



EXPLORE TWO RIVERS MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tuesday, January 13, 2026, at 8:00 a.m.

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

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order at 8:00 a.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Present: Amanda Verhelst, Mike Mathis, Cherry Barbier, John Wyrostek, Michael Ditmer, Melissa Nyssen, Todd Nilson, Erin Dembski, Lyssa Schmidt, Joe Metzen

Absent: Curt Andrews

Guests: Kyle Kordell

3. INTRODUCTION OF INVITED GUESTS

None.

4. APPROVAL OF BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Approval of Minutes from the November Board meeting. Motion to approve made by Erin Dembski, seconded by Michael Ditmer. Motion carried.

5. TREASURER REPORT

Joe Metzen presented the Treasurer's Report.

Discussion highlights:

- Final 2025 financials are delayed due to a 45-day lag in room tax revenue reporting.
- Accrual-based reporting adopted in 2025 provides a more accurate month-to-month view of room tax performance, while the budget-to-actual report follows the City's cash-based accounting system.
- Room tax revenue began trending downward in April 2025, a pattern also observed in the manufacturing sector, as noted by Room Tax Commission Chair Rick Carey.
- Room Tax Commission reserve goal remains \$90,000; current reserves are just under \$70,000.
- A one-time, unplanned \$20,000 park equipment expense was discussed. The expenditure was required to match a \$100,000 pledge from the West Foundation, resulting in \$120,000 in new playground equipment with no installation costs to Parks and Recreation.

Motion to approve the Treasurer's Report made by Michael Ditmer, seconded by Cherry Barbier. Motion carried.

6. OLD BUSINESS

a. Election of Officers

- Joe Metzen facilitated the election of officers and emphasized the importance of board support for the onboarding of the incoming Tourism Director.

The following slate was presented:

- President: Michael Ditmer
- Vice President: Mike Mathis
- Secretary: Todd Nilson
- Treasurer: Curt Andrews

Motion to approve the slate made by Amanda Verhelst, seconded by Melissa Nyssen. Motion carried.

b. Recognition of Outgoing Board Member

The board recognized John Wyrostek as an outgoing president and board member and expressed its gratitude for his years of service and contributions to Explore Two Rivers and the City of Two Rivers.

7. NEW BUSINESS AND UPDATES

a. Visitor Guide Production and Distribution

- Joe Metzen reviewed the visitor guide production process. He noted significant concerns with the subcontracted layout work, requiring extensive internal revisions to ensure imagery and content accurately reflected Two Rivers and Manitowoc.
- The 2026 Visitor Guide print run increased to 25,000 copies after the previous 20,000 copies were depleted before November. Over 2,000 guides have already been distributed locally, with statewide distribution underway. The digital guide received 3,772 views within 19 hours of launch, with 64% from non-followers.

c. Nearshore Shipwreck Campaign

- An update was provided on the nearshore shipwreck campaign in partnership with NOAA. A draft brochure is in development featuring mapped shipwreck locations, GPS coordinates, access points, and a QR code linking to a new podcast series. Materials are targeted for completion ahead of Canoecopia, where Explore Two Rivers will share a booth with NOAA.

Upcoming events include:

- Ghost Ship Festival (March 6–7)
- Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast Film Festival (April 10)

d. Summer Concert Series

- Mike Mathis confirmed summer programming is finalized, including eight Bands on the Beach concerts, a fully booked Thursday series, and the return of Friday Night Live with nine concerts. Joe Metzen noted the return of the Summer of Fun Passport promotional brochure as an enhancement to the Friday Night LIVE downtown concert series..

e. Community Positivity Campaign

- Joe Metzen introduced a proposed community positivity campaign to counter online negativity impacting local businesses. The campaign is intended to highlight positive stories, reinforce brand values, and provide a structured roadmap for the incoming Tourism Director's first year.
- Interest has been expressed by Colt Peterson, Pam Wargin (TRBA), and Rick Carey (Room Tax Commission) Beth Kowalski (HWT&PM). Target launch is National Travel and Tourism Week in early May. Civic Brand has responded positively and is preparing a proposal for further engagement. A meeting open to the public will be scheduled in February.

f. National Travel and Tourism Week Event

- The board confirmed the National Travel and Tourism Week celebration will be held Thursday, May 7, 2026, at Sepia Chapel. The event will follow a celebratory format and continue the Taste of Two Rivers concept. Tentative timing is 5:30–7:00 p.m.

g. Tourism Director Search Update

- John Wyrosteck reported that 12 applications were received for the Tourism Director position. Five candidates are being considered for interviews by the search committee consisting of Rick Carey, Curt Andrews, Amanda Verhelst, and Kyle Kordell.

8. TOURISM DIRECTOR REPORT

No formal report.

9. NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting date will be announced.

10. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn made by Mike Mathis, seconded by Erin Dembski. Motion carried.

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It is possible that members of and possibly a quorum of governmental bodies of the municipality may be in attendance at the above stated meeting to gather information; no other action will be taken by any governmental body at the above-stated meeting other than the governmental body specifically referred to above in this notice