

***Pulaski County
Tourism Advisory Council***

Thursday, 20 March 2025
Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Friday, 24 January 2025
Winamac Municipal Utilities Complex
Winamac, Indiana

Members present: Vernon Gillum (County Council (Council)), Sue Kast (Board of Commissioners (Board)), Raymond Heabel (Board), Tom Miller (Winamac Town Council (W.T.C.)), Christie Nicholson (Council), Dave Scott (W.T.C.), Kelsie Zellers (Board). Department of Community Development (D.C.D.) Executive Director Nathan P. Origer, D.C.D. Assistant Taylor Bailey. Beth Hargrove (Main Street Winamac) arrived at 12:02 *p.m.*

Members absent: Jeff Litke (The UPTOWN Project) [business].

Guests present: Donna Heabel.

Call to Order and Introductions

Director Origer called the meeting to order at 12:01 *p.m.* and briefly introduced the members, highlighting that Mrs. Zellers had stepped down from her role representing Main Street Winamac and had been appointed fulfill a former commissioners-appointed member's term, and that Mrs. Hargrove had been appointed by Main Street Winamac.

Consent Agenda

With the October minutes having been extracted and tabled, the consent agenda was approved as amended.

Motion: Mr. Scott; second: Mrs. Nicholson; no discussion; approval: all.

In light of 2024-secretary Mrs. Kast's absence from the October meeting, Mr. Gillum agreed to review the minutes as secretary *pro tempore*.

Election of Officers

The director explained 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 Community Development Commission (C.D.C.). 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 not be responsible for preparing them. Director Origer called for nominations, noting that Mr. Scott, Mr. Miller and Mrs. Kast had served in 2024.

Mr. Heabel nominated the 2024 officers to continue serving; all three accepted. With no other nominations having been made, or other members having volunteered, the nominations were closed, and the slate was approved as presented.

Motion: Mr. Gillum; second: Mrs. Nicholson; no discussion; approval: all.

Old Business

Tourism Strategic Plan: Director Origer would be scheduling a meeting with the Strategic Planning Committee (S.P.C.) to review the draft of the plan; Mrs. Nicholson and Mrs. Zellers agreed to continue serving on the committee, and the director suggested that Mr. Litke likely would be willing as well. [Mr. Litke later confirmed.]

The director expressed his hope of completing the plan within the first half of the year, noting that some implementation work would likely occur parallel to development, especially investigating the appropriateness of an updated hotel-feasibility study, which would likely be addressed, along with any concerns pertaining to existing alternatives to hotels, in conversations with larger local companies. Over the course of the year, the director and Ms. Bailey, separately or together as circumstances dictate, would be attempting to meet with at least one local tourism business or entity every other month.

2025 Community Development budget — tourism-marketing allocation: Travel Indiana had provided options greater emphasis on digital; to date, the director had confirmed 2025 marketing with Travel Indiana, GreatNews.Life, and the publisher of two D.N.R. guides, leaving about \$13,600 remaining in the reduced marketing budget. The director suggested that some of the remaining funds could be used for local-event advertising support. Discussion ensued regarding potential risks to future budgets by leaving funds unexpended.

President Scott enquired about advertising with Indiana Beach, something that Donna Heabel had suggested in October. Mrs. Heabel explained that it provides personalized advertising on the Indiana Beach website as well as an ad in the in-park flyer distributed to customers, sharing that a number of Miss Kitty's customers had seen their ad in the flyer. Director Origer expressed concern regarding how effective this option would be regarding countywide marketing as opposed to a single business's utilizing the option. Mrs. Heabel confirmed that this option targets individual businesses; Mrs. Zellers suggested that using TAC marketing funds to support a co-operative ad shared by multiple Pulaski County entities might be worthwhile, and the director agreed to contact the company to investigate this possibility. Members generally agreed with this option, but the president reiterated concerns about advertisements being buried in ad-heavy print publications.

Mrs. Nicholson reiterated that some of the marketing budget should be saved for Google Ads and social media advertising. Mrs. Hargrove suggested exploring opportunities for supporting cooperative tourism opportunities, such as paying a discounted rate for a visit that bundles a day on the river with a night at a local accommodation. Director Origer explained that discussions regarding the topic had been held in the past, but a lack of commitment from businesses thus far and fine-tuning the details of the process had prohibited progress. The tourism strategic plan would include language pertaining to helping to coordinate these conversations and partnerships.

Mrs. Nicholson mentioned Purdue University's Social Networking program, noting that students must work a certain number of internship hours before they can obtain their degree; discussion ensued regarding investigating this program as a potential source for an intern who could focus on social-media tourism marketing and about expanded social-media marketing, generally. The director would investigate the Purdue program; Mrs. Nicholson added that she had already planning on utilizing this program at Acorn Oaks and would be willing to share information with the director.

2025 Community Development budget — Pulaski County Tribe signage proposal: Mr. Heabel suggested that any leftover marketing-budget funds could be allocated toward this project. The director recapitulated the October conversation with Brandi Larkin and Diana Day of the Tribe regarding the proposal, expressing skepticism about flexibility in the reduced marketing budget and the effectiveness of installing it on the courthouse lawn, at a corner without a four-way stop, as well as concerns with adversely affecting the courthouse-renovation project. Mr. Gillum added that Mrs. Larkin had also mentioned the possibility of placing the sign at the Veterans Memorial Park; members agreed that this would be a better location. Discussion ensued, with President Scott expressing his concern with the TAC's providing financial support, explaining that the TAC, as a tourism agency, should be focused on targeting visitors rather than residents; Mrs. Nicholson agreed. In light of the concerns raised, the members declined to provide financial support for the project.

