

Regular November Richland Center Tourism Commission Meeting, November 19, 2024

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chairman Ron Fruit at 4:07 pm.

Members present, Ron Fruit, Dennis Fry, Jayme Walsh, Toni McCarvel, and Karen Tepley.

Motion to amend agenda order. Director Richards stated that for clarity during the budget discussion item #5 should be moved to item #3 and all other items slide down one. Member Tepley made that motion, member Fry seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.

Approval of previous meeting minutes. The minutes from the October Richland Center Tourism Commission were approved, a motion made by K Tepley, second by J Walsh, motion carried on a voice vote.

Election of Secretary Due to the vacancy of the Secretary position Director Richards, Chair Fruit asked for nominations for the position of Secretary. Member Fry nominated new member Toni McCarvel, J Walsh seconded that nomination. Chair Fruit closed nominations when there were no other nominations. K Tepley made a motion to cast a unanimous ballot for Toni McCarvel as Secty, D Fry seconded that motion, motion passed on a unanimous voice vote.

2025 Greater Richland Tourism Trends and Efforts Discussion: Director Richards explained how the environment appears for 2025 and what efforts we can take to best grow visitor numbers in the area. Richards explained the growth in “reels” on IG, or “Shorts” on YouTube has benefited our social media channels, and good video for these purposes is important for the future. Additionally, the video we have already produced in 2023 and 2024 has saved us dollars on production costs for our streaming advertising. This video is important for social media channels and streaming advertising.

YouTube internationally has seen growth of 79% and we are positioned well to take advantage of that. On our YouTube channel, 69% of men search and find our content, this is where we are best able to connect with males. Facebook continues to grow but also continues to be primarily female at 74% and tends to be a more mature group in the 45 to 75-year-old group.

Our website traffic continues to trend upward significantly. In 2023 GreaterRichlandTourism.com saw 57,436 new website visitors, year-to-date in 2024 there have been 73,340 new visits to the website. There are many reasons for this growth, our streaming efforts, the social media presence, some of our print advertising with MKE Magazine, and the digital billboard campaign in Chicagoland this past summer, also contribute to this growth.

To continue future growth Director Richards suggested that we need to continue the path we are on as we have seen year-over-year significant growth. In the future there is an interest in entering the Minneapolis/St Paul media area as resources come available. Director Richards did express some concern about the lack of night-time casual or fine dining options in the city of Richland Center and a low number of hotel rooms in the area.

2025 Greater Richland Tourism Budget Discussion and Action: Director Richards presented a budget for 2025 that reflected an estimated revenue of \$104,100, planned annual operating expenditures of \$63,507.05, expected Tourism Grant applications of \$9,000, and Additional Marketing expenditures of \$23,750.

Director Richards explained Greater Richland Tourism has received all back taxes to current, for Eagle, Ithaca, and Forest Townships. This created additional tax revenue of \$7,642 from 2022 to current. These funds were deposited in the Greater Richland Tourism account which now carries a balance of \$53,722.63. There was much informational discussion regarding the budget efforts and future goals.

There will be additional tax revenue received from Richland Township as room tax collection has just gone into effect on July 1, 2024. Additionally, Henrietta Township has adopted the room tax as of their November regular meeting.

Member Tepley asked if we are getting to the point of increasing the cost share of the Director's Salary with the City of Richland Center. Director Richards commented that is absolutely a future consideration as the room tax remittance grows.

Member J Walsh made the motion to approve the 2025 budget as presented, Member Tepley seconded that motion. There was a voice vote on the budget as follows, Chair Fruit-Y, Member Fry-Y, Member Walsh-Y, Member Tepley-Y, Member McCarvel-Y. The 2025 Greater Richland Tourism budget was passed unanimously. The full budget is attached.

Gray Media Discussion and Possible Action

Director Richards brought back the discussion regarding Winter streaming advertising. As mentioned at our October meeting there is a desire of the Commission and Director Richards to continue streaming advertising in the Chicagoland area through the winter. However, last quarter we had not received the back-taxes from the 3rd party platforms that ensured we could continue the effort. Fortunately, as mentioned above we have received all delinquent room tax from Airbnb, VRBO, and other 3rd party platforms. K Tepley made the motion that we extend our advertising agreement with Gray Media through the 4th quarter in the Chicagoland area at an investment of \$2,500 per month for the remainder of 2024. J Walsh seconded the motion. A roll call vote was held: McCarvel-yes, Fruit-yes, Tepley-yes, Walsh-yes, Fry-yes. Motion carried unanimously.

Department Updates:

Director Richards Offered several other updates:

- We will likely need to do a reprint of the Greater Richland Travel Guide as we are running low on that publication. Director Richards will look at the updates needed and bring a cost estimate to a future meeting.
- Reminded that the Town of Henrietta has adopted the room tax.
- Discussed the Pine River and the concern of keeping that navigable for visitors. There has been discussion and will be continued discussion and effort to find a contractor willing to clear the Pine River when necessary. This will be done in concert between the Richland Center Parks, Richland County Parks, Friends of the Pine LLC, and Greater Richland Tourism
- Richland County Resilience Committee has been efforting river gauge on the Pine so there is a dependable measure of the flow of the river for safety purposes. Director Richards has served on this Committee and will continue to do so.

- Director Richards has been nominated to serve on the Prosperity Southwest Committee. This will go through the County Board for approval and future updates will be brought forward as it develops.

Next meeting and topics.

It was determined that the next meeting would be on Monday, January 6. Member Jayme Walsh asked at a future meeting that he would like to discuss future goals and direction for the Greater Richland Tourism entity. Chair Fruit also mentioned it would be a good exercise to walk through the background of Greater Richland Tourism, its relationship to the other Tourism Commissions, and how that operates as an educational piece.

The motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Tepley, 2nd by Fry. Motion Carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:21 pm.