

TOURISM COMMISSION MINUTES
Monday, September 8, 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, Alder Fesenmaier, Alder Frame, Shelley Rowell, Stephanie Klett (Ex-Off), Mayor Krause (Ex-Off), Laura Pisarcik (Ex-Off)
Absent: Troy Migut

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

None.

Approval of Tourism Commission minutes from August 11, 2025

*Motion by Waspi, second by Pirzada, to approve the minutes from August 11, 2025.
Unanimously carried.*

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

Jones reviewed the Marketing Update section of her monthly report. She is excited about the positive results from the google ads for the Tourism Commission website of City hotels. Jones noted she added the comp information to the chart as requested last month. We are well above pace for Riviera bookings.

Update from Tourism Entity – Visit Lake Geneva

Ms. Klett gave the report in Goodwin’s absence. The Monthly Partner Meeting will be held September 16 at The Cove and include a Hwy. 50 Construction update.

Mark your calendar for the Annual Dinner and Impact Awards being held on October 14 at Grand Geneva Resort.

Twelve top travel writers visited the area for the September Media Tour. There is a much quicker turnaround now when they publish their articles bringing tourists here sooner than ever before. Chicago will see cars and subway trains “wrapped” with marketing messages to visit Lake Geneva this fall.

Question will be referred to Deanna regarding whether it is possible to add a column to the RFP list to separate out the City of Lake Geneva Hotels and to add a chart of RFPs indicating just small meeting spaces.

Another question was asked about the Tourism Commission applying for a Tourism grant to be a Title Sponsor or a Bonfire Sponsor. Klett explained the new sponsorships were needed due to increased costs, specifically the need for prize money or per diem for snow sculpture teams, now that Visit Lake Geneva acquired the competition.

Update from Lake Geneva Business Improvement District (BID) – Alexandria Binanti

Binanti started by handing out two documents – “Planning for Road Construction” and “Downtown Development Toolkit” for the Hwy. 50 Construction update as requested by the

Commission. She gave the information under her report although Commissioners had asked for a separate repeated monthly agenda item.

Binanti reported that the Saturday of Maxwell Street Days was the busiest with record-breaking sales. The Lemonade Crawl, centered in Flat Iron Park with additional vendors and activities experienced a fantastic turnout with 500 tickets “sold.” All proceeds from the tickets will be used in future mural projects. They will be planning creatively for 2026 on August 20 as it overlaps with the annual Venetian Festival.

BID is working with Evergreen Banners for new Spring and Summer designs to be hung downtown. They are cooperating with Public Works on the bench inventory to rehab the benches in time for placement in spring.

BID will apply for a Façade Grant through the Main Street Program and is using Vibe Map for their go-to events communications channel.

Written financial update provided by City Comptroller

Balance Sheet from July 31, 2025

Total Assets - \$1,054,735.32

Restricted Fund Balance - \$1,075,073.65

Note: Lake Geneva Jaycees’ payment for May is correct at \$27,500. July should be corrected to be an additional \$2650 according to the July minutes.

Tourism Commission Budget

The Commission reviewed the proposed 2026 budget request of \$1,684,655 for revenues/expenses. Comptroller explained that if the Commission exceeds the promotional grant amount, we can use the reserves. *Motion by Waspi, second by Rowell, to recommend the proposed 2026 budget. Unanimously carried.*

Motion by Waspi, second by Pirzada, to move Item B Tracing the Divide grant before Item A on the agenda. Unanimously carried.

Tourism Promotional Grant Program and Requests

Tracing the Divide, Avant Fall Cider Tour; Avant Cycles, Ann Esarco

Ann presented the event for a film titled, “Tracing the Divide” and 15-mile bike tour including stops at several of our local parks. The marketing materials need to be turned in for the event including the Tourism Logo and Tourism website of City Hotels URL. *Motion by Waspi, second by Frame, to approve the grant.* Discussion continued regarding the marketing plan including items that would not be used for marketing (i.e. airfare, pizza, candy). *Motion to amend grant to \$4000 by Pirzada, second by Waspi. Amendment carries. Main motion as amended to \$4000 for the event on October 25 and 26, 2025. Unanimously carried.*

Lake Geneva Oktoberfest; Downtown Lake Geneva BID, Alexandria Binanti

Binanti announced the 30th year for the downtown Oktoberfest. Event will be moved back to Flat Iron Park. New year is the Pumpkin Stroll, similar to the Ice Sculptures, on the sidewalks downtown. Store owners will have the option of rolling the pumpkins into their stores for preservation overnight. Stellar application which included detailed marketing budget and sample marketing materials. *Motion by Frame, second by Pirzada, to approve \$22,005.56 for Oktoberfest on October 11 and 12, 2025. Unanimously carried.*

Abominable Trail Race; ASR Events, LLC

The event is a repeat. Organizer will send in a more **detailed** marketing budget. *Motion by Waspi, second by Frame, to approve \$3000 for the Abominable TRAIL Race on November 15, 2025, conditional on revising marketing materials to include the Tourism Logo and Tourism website of City Hotels URL. Unanimously carried.*

Abominable SNOW Race; ASR Events, LLC

The event is extremely popular, and the organizer does a fantastic job of marketing with a presence at other local events including Yeti appearances. Needs to send in a **detailed** marketing budget and marketing flyer to include the Tourism Logo and Tourism website of City Hotels URL. *Motion by Pirzada, second by Waspi, to approve \$10,000 for the Abominable SNOW Race on January 31, 2026. Unanimously carried.*

Lake Geneva Winter Bridal Expo; Celebration Management, Charlie Lorenzi

Lorenzi explained the bridal event's success from past years including 700 attendees this past year. This is their 7th Annual event which will now focus on a city-wide celebration including all the city hotels (notified by email) with the primary focus on the Riviera. The marketing budget was not included in the application or packet. Lorenzi passed out paper copies at the meeting. *Motion by Fesenmaier, second by Pirzada, to award \$30,000 for the Winter Bridal Expo on January 17, 2026. Unanimously carried.*

Final Event Evaluations from organizations receiving Tourism Grants

Jazz by the Lake; Lake Geneva Community Foundation, Fred Gahl

Concerns regarding smaller size attendance than estimated, majority of locals in attendance versus visitors with overnight stays, timing of the event that coincided with other popular events such as Country Thunder and Das Fest, and not using full marketing budget.

Discussion/Action regarding transfer of Municipal Development Funding from the Tourism Commission to the General Fund for the Knowles-Nelson Grant Matching Funds (continued from August meeting)

This item was continued from the August discussion. *Motion by Frame, second by Pirzada, to approve moving \$242,500 from the Tourism Commission account to the General Fund for use as matching funds for the Knowles-Nelson Grant received by the City for Zone 1 of the Hillmoor property per the conditions of the grant. Unanimously carried.*

Tourism Commission related forms, paperwork, and grant procedures review

Commissioners discussed creating a separate application for municipal development request noting the information required is different from the grant applications.

Waspi will also check the grant application to ensure that previously approved changes were made on the actual form. *Continue to October agenda and packet for review of both items.*

Future meeting agenda items and next meeting date –

- Add to each month's agenda: Hwy. 50 Update, BID
- Winterfest Grant for Title Sponsorship and/or Bonfire Sponsorship by the Commission
- Updated grant application.
- New form for municipal development requests.
- List future meeting date/time and agenda items.

Monday, October 13, 2025, at 4:00 PM

Motion by Pirzada, second by Waspi, to adjourn at 5:49 p.m. Carried.

Respectfully submitted, Alderman Fesenmaier, Secretary