

Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes
November 2, 2021
Held at the Merrill Chamber of Commerce

Members Present: Ryan Schwartzman, Dan Wendorf, John Van Lieshout
Via Zoom: Becky Roberts

Staff Present: Clyde Nelson, Cheryl Skoug

Others Present: MP3

Called to order: 12:30pm by Dan Wendorf

Approval of Minutes from last meeting reviewed, and a motion to approve minutes from the November 5, 2020, meeting was made by Schwartzman, seconded by Roberts, voted, and carried.

Review of Budget for 2022

Reviewing of data that was provided. Pictures of handouts were sent via text message to Roberts.

Review of Applications of Grants:

Operations Budget:

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 2022. This would allow for one motion at the end of all discussion to set the Tourism Budget for next year. Nelson suggested, that with a healthy budget heading into 2022, that we could consider full funding for each applicant.

Admin/Rent: The Chamber provided information showing what the cost of running Tourism out of our office. The Chamber would like a slight increase to help offset the cost to the Chamber.

Information was provided to show what each visitor that comes to Merrill spends. With the “rack” price increased, that means the Room Tax will slightly increase.

Room Tax for the surrounding areas was provided to see if we are on the right track at 6%.

Would we like to have two grant application periods per year? Have the budget for 6 months at a time instead of the year? Will investigate and decide at next meeting. It was mentioned that Rothschild utilizes the two per year grant cycle.

*** Welcome Clyde Nelson to Tourism Commission. Clyde is the new Executive Director at the Merrill Chamber.***

The Commission should consider helping the city with re-branding Merrill. The Commission is on board with helping them out.

With not knowing how COVID-19 was going to affect Tourism in Merrill in 2020-2021, we were cautious with funds. We have a nice amount in the checkbook, would we need to review each of the applications and adjust what they are asking for?

Savings Account – do we need one or do we just make sure we have funds in checkbook to be able to work with Discover Wisconsin when they come to us without taking a huge hit?

What is the budget for each event? Commission would like to see how each grantee uses the money for marketing and with what companies, to ensure they are creating overnight stays. Wendorf stated that it is important (and required) for each organization to provide a detailed budget for their events. This helps aid the Commission with their decisions.

Two of the major events, Fair and Rodeo are the two biggest events that bring overnight stays to Merrill. Will need to keep that in mind when reviewing.

Nelson suggested that we just grant the asking amount to all applicates. Let's help the events make some money.

Schwartzman suggested that if we give the Rodeo their asking amount, that we should think of bumping the Fair to the same amount. Would like to see that the fair advertises outside of the basic areas – Green Bay, Shawano, Eau Claire, etc.

A motion to approve the following amounts to events.

Merrill Winterfest Sled Dog Race: Asking: \$400, granted: \$400

Merrill Area Lion's Labor Day Car Show: Asking: \$1100, granted: \$1100

Lincoln County Fair: Asking 10,000, granted: \$12,500 – will need to use the extra money advertising outside their normal avenues.

Wisconsin River Pro Rodeo: Asking: \$12,500, granted: \$12,500

Central Wisconsin Concertina Festival Asking: \$300, granted: \$300

Merrill Ice Drags: Asking: \$5,000, granted: \$5,000

Lincoln County Barleyfest: Asking: \$2500, granted: \$2500

Pork in the Park: Asking; \$2500, granted: \$2500

Black Squirrel Scurry Asking: \$1000, granted: \$1000

Oktoberfest Asking: \$2500, granted: \$2500

Underdown Trail Ride: Asking: \$750, granted: \$750

Grants totaling \$41,050 was made by Ryan Schwartzman, seconded by Becky Roberts, voted, and carried unanimously.

A motion to approve the total budget for the Tourism Commission along with the grant award amount included, \$82,250, was made by Ryan Schwartzman, seconded by John VanLieshout, voted, and carried unanimously.

Discussion: (1) Why are people not applying for the funds? (2) Commission would like to see who the grantees are using for advertising. (3) Depending on when the event is, do we offer applications turned in at two different times of the year. (4) Do we move the date later September 30th of the year? (5) Dan will reach out to Rothschild to see how they do their application process twice a year. (6) Ironbull organization which is holding the Underdown Trail Ride. They are working with Dan to make this

“silent” sport heard. (7) Do we need to set aside money to help rebrand Merrill? (8) Use the money that is not used to help better the city with things that would help with tourism, example: signs throughout the city. (9) The chamber will be looking for other grants opportunities to the city. (10) We need to grow Merrill by advertising in the outside areas – Counties, State.

Next meeting: April 19, 2022, at noon – Chamber office.

A motion to adjourn at 1:29 pm was made by John Van Lieshout, seconded by Ryan Schwartzman, voted, and carried.

Cheryl Skoug
Recording Secretary