Amtrak to update the train station with modern signage. Other options staff looked at was cloud digital signage from Soofa and Reach. The commission would like staff to ask Amtrak, Julie's Java House about interest before selecting digital signage.

13. Print Ads Update

- Famularo stated that she and Belschner have discussed this project, but Belschner would have more information for the next meeting.

14. Planting Redbud Trees Discussion

- Staff informed the commission that the Chamber of Commerce is revamping its Redbud Day to incorporate more tree planting and education. Staff recommends partnering with the Chamber to possibly partner with them for additional trees. The commission discussed some additional ideas for marketing the redbud trees and Walker provided information on behalf of the Chamber regarding planning for the 2025 event.

15. Future Agenda Items

- Policy to assist non-profits for tourism resources
- 2025 budget
- Election of Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary
- Bennett will alert the commission as to when the delivery of the kayaks and possible ribbon cutting to take place if before the next meeting.
- Next meeting will be August 12, 2024 at 5:30 pm.

16. Adjourn

- Motion to adjourn by Famularo. Second by Walker. Adjourned at 8:12 pm

-Submitted by David Bennett



Agenda Item Report

Meeting Type: Tourism Commission

Meeting Date: August 12, 2024

Item Title: Draft Tourism Support Policy

Submitted By: David Bennett, Communications & Economic Development Coordinator

Detailed Description of Subject Matter:

A draft policy highlighting use of the Room Tax Grant, City staff research of State tourism grants and use of other tourism resources on behalf of local event organizers, and marketing, partnerships, and sponsorships.

List all Supporting Documentation Attached:

Draft Policy for Tourism Commission Support

Action Requested of Tourism Commission:

Review, discuss and approve the Policy for Tourism Commission Support

DRAFT – Policy for Tourism Commission Support

The City of Columbus, Wisconsin's Tourism Commission would like to offer support and assistance to local event organizers and other groups in the spirit of drawing overnight visitors to the city.

Areas of assistance include:

1. Room Tax Grant
2. Staff research of State Tourism grants and use of local tourism resources
3. Marketing partnerships and sponsorships

All applications for room tax funds, assistance, and/or marketing partnerships must be submitted at least 60 days prior to the date of the event or other deadline(s) for which funds, assistance, or partnership is requested. Applications are to be given to the Community and Economic Development Director, City Hall, 105 N. Dickason Blvd., Columbus, WI 53925.

Any financial assistance, sponsorship, financial contributions toward partnered marketing, or room tax grant funding shall be made from the Special Events line item in the Tourism Fund budget. This differentiates from the general marketing done by Tourism which is generally funded by the Marketing / Advertising line item.

The City of Columbus, WI Tourism Commission will operate without discrimination as to age, race, religion, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation in the consideration of funding and support requests and will recommend funding and support only to organizations which do not discriminate as to age, race, religion, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation.

Room Tax Grant

Room Tax Grant is available to local event organizers hosting events within the City of Columbus, WI on a first-come, first-served basis and is available for related expenses. Guidelines for room tax funding are:

- The purpose of room tax proceeds is to foster tourism and development within the City of Columbus, WI. Priority will be given to events which will attract overnight visitors to the community.
- Funds are granted to non-profit organizations or organizations that can provide proof of insurance or have the ability to obtain insurance, if required.
- Applicants must leverage a minimum of \$2.00 of private funds for every \$1.00 of room tax funds requested.
- Within 60 days of completion of the event for which room tax funds are granted, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission a final report detailing room tax eligible expenditures, including receipts for the expenditures for which they are seeking reimbursement. The report should also provide examples of the project/program and its effectiveness in promoting the City of Columbus. Failure to provide this report will result in the group not being eligible for the receipt of room tax funds for that grant year and for 18 months following the event.
- Within 60 days of completion of the event for which room tax funds are granted, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission multiple photos of the event, including rights to the photos.
- Applicants are encouraged to have a mechanism in place to track effectiveness of their event, including statistics related to attendance and overnight stays generated.
- Applicants are required to be present when the Tourism Commission considers their request.
- The Tourism Commission will review applications and will make their decision based on:
 - How well the event meets these guidelines;
 - How well the organization makes use of its own resources along with the proposed use of funds.

