

TOURISM COMMISSION MINUTES
Monday, November 10, 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, Troy Migut, Shelley Rowell, Mayor Krause (Ex-Off), Laura Pisarcik (Ex-Off)
Absent: Stephanie Klett (Ex-Off)

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

Alderman Hoiland, District 3, spoke about separating out the fees received from short-term rentals especially now that the city has invested in a more robust licensing system and investigating reports of non-compliance.

Luke Pfeifer, 1091 S. Lake Shore Drive and owner of Maxwell Mansion, expressed deep concern about Grant Applications awarded for event outside the city limits. He explained that in 1967 the state set up procedures for lodging establishments to pool their resources to spend money on marketing. He stated that we have 645 available rooms to rent citywide, and some grant numbers far exceed that capacity in their estimates. He is also against using room tax money for municipal maintenance projects. Pfeifer felt that a simple link or mention on marketing materials was not enough.

Alderman Stoodley spoke in support The Balloon Adventure grant application on tonight's agenda even though the event is outside the city limits.

Approval of Tourism Commission minutes from October 13, 2025

*Motion by Waspi, second by Migut, to approve the minutes from October 13, 2025.
Unanimously carried.*

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

Heather Jones reviewed data from the packet. The Tourism website of city hotels continues to show positive numbers of site sessions, etc. Riviera bookings are on pace for 2026. The Riviera revenue for 2025 broke the top 2023 record.

To clarify, Jones' contract was approved and extended last month. Staff are currently looking for a digital copy for revision of dates; signatures then needed.

Update from Tourism Entity – Visit Lake Geneva

Deanna Goodwin highlighted data from her monthly report. Winterfest 2026 has 15 sculpting teams lined up. Two are international teams which will generate more PR and interest. The Electric Christmas Parade is December 6 at 5:00 p.m. Volunteers needed.

October 2025 Earned Media samples:

- World Atlas | 13 Cutest Small Towns in Wisconsin
- TravelHost | 8 Must-Visit Spots in Wisconsin
- Daily Journal (Indiana) | Fall fishing is on fire across Midwest
- Newsbreak | 20 Autumn Travel Spots That Time Forgot

The Winter content and ads will be seen mid-November with spotlights of Donald Drive at Kwik Trips.

The Bundle Up donation campaign for outdoor gear has commenced running through December.

Update from Lake Geneva Business Improvement District (BID)

Alexandria Binanti handed out copies of her monthly report and pointed out that new store openings and anniversaries, Oktoberfest, and mural announcements had the largest organic reach. This year's Oktoberfest set a record for beer sales and drew much attention for their new Pie Eating Contest. BID will be heard on WLKG radio on Sundays for 20 minutes with a segment called "Main Street Messages." The latest mural has been installed outside the library as part of the butterfly garden facing the lake. Benches (25 to date) have been rehabbed and are now being rotated throughout downtown. BID has formed a new non-profit group to help with grants and funding; a board is currently being appointed. BID is doing their Strategic Planning January through March 2026. Vacant storefronts are a concern especially with the impending Highway 50 construction.

Written financial update provided by City Comptroller

Balance Sheet as of October 2025

Total Assets - \$1,150,022.19

Restricted Fund Balance - \$1,075,073.65

Tourism Promotional Grant Program and Requests

World's Tallest Glass Tree; Mack Glass NFP

In October, the Commission granted \$50,000 of the original \$100,00 request. They asked Rob Elliott return with more details if additional funds were needed above the \$50,000. Rob explained at tonight's meeting that he submitted an updated budget that is in this month's packet. He is no longer receiving the GEM grant. The event extends beyond the date because the tree will be left standing for visitors, and the past has shown that people do visit in the weeks following. They are working with WGN on ads that now include free ticket contests. They have submitted requests to Williams Bay for \$2000 and to Fontana for \$8500 but have not heard back. Rob claims a majority their event goes stay in the City of Lake Geneva for the 6+-day event.

Chair Waspi started by assuring all present that the Tourism Commission finds reasons to say "yes" because we are all on the same team. A check with the City attorney confirmed that the statute does not state that grants must show a positive ROI (return on investment). It was also noted that the Tourism Commission website of City hotels is showing increased traffic most likely from the requirement to list the URL on marketing materials of grant recipients.

After discussion, no additional motions were made.

Baseball/Softball Travel Tournaments-Sport Field Maintenance Work; Geneva Lakes YMCA

Mike Coolidge presented the grant and noted the cycle of field disrepair. From the grant funding rehab, tournament bookings have increased to a total of 13 for this year. Discussion: does maintenance align with the statute's use of the word development? Pirzada verified that they are seeing overnight stays from tournament visitors. *Motion by Pirzada, second by Rowell, to award the grant for \$36,400. Unanimously carried.*

The Balloon Adventure – Buggin’ Out!; 531 Fund (formerly Santa Cause)

Kim Voller explained the grant which included marketing to people travelling outside of the City in a 3-hour radius. Their total marketing budget for this year is \$75,000 with a reduced GEM grant amount of 25%. Voller confirmed the event is NOT a Gage event, but that they are partners and donate the space. Discussion points: they need to put the Tourism website URL or QRcode on the Passport booklet and all marketing materials. In general, it was asked: if this is the third year of the event, at what point does it become sustainable?

Motion by Waspi, second by Pirzada, to approve \$20,000 for the grant.

Discussion continued about a larger portion of the \$40,000 original request. *Motion by Frame, second by Rowell, to grant \$25,000. Amendment and then the new main motion, unanimously carried.*

Final Event Evaluations from organizations receiving Tourism Grants

Sylph Lake Geneva: Dawn Springer Dance Projects – due to time and *by consensus, item is continued to next month.*

Future meeting agenda items and next meeting date –

Sylph Lake Geneva; Dawn Springer Dance Projects – Final Evaluation

Monday, December 8 at 4:00 PM

Motion by Fesenmaier, second by Pirzada, to adjourn at 5:57 p.m. Carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Alderman Fesenmaier, Secretary