



EXPLORE
**TWO
RIVERS**
WISCONSIN

EXPLORE TWO RIVERS MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Thursday, April 9th, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

3rd floor Two Rivers City Hall
1717 E. Park Street
Two Rivers, WI 54241

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

2. **ROLL CALL:** The meeting was called to order at 8 a.m. by Joe Metzen, with the board chair, Michael Ditmer, attending remotely. Attendees included Curt Andrews, Amanda Latour, Erin Dembski, Melissa Nyssen and later Lyssa Schmidt and Cherry Barbier remotely Absent: Mike Mathis and Todd Nilson. Caitlyn Meola attended as staff. Kyle Kordell attended as a guest.

3. APPROVAL OF BOARD MEETING MINUTES

The board reviewed the minutes of the March 2026 meeting. A motion was made by Curt Andrews and seconded by Michael Ditmer to adopt the minutes. The motion carried after a discussion was opened and concluded.

4. TREASURER REPORT:

- **YTD 2026 Budget to Actual Report:** Board Treasurer Curt Andrews reported that the year-to-date revenue numbers showed a concerning trend, with the January room tax revenue of \$5773.00 was the lowest since 2021. The February room tax revenue indicated the revenue was almost half of what it was the previous year, running comparable to 2019 and 2020 numbers. As a result of this trend, the Room Tax Commission at their meeting in March adjusted the 2026 budget.
- **Review 2026 budget revisions made by Room Tax Commission at Q1 2026 meeting:** In response to the lower January room tax revenue, the Room Tax Commission proactively decided to adjust the forecast in both revenue and expenses. This conservative approach is intended to prevent a short fall in spending later in the year. The budget forecast was reduced from \$342,000 to \$324,000, based on 2023 total revenue. Expenses were reduced by \$30,700, bringing the total down from \$235,000 to \$204,400. Reductions included lowering the transfer from other funds by \$13,200. The expense reduction exercise was described as an effort to be fiscally minded, not an attempt to save their way to success, as the primary goal remains to drive more people to the area. The marketing plan remains largely intact, focusing on leveraging existing dollars and closely monitoring revenue tracking. The potential for new revenue from the RV camping room tax (see other) ordinance. This change in the ordinance is expected to produce a 10% increase to room tax revenue by the end of 2026.
- **Vote to adopt revised 2026 Budget as presented:** A motion was made by Erin Dembski and seconded by Melissa Nyssen to accept the new budget as outlined, noting that it could fluctuate again at the next meeting. After discussion, the motion carried for a roll call vote.
- Following that, a motion was made by Amanda LaTour and seconded by Melissa Nyssen to accept the Treasurer's Report was made and carried out. After discussion motion carried.

5. OLD BUSINESS

- **National Travel and Tourism Week Celebration**
 - i. **Review event floor plan:** The proposed layout includes round guest tables, attraction tables on the left, and food vendors for the "Taste of Two Rivers" on the right. A welcome

table at the event's entrance was recommended, and board member Amanda LaTour agreed to staff it. Staff and board members were encouraged to wear lanyards and perhaps dress in business casual attire.

- ii. **Set itinerary for the event with volunteer roles:** The event is scheduled from 5:30 to 7:00, with doors opening at 5:30. The event's theme is "I LOVE TR,". The presentation is set to begin at 6:00pm. Michael Ditmer, as the board president, agreed to deliver the welcome speech, which will be pre-scripted and focus on the "I LOVE TR" campaign. Kyle Cordell will also say a few short words. Caitlyn Meola is working on a short video presentation featuring 10 to 20-second clips of community members saying why they love Two Rivers, aiming for a 2-minute total video. Michael Ditmer offered to coordinate with Colt Peterson and help edit the video montage. Caitlyn Meola will give a general speech on Tourism before handing the microphone to Greg Buckley to announce the Community Advocacy Award. Ryan Short from Civic Brand will present for 15-20 minutes about Two River's brand revitalization. Michael Ditmer was asked to conclude the event after Ryan Short's presentation. It was requested that the board members for both Room Tax and Explore Board be introduced and recognized. Cleanup volunteers are needed, with Cherry Barbier confirming they can assist.
- iii. **Taste of TR** There is space for two more vendor tables. There was discussion about inviting new businesses like Bees Emporium Cafe and the new Mexican seafood place.
- iv. **Attendees** They are sitting at about 50 attendees, and the RSVP deadline is April 24th.

