

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes
May 3, 2022
Held at the Merrill Chamber of Commerce

Members Present: Dan Wendorf, Sue Kunkel, Ketul Patel, Paul Russell, Sara Gilbert, Jeremy Ratliff

Staff Present: Clyde Nelson, Cheryl Skoug

Others Present: MP3

Called to order: 12:03pm by Dan Wendorf

Introduction to new members.

Public Comment: None

Approval of Minutes from last meeting reviewed, and a motion to approve meeting minutes as written was made by Paul Russell, seconded by Jeremy Ratliff, voted, and carried.

Overview of Commission for new members - Clyde Nelson gave an overview of What is Tourism? Tourism is events that bring people to Merrill and generates overnight stays.

Report that was provided to the Common Council - Clyde provided the Council with this report. We need people to stay in Merrill. "Heads in the beds," People visiting Merrill for the Day spend \$71 on average while here. People that stay overnight spend on average \$160 while here. Room Tax that is received to the city of Merrill, 70% goes to Tourism. As the commission grants out money, they look at the money that has come from room tax in the previous quarters, to determine what funds are available to give to each grantee. In a survey provided from the Department of Tourism in Wisconsin, people will be taking short trips around the state due to the rise in fuel.

Room Tax Rate was at 4% three years ago in Lincoln County and is currently at 6%. Merrill has 158 rooms available to rent out. Sara Gilbert from Council Grounds will provide overnight stays from this time forward, and if the are here staying for a certain reason.

Admin/Rent Fees – these are the fees that get paid to the Merrill Chamber for holding the tourism information for the city and state, creating and submitting ads to publications to different agencies in the state, maintain communications and payment to the Grantees, mailing and giving out information about the city and county, and storing the misc. city, county and state information.

Review of Grantees and award amounts – Grantees who received money must use that money for advertising outside of Lincoln County. Grantees can submit applications for their events to help pay for advertising.

-Clyde played a recording from Travel Wisconsin that was aired in Milwaukee, WI on WTMJ about traveling to Merrill to visit the River Bend Trail and Sawmill Brewing Company.

-Currently the Merrill Chamber is working with Travel Wisconsin to bring an "influencer" to Merrill to write about the non-motorized trails in Merrill. We will be looking for a grant to help pay for this person to come. Plus, we will be working with Harrison Hills to start advertising the area with trails. In hopes to bring more people to the area for trail riding. "Economic Impact of Tourism in Wisconsin" from 2020, was handed out to everyone to review on their own time. The Chamber will be working with Travel Wisconsin to get trails listed in their publications that are provide.

- Do we have any knowledge of how many people come to Merrill and stay with family members, and what they spend while in Merrill? Currently, we do not have a way to account for this information. We should have numbers on each event how many rooms are used. We should receive those numbers.
- How do we know if the advertising the grantee use, brings people to the event? No way of knowing unless someone is right there getting the information.
- Chamber has not attended any tradeshows to help bring people to Merrill. The Chamber will start attending different tradeshows throughout the state.
- The Commission needs to focus on giving money to events that apply for funds that the event is held here in Merrill.
- The chamber will add the city logo with our logo along with tag words to keep everything sync. People will hear the same tag words from the Chamber and City.
- What Ken does with his videos? These videos could help the event do more advertising. Chamber might start working with a company that people could upload their pictures to help show others what they experience at the Grantee's event.
- Charter Spectrum would like Merrill to start to advertise online with them. Have pop ups that would come online while people are using their system.
- City of Merrill has hired a Marketing Specialist. She is contracted by the city to start on June 1st. Will be working with Businesses to help bring people to Merrill. City is also looking for a social media part-time person.
- Explore the City – Quality of Life. City Pages from Wausau only had what is happening at the Sawmill. Where are all the events for Merrill? Fall Ride has no set stops in Merrill. Why is that?
- Budget** – was approved last November for 2022. We do not pay the grantee the money they are awarded until we received the receipts of paid advertising from grantee. If no receipts are received, no money is paid out and the money stays in the account.
- Grant Applications** – review how the applications are received and process.
- Produce a brief survey to ask why they are coming to Merrill for the hotels to ask. Jeremy and Ketul will work on survey for the next meeting.

Next meeting will be Tuesday July 19, 2022, at Noon at the Merrill Chamber office.

A motion to adjourn at 1:20pm was made by Sue Kunkel, seconded by Jeremy Ratliff, voted and motion carried.