

***Pulaski County
Tourism Advisory Council***

Tuesday, 8 October 2024
Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, 11 January 2024
Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Members present: Vernon Gillum (County Council (Council)), Sue Kast (Board of Commissioners (Board)), Jeff Litke (The UPTOWN Project), Tom Miller (Winamac Town Council (W.T.C.)), Dave Scott (W.T.C.), Kelsie Zellers (Main Street Winamac). Department of Community Development (D.C.D.) Executive Director Nathan P. Origer, D.C.D. Assistant Taylor Bailey.

Members absent: Raymond Heabel (Board), Scott Kubish (Board), Christie Nicholson (Council).

Guests present: None

Call to Order and Introductions

Director Origer called the meeting to order at noon and introduced the members, noting their appointing bodies and initial-term lengths.

Election of Officers

Director Origer provided a summary of the Community Development Commission's (C.D.C.) history and the reorganization and restructuring process that had begun in 2022. The Board and Council had, in 2023, established various statutory commissions to provide the County with access to development tools that had been unavailable, as well as to alleviate the difficulties of working under a 15-member C.D.C. Among the new governing bodies created is this Tourism Advisory Council (TAC); the *Indiana Code* has a provision for a tourism commission, which can only be established if the Council adopts an Innkeepers Tax, which the Council had not yet been prepared to do. The TAC will closely follow the provisions of tourism-commission law excluding the Innkeepers Tax.

The director went on to explain the three offices — president, vice-president, secretary — and their responsibilities, noting that, in addition to running meetings and signing documents as appropriate, the president would serve a concurrent term on the restructured C.D.C., and that Main Street representatives are not eligible to serve as president. The vice-president would conduct meetings in the absence of the president, and the secretary would be asked to review minutes drafted by staff, but would not be responsible for preparing them. Director Origer noted that the three members not in attendance are also eligible to serve as officers.

Nominations and/or volunteers were encouraged for each office. Mr. Gillum expressed that he would not be able to serve as an officer as of right now due to his extra workload after losing his assistant manager at the state park.

Mrs. Zellers nominated Mr. Scott to serve as president; Mr. Scott accepted. Mr. Miller volunteered to serve as vice-president, and Mrs. Kast volunteered to serve as secretary.

With no other volunteers having spoken or nominations having been made, nominations were closed, and the slate was approved as presented.

Motion: Mr. Gillum; second: Mr. Litke; no discussion; approval: all.

New Business

General Responsibilities: A key TAC responsibility will be making recommendations regarding and approving the annual marketing-budget allocations and content; part of the D.C.D.'s budget is an appropriation used exclusively for tourism. This includes running television ads in Chicagoland and digital and print ads across the state. When funds would become available, the TAC would be asked to make recommendations regarding and to approve expenditures to support local tourism programs, projects, and events, which might include supporting a festival or developing a network of the various tourism-related businesses to encourage partnerships. The TAC would, in

short, be responsible for aiding in the general promotion of Pulaski County and its amenities as a tourism destination and in building relationships with and among local tourism businesses.

Director Origer noted that, unless an emerging project would require more sessions, it is preferred that the TAC and other commissions only meet a few times a year: a January reorganizational meeting, a May or early-June session to approve the next year's budget, and a third meeting later in the year regarding marketing-budget allocations for the coming year.

Tourism Strategic Plan: The Hometown Collaboration Initiative team developed a tourism strategic plan in 2017; the director noted that, in light of staffing changes and other, higher-priority responsibilities, little implementation had occurred, and the C.D.C had focused tourism efforts almost exclusively on external marketing. The plan called for establishing a tourism advisory committee, a role now filled by the TAC in a more formalized.

The Pulaski County Bike Route Network was a main objective of the strategic plan; this had been put on hold due to difficulties with the northward expansion of the Panhandle Pathway. Director Origer stated that he would like to see this project move forward as the Panhandle slowly progresses toward the Tippecanoe River State Park and beyond.

While the previous plan has some projects that could still be completed, the director expressed that he would like to use the 2017 plan as a guideline for developing a new, more robust vision that would align with the County's 2021 economic-development strategic plan. This would be a project undertaken in house with input from TAC members, with a committee of two or three members taking ownership of the update along with staff. Director Origer hoped to complete the new plan by the end of 2024, with the Committee presenting it to the TAC for approval upon completion.