6. I LOVE TR

- **Assets**

- i. **Metal heart signs** Amanda LaTour presented a sample metal yard stake banner, noting that the spray-painted version would cost about \$10, and a more durable powder-coated version would be about \$15. Feedback suggested making the heart on the design a little bigger for better visibility. The Board suggested a larger sign costing \$15, which could sell for \$20 or \$25 to make a small profit. Michael Ditmer agreed that a powder coat finishing is worth the cost. Curt Andrews explained that the size increase for the yard signs should be efficient for cutting on a sheet, suggesting an increase between 25% and 50% to avoid excessive waste. They confirmed that the current color is acceptable, and Joe Metzen will email the specific color specs. They also determined that the sign should have a single stake with a kick-out design for stability. The group decided to start with an initial production run of 50 yard signs. Joe Metzen suggested calculating the per-unit cost for 25 and 50 units to determine if there is a cost break. They noted that Two Rivers High School Production Shop typically closes around June 5th, so they will ask the vendor how fast they can implement production.
- ii. **Apparel** Ericson's is moving ahead with apparel items to be ready for the May 7th event. Joe Metzen outlined a new approach to lessen the financial burden on the Explore budget by working with local vendors, like Ericson's, on design concepts, potentially including royalty for logo usage.

- **Community Workshops** The flyer for the community workshops, which is not the final polished version, has been shared on the Explore Facebook page and other pages, listing the event at the public library. The event will go live on the community calendar on April 13th, and promotional materials will be available at the May 7th event. Jeff will cover the bulk price for Ryan's book, which will be available and autographed for workshop attendees.

7. OTHER

- **Room Tax Potential:** An "aha moment" at the Room Tax Committee passes a recommendation to be sent to Two Rivers City Council to make an ordinance change that short-term RV overnights should potentially pay room tax, as 12 to 14 other municipalities in Wisconsin's do this. A draft ordinance was created for City Council review, with the next step being to put this on a future Room Tax Commission agenda for proper notice, tentatively aiming for the first meeting in May. This proposed room tax does not apply to ground-based tent camping or stays longer than 30 days.

- **Communication to New Tourism Director:** Joe Metzen confirmed that communications should be directed to Caitlyn via the generic tourism email. All files, including master folders on Google Docs and Common Drive with the city, will be accessible to Caitlyn starting the following Monday, April 13th. Joe Metzen expressed gratitude for the team's work on the transition.
 - **Presentation on the Financial Impact of Tourism:** Curt Andrews the chair of the Room Tax Commission presented to the City Council at their April 7th meeting on the financial impact of tourism, focusing on the revenue generated by hotel stays and short-term rentals. The presentation highlighted that 100% of the 49 businesses surveyed agreed that tourism impacts their business, and 61% said their business likely would not exist without tourism. In addition, sales tax distribution data indicates that the tourism season extends from May through October, demonstrating that it is longer than just the three summer months. The five hotels and 34 short-term rentals contribute over \$258,000 in property tax. The presentation clarified that 30% of the room tax collected goes back to the general fund, impacting taxes positively.
 - **Summary of Tourism's Economic Benefit and Community Role:** The total financial impact summarized was over \$1.2 million, with roughly \$645,000 going back to the community for general fund, events, and projects. Curt Andrews emphasized that tourism is vital and that if this money were not collected, taxes might increase by an additional 1%. They concluded that everyone in the community serves as a "brand ambassador" by promoting "I Heart Rivers" through positive interactions and shared stories.
 - **Successful Tourism Marketing Artifact and Partnership:** Joe Metzen provided an update on an article that was published in *Lakeland Boating* as a result of a meeting at Circle Wisconsin's Midwest Marketplace in 2025, focusing on the lakeshore and the marine sanctuary. Both Explore Two Rivers and Visit Manitowoc placed complementary advertisements in the article.
 - **Recognition and Farewell to Joe Metzen:** The board acknowledged that this was Joe Metzen's last board meeting as Tourism Director. He was thanked for his fantastic work in laying the groundwork for the organization during a period of transition. Joe Metzen expressed that the job was a privilege and an honor, and he is confident in handing the role to Caitlyn Meola.
8. **ADJOURNMENT** Meeting adjourned at 10:15am. Motion to adjourn made by Curt Andrews, second by Amanda LaTour. Motion carried.