

TOURISM COMMISSION MINUTES
Monday, April 14, 2025
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

Meeting was called to order by Chair Waspi at 4:00 p.m.

Roll Call

Present: Chair Brian Waspi, Vice Chair Zakia Pirzada, Alderman Fesenmaier, Alderman Stoodley, Troy Migut, Shelley Rowell; Mayor Krause (Ex-Off), Stephanie Klett (Ex-Off)
Absent: Comptroller Laura Pisarcik (Ex-Off).

Comments from the Public limited to 5 minutes, limited to items on the agenda:

Luke Pfeiffer, 1091 S. Lake Shore Drive, spoke regarding Item #10b. His concern is that the City keeps all the revenue from the Riviera rentals, and the Tourism Commission pays for the independent contractor, Heather Jones, plus the debt service while also retaining 30% of the total room tax collected. Luke also pointed out the Town of Geneva has its own Tourism Commission now, and we should bring in hotel managers to find out how to promote city hotels.

Stephanie Klett, Havenwood Drive, addressed Item #11b. She pointed out that the Wisconsin Department of Tourism Joint Effort Marketing (JEM) grants are given only to non-profit groups or a grant containing a non-profit component. Grant awards are limited to three years to acknowledge new events and the initiation period. Klett also reiterated the idea of using money for municipal development projects such as City Welcome signs, new attractive map kiosks, and wayfinding signs.

Approval of Tourism Commission minutes from March 10, 2025

Motion by Pirzada, second by Waspi, to approve the minutes from March 10, 2025. Unanimously carried.

Heather Jones, Independent Contractor for Tourism Commission, Meet at the Lake Promotional Activity

Jones was absent, so Waspi quickly highlighted items from her report including the positive website trends and number of Riviera events booked. To address Public Comments, he explained that City staff in the past oversaw booking the Riviera which meant not reaching full potential. The Commission hired a contractor to focus solely on the Riviera marketing and bookings.

Update from Tourism Entity – Visit Lake Geneva

Deanna Goodwin drew attention to upcoming events: Restaurant Week, Concerts in the Park, and the annual Electric Christmas parade. City of Lake Geneva scored in the top 5 for Readers Choice Awards in USA Today's Best Small Towns. National Travel and Tourism Week is May 4 through May 10, 2025.

Discover Wisconsin's t.v. episode "Lake Geneva After Dark" will air again on May 17 and 18.

Update from Lake Geneva Business Improvement District (BID) –

Alexandra Binanti was absent, and Waspi gave a brief review of her report.

Written financial update provided by City Comptroller

Balance Sheet from February 28, 2025

Total Assets \$1,031,919.75

Restricted Fund Balance - \$1,075,073.65

Tourism Promotional Grant Program and Requests

None

Final Grant Evaluations from organizations receiving Tourism Grant

Abominable Snowman –

Though the results were very thorough, the size of this and other grants are increasing. Tourism website of City hotels was not on promotional materials. Commissioners will check future events for website QR-Code or URL on promotional materials – samples are required as part of the application packet.

The Riviera Ballroom – Winter Promo

The event targeted off-season rentals with a discount package for booking rooms at City Hotels.

Tourism Commission related forms, paperwork, and grant procedures review

Discussion ensued regarding creating fair but flexible criteria or guidelines for awarding grants.

Motion by Fesenmaier, second by Waspi, to suspend the rules to allow Deanna Goodwin to speak. Unanimously carried. Deanna let the group know that placer.ai will not be available through the Walworth County Visitor's Bureau after their subscription runs out this year. The company does not allow the co-op agreement of multiple groups sharing the subscription and cost (\$40,000/year). Visit Lake Geneva is meeting with representatives to discuss options. There are other companies providing similar services, but placer.ai tops the industry standards. Other discussion included landmark lawsuits in the last two years about how tourism funds are dispersed; adding a sports grant category; tying the grant to City permits issued, need for a convention center in the city limits; importance of off-season and new events; capping grants at three years; Welcome signs, map kiosks, and wayfaring signs that are cohesive, unique, and attractive plus maintenance, replacement, and landscaping; capping the amount of grants or not approving proposed amounts; adding a line item in the tourism section of the city budget for municipal development.

After more discussion, the Commission wants to move forward with **criteria/guidelines placed directly** on the grant application noting that strong preference will be given to new events or new elements, whether located in a municipality with an existing Tourism Commission or room tax collection, cap at three (3) years or reduced amounts, non-profits or non-profit components, and/or multiple day events.

Future meeting agenda items and next meeting date – Monday, May 12 at 4:00 PM

- Lake Geneva Taco Fest grant application

- Promoting Tourism website listing City hotels (Zakia)
- Budget – add line items for municipal development projects including maintenance
- Riviera Ballroom Complimentary Request form with supporting docs (see above)
- Criteria for grant awards (see above)
- Note: Include Future Meeting Date on the agenda

Motion by Pirzada, second by Rowell, to adjourn at 5:54 p.m. Carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Alderman Fesenmaier
Secretary