Assistance with Local and State Tourism Resources

There are various grants and opportunities that local event organizers may not be aware of to assist with funding events or the creation of information centers, event venues, or local attractions. Guidelines for assisting organizations with State and local tourism resources include:

- The purpose of staff assistance and use of tourism resources is to foster tourism and development within the City of Columbus, WI. Priority will be given to events and venues which will attract overnight visitors to the community.
- Assistance and/or resource use is granted to non-profit organizations or organizations that can provide evidence of active or planned tourism activity, if required.
- Applicants must leverage a minimum of \$2.00 of private funds for every \$1.00 of room tax funds requested.
- Applicants must leverage at least 1 member or staff who contributes a minimum of 2 hours for every 1 hour of City staff assistance.
- Applicants must apply at least 60 days in advance of any deadline in which a City staff researched grant or tourism funding may be needed.
- Within 60 days of completion of the request for which room tax funds, City staff assistance, or other tourism resources are granted, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission a final report detailing room tax eligible expenditures, results of grant applications, tourism-related events, activities, and/or venue use. The report should also provide examples of the results and its effectiveness in promoting the City of Columbus. Failure to provide this report will result in the group not being eligible for the receipt of staff assistance for the remainder of the year and for 18 months following the request.
- Applicants are encouraged to have a mechanism in place to track effectiveness of their event(s) or venue, including statistics related to attendance and overnight stays generated.
- Applicants are required to be present when the Tourism Commission considers their request.
- The Tourism Commission will review applications and will make their decision based on:
 - How well the request meets these guidelines;
 - How many hours might be needed by City staff for research;
 - How well the organization makes use of its own resources along with the proposed use of funds, staff assistance, and other tourism resources.

Marketing Partnerships and Sponsorships

The primary focus of the Tourism Commission is to promote events that draw visitors for overnight stays. Besides these kinds of events, there numerous other things that may draw out-of-town visitors in which an event organizer or other groups and organizations could partner with the Tourism Commission to help promote. Guidelines for Marketing Partnerships are as follows:

- The purpose of marketing partnerships and sponsorships is to foster tourism and development within the City of Columbus, WI. Priority will be given to events and venues which will attract overnight visitors to the community.
- Partnerships and sponsorships are granted to non-profit organizations or organizations that can provide proof of insurance or have the ability to obtain insurance, if required.
- Applicants must leverage a minimum of \$2.00 of private funds for every \$1.00 of tourism funds requested.
- Applicants must apply at least 60 days in advance of events.
- Within 60 days of completion of the event for which marketing partnerships are granted, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission a final report detailing room tax eligible expenditures, including receipts for the expenditures for which they are seeking reimbursement. The report should also provide examples of the project/program and its effectiveness in promoting the City of Columbus. Failure to provide this report will result in the group not being eligible for the receipt of room tax funds for that grant year and for 18 months following the event.
- Within 60 days of completion of the event for which room tax funds are granted, applicants shall provide the Tourism Commission multiple photos of the event, including rights to the photos.
- Applicants are encouraged to have a mechanism in place to track effectiveness of their event, including statistics related to attendance and overnight stays generated.
- Applicants are required to be present when the Tourism Commission considers their request.
- The Tourism Commission will review applications and will make their decision based on:
 - How well the event meets these guidelines;
 - How well the organization makes use of its own resources along with the proposed use of funds.



Agenda Item Report

Meeting Type: Tourism Commission

Meeting Date: August 12, 2024

Item Title: 2025 Proposed Tourism Budget

Submitted By: David Bennett, Communications & Economic Development Coordinator

Detailed Description of Subject Matter:

The City is in the process of developing its 2025 budget that will include proposed budgeting of the Tourism Fund by staff and the Tourism Commission. Budgets are due August 23, 2024 and will take into consideration revenues and expenditures.

List all Supporting Documentation Attached:

Budget Goals

List of 3-5 Year Projects

2025 Budget Worksheet

Action Requested of Tourism Commission:

Review, discuss, and recommend to Council the 2025 Tourism Budget

2025 Budget Goals

Staff's budget goals for 2025 focus on fostering a more proactive tourism marketing approach, positioning the Tourism Commission a resource for local event hosts, and building partnerships in the community to attract visitors and increase overnight stays.

Proactive Marketing

Getting ahead of the game in being able to promote area events with general tourism marketing.

- Ad spend of \$100 minimum per month via Events.com as it reaches Facebook, Google, Instagram, and many more platforms all at once. A test run in 2024 has shown that the strategy has kept all of the tourism website pages in the top 40 of all City website pages (830) with 2 consistently in the top 10. 2023's digital focus for advertising the Holiday Train yielded over 13,000 visitors to the tourism website along with a reach of over 1,250,000. The event had solid attendance of nearly 2,000 people on a Monday night.
- Develop our own tourism guide for publication and distribution around the State.
- Promote 3 or 4 of the biggest events (1 for each season) outside of general tourism marketing.

Available Resources

The Tourism Commission can be a valuable resource in not only the economic development, but a resource to area groups who want to showcase this community.

- Easier accessibility to apply for room tax funding along with as much marketing of the program as we're allowed to do.
- Allow local organizations to receive assistance in researching for tourism grants if available.
- Allocate funds towards specific events and venues with the premise of creating a destination of Columbus or generating overnight stays.

Partnerships

Partnerships will help for marketing specific events and venues in the Columbus area. We would emphasize the priority towards those who possibly generate overnight stays by out-of-town guests.