An overhaul of the County website had begun, and Director Origer welcomed any input from the members regarding the Tourism section. The current Tourism microsite is not very interactive, which the director had hoped to improve as part of the rebuild. Ms. Bailey has been working on a user-friendly way to include the short-term rentals available in the county on the website; currently the full-service bed-and-breakfasts are featured.

The commercial that has been airing annual in Chicagoland had become dated, including featuring an attraction no longer operating; the director expressed hopes to replace the video this year or in 2025. When it first began airing and during the pandemic, the commercial had brought a tremendous number of visitors to the Tourism website; traffic had since declined substantially. Currently, the ads run from mid-April to mid-September. There is a clear need to refresh all marketing materials, as well as expanding the county's tourism social-media presence.

Director Origer asked if any members would be interested in serving on the Tourism Strategic Planning Committee; Mrs. Zellers and Mr. Litke volunteered. Staff would ask one of the members absent to fill a third seat.

Future Meetings: The goal for 2024 would be not to exceed three full-TAC meetings. If the strategic plan would be completed by the May meeting, then it could be approved then; otherwise, the approval could be postponed until the fall meeting. For the convenience of the members, date and time options would be emailed prior to future meetings to determine the best option. Mr. Gillum suggested that noon meetings would likely be ideal; Director Origer noted that lunch could be provided for any such meeting. Vice-President Miller added that he usually has open availability. The members as a whole agreed that lunch time meetings work best. In late April, staff would reach out to the members with date and time options for the May meeting. Director Origer would also reach out to the Strategic Plan Committee in the near future to schedule that meeting.

Other Business

Member pay: The director noted that, pursuant to tourism-commission provisions in the *Indiana Code*, members are not entitled to compensation. However, because the TAC does not exist strictly under State law, members would be paid for their attendance. The 2024 D.C.D. budget had been adopted with funds for *per-diem* pay; a W-9 form would likely be requested from each member once the director had conferred with the Auditor's Office regarding payment procedures.

Immediate next steps: Discussion ensued regarding whether any immediate accomplishments could be made during the meeting. Director Origer suggested that work could be done figuring out a marketing strategy based on the different demographics of each business's customer base. This would maximize marketing dollars by targeting more people likeliest to visit Pulaski County.

Mr. Gillum suggested finding a way to obtain information about from where visitors are coming. Director Origer explained that while no centralized, uniform measurement system is in place, self-reported data from the tourism businesses could be utilized, indicating that he would like to start tracking this data through the TAC. Vice-President Miller explained that most of the visitors at his short-term rentals typically live about two hours away, a majority coming from Chicago, Indianapolis, Detroit, and Fort Wayne. Secretary Kast added that a majority of Mill Creek Gardens guests come from Indianapolis, Southern Indiana, and Illinois; during the workweek, she mainly hosts business travelers, while many weekend guests come for the Panhandle Pathway or float the river. Vice-President Miller added he has renters come just to visit Fort Knox Paintball or Riverside Rentals.

Director Origer explained that, historically, marketing had never targeted Central and Southern Indiana; there is a competitive market due to the multiple destinations in that area. President Scott added that it is difficult to get first-time visitors to Pulaski County, but, once they are here, they love it and always return. Vice-President Miller agreed, adding that they have a guest that had been returning for the past three years. Secretary Kast shared that, in her opinion, an enhanced social-media presence would be more beneficial than running a television commercial.

Secretary Kast inquired about the marketing budget; the director reported a 2024 appropriation of \$60,000. Vice-President Miller asked how much of the budget is committed to the commercial; Director Origer explained that it would depend on the number of time slots, which times of day, and on which television stations it would run, noting the cost is typically about \$29,000. President Scott asked if Fort Knox Paintball had been offered the opportunity to serve on the TAC; Ms. Bailey confirmed that the owners had declined the offer due to how far out-of-county they reside.

Director Origer asked if a March meeting would be of interest before the May budget meeting; Vice-President Miller shared that he would like this, and President Scott noted that he would be out of town the last week of March.

Director Origer would be sending members the Chicagoland proposal he had received along with an explanation of the marketing money that had already been committed for this year. President Scott asked members if they could obtain information on where their visitors are coming from and bring it to the March meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Motion: Mr. Gillum; second: Vice-President Miller; no discussion; approval: all,
12:48 *p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

Taylor Bailey, Assistant/Recording Secretary
Sue Kast, Secretary