

**CITY OF MERRILL
TOURISM COMMISSION
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2025 MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING MERRILL AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
705 N CENTER AVENUE 12:00 PM**

- I. **Call to Order** Dan Wendorf called the meeting to order at 12:00 pm
Present: Parks Director Wendorf, Sue Kunkel, Gary Schwartz, D7 Alderperson Weix Jr., Sara Gilbert
Present Not Voting: Clyde Nelson, Sarah Brooks
- II. **Public Comment** There was no public comment.
- III. **Minutes from Previous Meeting**
 1. **Consider placing the minutes from the July 29th meeting on file**
- (Kunkel/D7 Alderperson Weix Jr.) motion/second to approve. The motion passed.
- IV. **2025 Budget**
 1. **2025 Budget Update** - As of today, the room tax collected has been \$54,550.42. The 3rd quarter check is anticipated to be \$29,000-30,000, and from that it is 5% less than what was anticipated by the City Finance Director a year ago. The 2025 approved festivals/events, the approved grants, Merrill Lions approved \$1,400 and dispersed \$845. The Lincoln Co Fair and Rodeo each approved \$21,000 and were each dispersed the full amount. The Concertina Festival was approved and dispersed \$425. Merrill Ice Druggers was approved for \$7,500 and dispersed \$5,525. Black Squirrel Scurry was approved and dispersed \$1,000. Under Down Trail Riders was approved and dispersed \$900. Fat Tire Bike Races was approved and dispersed \$250. Carry the Cross was approved \$1000, prior to the event it was canceled, so no funds were dispersed. Food Truck-a-Palooza was approved and dispersed \$1,500. Mud 'N' Jams was approved and dispersed \$2,000. The total approved was \$57,975. The total dispersed was \$54,445.31. Other promotions: a total of \$26,000. Of that \$8,000 was a matching grant to the City of Merrill for Fireworks. Remaining funds were used for attending 4 trade shows and the Governor's Conference, and the disbursement of the Visitor Guide. We have held off paying reimbursement for costs of attending the State Fair and marketing support. We are waiting for the funds for the 3rd Quarter to be received.
- V. **2026 Budget Discussion and approval** Due to a drop in 4th Quarter Tourism, the approved 2026 budget amount has been reduced to a total budget of \$97,400. The Tourism Commission receives 70% of the Room Tax collected. The City and Park & Rec Department split the remaining 30%. In 2026, the Chamber would like to do the following items: continue attending travel shows, changing the foyer for more access of information, postage will change because of the resources for getting the visitor guides distributed. We would like to keep a balance (buffer) in

the checkbook. In case of something that might come up. The Chamber will also be having influencer(s) to come to Merrill.

Grant Applications –

- Merrill Lions – Long time event. They are growing larger each year. They were unaware that it was a reimbursable grant. They were informed that in 2026 funds will only be reimbursed for paid advertising. Asking for \$1,400, granted is \$1,000.
 - Merrill Ice Drags – money used last year was to pay for advertising. It is a unique event that draws a lot of people into town. Expanded their advertising this year and the application was prepared well. Asking \$7500, granted \$5,000.
 - Black Squirrel Scurry – the organizer, has made this a great event, and it is a national qualifying event. He is getting more people coming to Merrill and spending the night. Asking \$1000, granted \$1000.
 - Underdown Trail Ride – This is a great activity that draws people from all over the country. They provide Geotagging as well. Asking for \$600, granted \$600.
 - Snowbound in Underdown Fat Bike Races – again another magnificent event that is bringing more people to Merrill every year. Asking \$350, granted \$350.
 - Food Truck-A-Palooza – Great event for the city. It has grown tremendously from year to year. People came from all over to enjoy the event. Other County Fairs came down to talk to the different food vendors to come to their fairs. Asking \$2000, granted \$1200.
 - Mud N Jams – ATV/UTV run that is a Charity Event. The application was received late, due to the reasons stated. The application was also submitted incomplete. Budget and marketing information was not provided, which is required for all applications to be submitted completely for consideration. Asking for \$5000, the application was declined for being an incomplete application.
 - Merrill Youth Hockey Summer Classic Tournaments—This event has grown a lot over the last 3 years. Bringing participants from across Wisconsin and 4 surrounding states. Asking for \$1000, granted \$1000.
 - 2026 World Horseshoe Tournament. This event is hosted in Wausau. They anticipate large numbers of attendees and will not have the ability to provide 9,000 “night” stays during the course of the event. Asking \$1500, granted \$1,000. There is a special requirement that they must provide us with documentation of them supporting Merrill and that Merrill hotels and campground to be listed as “preferred hotel destination.”
 - Rib Mountain Adventure - Winter Edition. New event submission. They are asking for \$500, and granted \$500.
 - Wisconsin Pro Rodeo –Asking for \$28,000, granted \$15,500. – Same as the Fair.
 - Lincoln County Fair –Asking for \$21,000, granted \$15,500,. Same as the Rodeo.
- *The Fair and Rodeo still received the same percentage of total grant money, just the total grant money was reduced. Thus, reducing each of their total grant awards.
- Fireworks – This is a matching funds grant. If the city spends \$8000, we

will match \$8000. Asked for \$16000, approved \$8000 matching grant.

- New Budget of the Tourism Commission is \$50,000 for all expenses, and \$50,650 for Grant funding totaling \$100,650. A motion was made to accept the 2025 Budget with said changes made by Sue and seconded by Sara, voted, and carried. **Please note that Sue Kunkel has abstained from the specific awarding of the Lincoln County Fair. Motion made to approve the 2026 Budget by Sue Kunkel and seconded by Mark Weix. All in favor, none opposed. Motion carries.

VI. Set date/time for next meeting The next meeting will be held in June 2026, unless something comes up beforehand. Meeting notice will be sent out well in advance of the event.

VII. Adjournment (Kunkel/Schwartz) motion/second to adjourn. The motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at 1:35 pm.

Minutes submitted by Sara Brooks and published by City Clerk Anderson-Malm