

TOURISM COMMISSION MINUTES
Monday, February 10, 2025
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

Meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Pirzada at 4:06 p.m.

Roll Call

Present: Vice Chair Zakia Pirzada, Alderman Fesenmaier, Alderman Stoodley, Shelley Rowell; Stephanie Klett (Ex-Off), Mayor Krause (Ex-Off)

Absent: Chair Brian Waspi, Troy Migut, Comptroller Laura Pisarcik (Ex-Off).

Comments from the Public limited to 5 minutes, limited to items on the agenda: None.

Approval of Tourism Commission minutes from January 13, 2025

Motion by Stoodley, second by Pirzada, to approve the minutes from January 13, 2025, with a correction of attendees from former Mayor Klein to current Mayor Krause. Unanimously carried.

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

Jones reviewed her monthly report included in the packet. Site sessions were up by 32%. There were 200 active inquiries (only 99 last year for the same period) possibly due to a new Zola subscription which may include “fluff” inquiries. LakeGenevaHotels.org website had an increase of 21 site sessions. The mid-winter social media campaign runs through April and will be refreshed shortly with new pictures.

The Wedding Expo was filled the Riviera to capacity. Heather will be looking to expand the space used for next year’s event. Jones explained that capacity varies depending on the set-up (i.e. band, food, etc.) but averages between 230 to 260 people.

Update from Tourism Entity – Visit Lake Geneva

Deanna Goodwin gave details regarding the enormous success of the 30th Annual Winterfest. Huge crowds and lots of media attention. Klett had received questions about moving the event due to weather, but other national and state sculpture contests are already scheduled in the weeks before or after the Lake Geneva date.

Restaurant Week is quickly approaching in mid-April.

Website visits are up 30%. Facebook reach was almost 6 million with over 75,000 followers. Their email open rate was 31% surpassing industry standards. The new weekly email of “events only” is close to 2000.

The “Lake Geneva” photo op statue placed in the Brunk Pavilion during the Winterfest event needs a permanent location. Visit will work with City staff for the perfect spot in Flat Iron Park! Earned media (included an extensive list).

Update from Lake Geneva Business Improvement District (BID) –

No representative to speak nor report in the packet.

Written financial update provided by City Comptroller

The Room Tax comparison between yearend 2023 and 2024 showed a net gain of almost \$57,000.

Balance Sheet from December 31, 2025

Total Assets \$1,255,529.13
Restricted Fund Balance - \$907,882.50

Tourism Promotional Grant Program and Requests

Art in the Park – Geneva Lake Arts Foundation

Jeff Russart explained the event in its 45th year. The marketing budget increased from last year with line item changes rather than vendors. The money generated from the event helps keep their current space open on Broad Street.

Motion by Pirzada, second by Stoodley, to fund the grant for \$22,280. Unanimously carried.

Wisconsin Cheese Festival – Lake Geneva House of Music and Adams Publishing

Chris Buttleman and Rob Ireland talked about the 2nd annual event for May 2025. Last year's event showcased a cheese sculpture. Using placer.ai they estimated that 15% of their attendees stayed at City of Lake Geneva hotels. Pirzada asked about the lack of cheese variety and choices. Buttleman responded their goal is to do better. They are adding Madison as a target for marketing. Fesenmaier pointed out that they had not heard back from the Geneva Township Tourism Commission (as noted in the application).

Motion by Fesenmaier, second by Pirzada, to continue the grant request to March. Carried on a 3 to 1 vote.

Lake Geneva Taco Fest - Lake Geneva House of Music and Adams Publishing

Chris Buttleman and Rob Ireland explained this \$25,000 grant request with a predicted overnight stay of up to 600 for the 5th annual September event. They pointed out the updated marketing plans that include bi-lingual ad buys. Fesenmaier asked about the amount of last year's grant and was told it was \$15,000. The same concern regarding the Geneva Township Tourism Commission funding was raised.

Motion by Fesenmaier, second by Pirzada, to continue the grant request to the March meeting. Unanimously carried.

Final Grant Evaluations from organizations receiving Tourism Grant

2024 World's Tallest Glass –

The evaluation included in the packet displayed a good diversity of marketing. The shuttle to the City of Lake Geneva hotels was a success. Missing was a detailed report from placer.ai (subscription funded by the Commission).

Chair Waspi will be asked to call Alex Binanti for an update and future reports.

Tourism Commission related forms, paperwork, and grant procedures review

None

Future meeting agenda items and next meeting date –

Monday, March 10 at 4:00 PM

- Wisconsin Cheese Festival
- Lake Geneva Taco Fest
- Note: Include Future Meeting Date on the agenda

Motion by Pirzada, second by Stoodley, to adjourn at 4:57 p.m. Carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Alderman Fesenmaier, Secretary