By consensus.

Mr. Heabel remarked upon the importance of strong downtowns to attracting visitors, suggesting that energy should be directed toward Winamac and then spread to other towns in the county. Director Origer expressed agreement, highlight the seats on the TAC held by Mr. Litke and Mrs. Hargrove representing Main Street organizations and his own involvement with such entities.

Discussion then returned briefly to the budget at-large, with Mrs. Hargrove highlighting her experiences as someone whose family recently moved to Winamac after investigating various options within a particular geographic region and emphasizing the importance of allocating a substantial share of the available funds for digital marketing.

New Business

Marketing materials — video: Mrs. Hargrove opined that content is key, and that she believes that if the businesses are willing to work together on package deals, then that could expand

the reach of marketing. Additionally, Mrs. Hargrove suggested using half of the leftover marketing budget for content and the other half for marketing; the director explained that funds in another appropriation could be used for content production.

President Scott added that Ryan Huggler has started a marketing business and had made an aerial video for Riverside Rentals; this could be an inexpensive option for additional content. Mrs. Hargrove agreed that drone and GoPro footage are key to effective marketing, also suggesting being open to receiving footage from people in the community who are willing to share. President Scott added that the TAC would need to prioritize content for video footage, and Director Origer noted that it would be helpful to have a plan for what content should be produced as well as what kind of content is worth “poaching”. Mrs. Hargrove suggested that members create a highlight schedule to guide planning and to ensure that as many attractions as possibly are featured equitably.

The director expressed interest in his and Ms. Bailey’s attending the Social Media Bootcamp hosted by GreatNews.Life and offered at no cost to clients. Mrs. Nicholson suggested offering this to tourism businesses in the community.

The director stated he would still like to have a discussion about producing a professional, commercial-length video that could be used on television were funding to be restored and online.

Marketing materials — print: The director would like to start pursuing the development of a new rack card, a two-sided brochure that would include a link and QR code that would direct users to the tourism website. These could be placed at travel centers across the state and throughout the county; Mrs. Bailey added that they could also be place at libraries in the area. Vice-President Miller inquired about the cost; Director Origer was unsure, but would investigate this. Members reviewed the existing, postcard-sized card, which Mrs. Zellers noted had been a good starting point.

The director noted that staff would be reviving some existing social-media accounts, which could be included on the card; Ms. Bailey added that she recently had received an email encouraging her to update the Instagram-account password. Mr. Gillum expressed his support for a new rack card, contending that having something tactile can sometimes be preferable to having everything online. Members approved of moving forward.

By consensus.

Indiana Tourism Association: Director Origer explained that, since the TAC had become more formal, he has begun looking into the Indiana Tourism Association. While unsure if membership would currently be worth the \$700 annual fee, the director had had some interest in trainings offered, although the director expressed equal skepticism toward the cost for the Association’s annual conference compared to other such events that he attends. Director Origer suggested that membership might be more worthwhile in the future, and Mrs. Zellers agreed; Mrs. Hargrove asked what benefits membership offers, and the director explained that members pay discounted rates for training and conferences, access to legal counsel, and professional networking development. President Scott suggested that the \$700 membership fee would be wasted without utilization of the costly services provided. Mrs. Hargrove opined that membership might be worth the cost if giving the County the opportunity to be part of a social-media campaign came as a benefit. The director would reach out to the Association for further information.

Future Meetings: Director Origer would be scheduling one or two S.P.C. meetings before reconvening the TAC; ideally, the S.P.C.’s draft plan would be ready for review by the TAC in May, at which point a meeting devoted to authorizing public review of the document and addressing the 2026 budget could be held. The director did not expect any meetings to be required during the third quarter, and the TAC would likely convene again in October notwithstanding something unforeseen.

2025 Economic Development Summit: Director Origer encouraged the members to attend the annual event, which would be held at a to-be-determined location at some point in April, and to offer suggestions regarding the guest speaker’s topic. Mrs. Zellers suggested the new Historical Society museum in downtown Winamac; the director was unsure as to the facility’s readiness, and Vice-President Miller suggested that it was expected to open in April. The director encouraged members to share thoughts regarding potential venues, too.

In past years, the event had rotated among the four incorporated towns, but the wisdom of this practice had come into question in the wake of the restructuring of C.D.C. and in light of the

relatively central location of Winamac — the county seat and home of the D.C.D. office —, which made for shorter drives for attendees from the county's extremities compared to trekking from southern Salem Township to Monterey. In contrast to the arguments in favor of permanently holding the event in Winamac, the director noted that circling the county makes hiring caterers outside of Winamac an easier task.

Other Business

Expression of gratitude: President Scott thanked the members for attending and remarked upon the productiveness of the meeting.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Motion: Mrs. Zellers; second: Mrs. Hargrove; no discussion; approval: all,
12:54 *p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

Taylor Bailey, Assistant/Recording Secretary

Sue Kast, Secretary