

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes

November 10, 2022

Held at the Merrill Chamber of Commerce

Members Present: Dan Wendorf, Sue Kunkel, Ketul Patel, Rick Blake, Sara Gilbert

Absent: Jeremy Ratliff

Staff Present: Clyde Nelson, Cheryl Skoug

Others Present: MP3

Called to order: 12:05pm by Dan Wendorf

Introduction to new members.

Public Comment: Dan Wendorf read an email from Stacy Pettitt about recipients of the grants are not using the funds for what they are supposed to be used. Dan let the Commission know that we have procedures about how the grantees are reimbursed from the grants.

Approval of Minutes from last meeting was provided at the time of the meeting but Wendorf suggested allowing everyone time to review them and approve them at the next meeting.

Review of Budget for 2023

Reviewing of data that was provided. Dan explained how the money was generated for the grants, and how the money should be used. Wendorf also provided statutory language from the State of Wisconsin as well as the City Ordinance as it pertains to Room Tax and Tourism Commission for the new members.

The 6% Room tax that comes from overnight stays in the City of Merrill is given to the City. The City divides the money between the delegated locations.

Clyde reviewed the 2022 Budget and where the money was spent. Review of the 2023 Budget was presented at this time.

- Trade shows - \$2,500 was added into the Budget. This was suggested that the staff should go to trade shows and get our faces seen. The Chamber will come up with shows that we are able to attend.
- Discussion on the difference between Tradeshow and Conference. A tradeshow is where staff would go, sit, and talk about why to come to Merrill. Conferences are where staff go to learn new and other ways to get people to Merrill.
- Admin/Rent – increase from last year.

Expanses breakdown was provided.

Review of Grant applications:

Wendorf suggested the Commission discuss each request individually and make suggested award amounts during discussion. He suggested reviewing the total budget at the end of overall discussion to ensure it fits within the anticipated budget for 2023. This would allow for one

motion at the end of all discussion to set the Tourism Budget and approve grant award amounts for next year.

Several applications came in higher than in the past, along with new events. One person will make a recommendation for the amount we should consider for each event. If the application came in after the deadline of September 9, 2023, the application could be awarded up to 50% of the asking amount.

We need to remind people to take time to fill out the application with as much information as possible. Providing more information about their event will help the commission determine the allotted amount of money they could get. Wendorf stated that some of the grant applications looked like there was not much thought put into them.

Merrill Winterfest Sled Dog Race – came in on September 12th. This is a unique event for Merrill. Moving locations to Gleason but mushers will still be using the hotels in Merrill. Asking \$400, granted \$200.

Lions Car Show – The event keeps growing every year. Had over 350 cars in 2022. Asking \$1,500, granted: \$1250

Lincoln County Fair – Clyde and Sue will not be voting on this event. Both will be willing to answer any questions regarding the fair. How is the Fair going to get into the Madison/Milwaukee areas? They will be using Spectrum Communications. Radio advertising. This is a huge event that brings lots of people to Merrill (40,000 to 50,000 people). Asking: \$16,000, granted: \$13,500.

Wisconsin River Pro Rodeo – Another event that brings a lot of people to Merrill. We do get people from all over the states. Will need to make sure that the Chamber information is on their advertising. Asking: \$20,000, granted: \$13,500

Concertina Festival – Application came in on September 24. Central Wisconsin Concertina has disbanded, and this group is taking the event over. Will make sure they understand how to use the funds that are granted to them. Asking: \$450, granted: \$225.

Merrill Ice Drags – has brought many people to the area. Has been a great event for the Merrill community. This event has no effect on Council Grounds. Would like a little more information on the event and how and where they advertise. Asking: \$6,500, granted: \$5,000.

Barleyfest – Dan will answer any questions for this event but will not be voting. They are looking at making a few changes to the event, and Dan stated that this event could be reduced by \$1,000. Asking: \$2,500, granted: \$1,500

Black Squirrel Scurry – This event does bring a different crowd to Merrill. Greg has been using Facebook boost directed at people that show interest in this kind of event. Greg has been working on getting more sponsors. Asking \$1,000, granted \$800.

Underdown Trail Ride – Ironbull – working big on getting people educated about this recreation. Ironbull has already made connections that they use to bring people to Merrill. They do have a huge marketing avenue and not asking much in return. Asking \$850, granted \$850

Central Wisconsin Bandits - New event. Semiprofessional Football team moving from Marshfield to Merrill. Will be playing spring football at Jay Stadium. The current players have attended many different events in Merrill. Have been at every home game of the Bluejays High School Football team. Will have many people coming to Merrill for home games. 50 people on each team, some traveling from Illinois. Will have at least 5 home games. Asking: \$1,000, granted: \$750

Merrill Youth Bantam Hockey Tournament – new event. They are asking for money to pay for ice time and refs. Money is not to be used for that. Cheryl was asked about how Merrill Youth Hockey could use funds, and she explained that they must pay WAHA a fee to have a sanction tournament. The event would be listed on the WAHA website for teams from all over Wisconsin to come to. If money is granted, we would need to see the Chamber information on advertising. They are to be instructed that they can only use this funding for promotions. Asking: \$2,580, granted \$500.

Merrill Youth Squirt Hockey Tournament – new event. See above what was said for the Merrill Youth Bantam Hockey Tournament. Asking: \$2,948, granted: \$500

Carry the Cross – new event. After reviewing last year's event, they had only spent \$500 on advertising. Not sure how they would use the amount requested. Will need to make sure that they know the correct information that is needed for advertising with grant money. Asking \$5,000, granted: \$1,000

\$40,075 is the total amount of granted money.

Ketul said that Cobblestone is down by 10% from 2021 stays.

The commission would like to add to application for 2024, who are the grantees advertising with and to whom? Also, would like more information on events.

Suggestion to remove Tradeshow from the budget. We need to re-think that. We need to get our faces out around the state to get more people to come here. Sue would be willing to volunteer to go to events.

The Chamber is asked to watch the budget and if anything comes up, to let the Commission know right away.

A motion to accept the proposed budget of \$98,220 for 2023 was made by Sue Kunkel, seconded by Rick Blake, voted, and carries.

Sue commented that this is hard for us to review and award the funds.

Next meeting will be emailed as needed.

A motion to adjourn at 1:43pm was made by Sue Kunkel, seconded by Sara Gilbert, voted and motion carried.

Cheryl Skoug
Recording Secretary