- Pursue Joint Effort Marketing (JEM) where we could either team up with other communities for a bigger grant or potentially local groups for events. We can try to actively look at other State grants for bringing out-of-state events to Columbus.
- Continue to partner with local organizations as event sponsors or assist with developing events or attractions to help generate overnight stays.
- Develop a tourism information display at the Amtrak Station.

Tourism 3-5 Year Projects

Based on previous meetings' discussions, five items have either started or have been shown interest as 3-5 year projects.

Current Projects

- **Kayak & Bike Rentals** – Kayak rental to be complete in 2024, while bike rentals could be 2025 or 2026. Rent.Fun is the kayak provider and has a parent company that does e-bike rentals.
- **Kiosk** – This project is in the research phase. Kiosks from Redyref and Advanced Kiosks have been presented, but come with a sizable cost barrier. Maybe a 2026 or 2027 for tentative completion date. Originally slated as a kiosk in Davies Park, the project may evolve to become a tourism information display at the Amtrak Station due to traffic, logistics, and potential for cost sharing.
- **Print Ads** – Flyers and brochures that feature a map, QR code to website, and event listings are currently in development. Pricing for production and distribution has yet to be presented. There is potential for acquiring sponsorship or partnerships for cost savings. At the current pace, this project should be implemented in 2025.

Additional Projects

- **Public Enemies Day** – A festival based on the movie, Public Enemies that was partially filmed in Columbus. There has only been discussion, but an event like this would probably need involve a partnership to make happen.
- **Itinerary Development** – Staff has participated in the Main Street Wisconsin's training for itinerary marketing. This would involve marketing around a specific theme that includes a list of things to do, where to eat, places to visit, etc. This type of marketing is featured heavily by Travel Wisconsin and other tourism organizations. Some discussion has taken place at previous meetings, but no action has been taken.

2025 Budget Worksheet

2025 - Initial Draft 7/17/24		12/31/2023	12/31/2023	2023 Actual	7/15/2024	12/31/2024	12/31/2024	2024 Projected	2024 to 2025	Budget Notes
Account Number	Account Description	2023 Actual	12/31/2023	2023 Budget	2024 YTD	2024 Projected	2024 Budget	% over/(under)	% inc/(dec)	
TOURISM COMMISSION										
250-414135-000	CONTRIBUTION FROM ROOM TAX FND	35,868.97	31,500.00	13.87%	4,757.14	31,500.00	38,500.00	-18.18%	-6.75%	Linked to Room Tax fund 70% of Room Tax collected
250-484810-000	TOURISM; MISC. INCOME/REVENUES									EV Charging Station, Events.com calendar, non-state grants?
250-424218-000	STATE; TRAVEL GRANT			0.00%	-	-	-	0.00%	0.00%	
250-484820-000	TOURISM; INTERST INCOME	221.12	10.00	2111.20%	140.83	162.00	100.00	62.00%	0.00%	Interest earned on fund balance
250-484830-000	TOURISM; KAYAK RENTAL REVENUE									Rent.Fun kayak rentals
250-494990-000	TOURISM; CARRY OVER PY FUNDS	-	6,924.00	0.00%	-	-	5,000.00	-100.00%	-100.00%	Kiosk in 2025? Use only when carryforward to be used in new budget year
	TOURISM REVENUES	36,090.09	38,434.00		4,897.97	31,662.00	43,600.00	-27.38%	-14.33%	
250-511000-249	TOURISM; MATERIALS & SERVICES	3,193.71	8,924.00	-64.21%	19,212.50	2,900.00	10,000.00	-71.00%	-50.00%	Signage, tourism information, small amenity/attractions
250-511000-310	TOURISM; WEB MEDIA	1,469.18	750.00	95.89%	1,389.84	1,600.00	1,600.00	0.00%	0.00%	Website, domains, web security, Archive Social, etc.
250-511000-313	TOURISM; MARKETING/ADVERTISING	12,183.49	11,750.00	3.69%	1,368.90	11,750.00	17,500.00	-32.86%	-42.86%	General tourism marketing - print, digital, video, etc.
250-511000-345	TOURISM; SPECIAL EVENTS	4,750.00	5,000.00	-5.00%	-	1,600.00	2,000.00	-20.00%	400.00%	Event Grant, possibly add sponsorships, assistance, partnerships
250-568000-610	TOURISM; CONTR TO GEN FUND	14,042.49	10,000.00	40.42%	4,932.14	9,000.00	12,500.00	-28.00%	-20.00%	Allocation based on Media Coord Payroll hours
	TOURISM EXPENDITURES	35,638.87	36,424.00		26,592.63	26,850.00	43,600.00		-16.06%	
	TOURISM REVENUES OVER EXPENDITURES	451.22	2,010.00		(21,694.66)	4,812.00	-		0.00%	
Budget approved by Tourism Commission 9/11/23										