

Regular October Richland Center Tourism Commission Meeting, October 7, 2024

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Ron Fruit at 4:00 pm.

Members present, Ron Fruit, Dennis Fry, Jayme Walsh, and Karin Tepley.

Dennis Fry made the motion to approve the minutes from the August Richland Center Tourism Commission, member Tepley seconded that motion. The motion was unanimously approved by voice vote.

Director Richards mentioned that past member Candace Fagerlind had resigned from the Tourism Commission as she had moved out of state. The members of the Commission and Director Richards expressed strong appreciation for Candace's support and involvement in the past and wished her the best of fortune in her new endeavor.

Tourism Grant Applications:

The Driftless Area Deer Classic grant application was discussed. Per their application, this is a repeat event and has grown significantly in that it now encompasses two days and is one of the few of its kind in Southern Wisconsin. They advertise the event in a 3-state area and the potential of overnight stays in our area lodging partners is extremely likely. Jayme W made the motion to approve the 2025 grant application, Dennis F seconded the motion. A voice vote was held, Fruit-y, Walsh-y, Tepley-y, Fry-y.

Gray Media Discussion and Possible Action:

Director Richards explained that our current contract with Gray Media ran to the end of October and it is time to renew for November-December streaming advertising. There was a general discussion that streaming advertising has been very productive in driving potential visitors to our website. However, we are still awaiting initial room tax remittances from Ithaca, Forest, and Richland Townships that would provide the resources to continue this effort. Director Richards suggested the Commission table this decision until the new remittances were received. The commission members agreed, and this will be brought back for review and possible action in November. There was also some discussion about working on getting a winter 30-second ad produced so we can promote snow cover as it arrives in our area. Last winter we had a 10-day stretch in which SW Wisconsin was the only area to open its snowmobile trails and this provided a nice boost in tourism activity. Member Walsh encouraged us to work on a snow-covered image-led ad to have it ready for that possibility again.

Hidden Valley Magazine Discussion and Possible Action:

Director Richards brought forward a proposal to support the Richland County submission in the Hidden Valleys Magazine. In the past Richland County was a participant in the magazine. However, in 2021 the magazine had fallen on hard times, did not have an online presence, and Richland County was cutting its budget. At that point, Richland County discontinued their partnership. Since new leadership has joined Hidden Valleys, it has built up the magazine significantly and has a solid online presence. Director Richards suggested Greater Richland Tourism re-join Hidden Valleys for \$1,200 in 2025 as this would increase our exposure in the magazine which now has a bigger distributorship than it did previously. Member Tepley made the motion to approve a \$1,200 expense in 2025 to support Hidden Valleys Magazine, Jamey W seconded that motion. Fruit-Y, Walsh-Y, Tepley-Y, Fry-Y.

Department Updates:

Director Richards explained that we have a new bed and breakfast operating in the former Lewis house. Mary Grell has purchased the home and is now open as a lodging option here in the city.

Director Richards reported back that the Center Colorfest Weekend went off without issue and the events of the weekend were widely attended. There were strong reports of full lodging occupancy, and the Canyon of Lights parade was strongly attended with the most entries we have seen in the parade post-COVID.

Director Richards also reported that we have identified an Intern to help support some of the back-office work remotely during the school year, and in-person during the summer. When remote this will be an unpaid position. However, during the summer, we are considering that it could be a paid position. Director Richards will continue to investigate the paid potential in the summer.

The motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Tepley, 2nd by Fry. Motion Carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:00pm.