**MINUTES**

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY CONVENTION & VISITORS COMMISSION**

**Tuesday, January 8, 2013 – 5:30 p,**

**Montgomery County Courthouse**

**100 East Main Street – Room 103**

**Crawfordsville, IN 47933**

Upon arriving to the meeting chambers, newly appointed Commission members John Frey, Kelly Bielecki, Nichole Copeland, Anita Klein, and Cindy Smith took an Oath of Office administered by Jennifer Bentley. (Dan Guard took his oath on January 1, 2013, attested by Terri Gadd.)

The meeting of the Montgomery County Tourism Commission was called to order by County Council appointee, John Frey. In addition to John Frey, new Tourism Commissioners present were Cindy Smith, Anita Klein, Kelly Bielecki, Nikki Copeland, Dan Guard, and Dan Taylor. Steve Golliher joined the meeting by phone.

Others present included former Tourism Commission board members (Joe O’Rourke, Lyle Schmidt, Hubert Danzebrink, Sheridan Hadley, Diane Kreisher, and Elizabeth Justice); past and present Visitors and Convention Bureau board members (Lani Ropkey, Paul Parry, Julie Hess, Bob Cash, Leslie Peacock, Jeff Nelson) and their legal representative (Greg Miller); Executive Director Sharon Kenny and her assistant, Kara Edie; League of Women Voters observer Donna McGrady; Priscilla Zachary representing the Flower Lovers Garden Club; Dorothy Fogel representing Crawfordsville Mainstreet; Putnam County Visitors Bureau Executive Director, Karla Lawless: Deanna Durett member of Montgomery County Economic Development Marketing Committee; and Jason Seward, Clements Canoes.

Mr. Frey made a motion to approve the minutes of the December 11, 2012 meeting. Steve Golliher seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.

Elizabeth Justice (Elizabeth Justice, Attorney at Law) was recognized by Mr.Frey and Ms. Justice inquired as to what the statutes stated regarding the Commmittee’s ability to accept a vote via phone. Dan Taylor addressed the question, insisting that both the “Open Door” policy and Montgomery County guidelines allowed for participation via phone.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Golliher (via phone) nominated Mr. Frey for the office of President for 2013. The nomination was approved. Mr. Frey nominated Mr. Golliher for the office of Vice President for 2013. The nomination was approved. Mr. Frey nominated Nikki Copeland for the office of Treasurer for 2013. The nomination was approved. Mr. Frey nominated Kelly Bielecki for the office of Secretary for 2013. The nomination was approved. Mr. Frey made a motion that Dan Taylor of Kirtley, Taylor, Sims, Chadd & Minnette, P.C. act as the legal representation for the Commission. Ms. Copeland seconded the motion and Mr. Taylor’s position was approved.

Mr. Frey referred to a handout, which described the Summary of Powers and Responsibilities of the Tourism Commission, and asked Mr. Taylor to articulate, in detail, the duties and responsibilities of the Commission members. Mr. Taylor went over the list of items, and provided additional information with regard to the budget process and funds.

Mr. Frey recognized the large audience, and stated that his personal goal was to grow relationships. He conveyed his eagerness to be involved with opportunities for tourism, and expressed that his excitement is a result of the on-going joint efforts of the City and County officials to improve our community.

Mr. Frey recognized Deanna Durrett,, representative for Montgomery County Economical Development (MCED), who stated that MCED wished to have a member of the Tourism Commission appointed to represent the Tourism Commission at MCED meetings. Mr. Frey nominated Steve Golliher to serve as this representative and the nomination was approved.

Mr. Frey stated that in an effort to comply with the ordinance, which calls for staggering terms, three of the new appointees would need to agree to one-year terms initially (vs. two years). Both Mr. Frey and Mr. Golliher volunteered immediately to serve initial one-year terms. Cindy Smith also agreed to a one-year term. Ms. Smith made a motion to accept Frey’s, Golliher’s and her own appointments as one-year terms. Mr. Dan Guard seconded the motion and it passed.

Since guest speaker, Steve Jacob, had not yet arrived, Mr. Frey asked to skip agenda items F and G. He then asked if Commission members were agreeable to meeting at 5:30 pm on the first Tuesday of each month—same day as the County Commissioner’s meeting. The meeting time was agreed upon by all of the Commission members present.

MONEY MATTERS

Both Mr. Frey and Mr. Taylor spoke to the Visitors Bureau’s approved 2012 and 2013 budgets which allows for distribution of set funds generated by Innkeepers Tax to be distributed to the Visitor’s Bureau in quarterly payments. Ms. Justice presented an exhibit of the county commissioner’s minutes, verifying approval of the 2012 and 2013 budgets for the Visitors Bureau. Ms. Bielecki made the motion that the December 2012 quarterly draw that was withheld at the December meeting be released to the Visitor’s Bureau. Ms. Copeland seconded the motion and the motion passed 7-0.

Mr. Frey recommended that Mr. Taylor work with Mr. Greg Miller, legal representation for the Visitors Bureau, to establish a written agreement between the Tourism Commission and the Visitors Bureau. Mr. Joe O’Rourke asked for further details regarding Montgomery County’s newly adopted Ordinance No. 2012-18 (Innkeepers Tax Code), specifically requesting disclosure of the newly appointed board members’ political affiliations. Mr. Taylor responded that any such questions should be directed at the Mayor or County Commissioners who had made the appointments. Mr. O’Rourke persisted with his questioning, and requested that each member declare their party affiliation as proof that those appointed fulfilled the bi-partisan participation mandated by the new ordinance. After a brief debate between Mr. O’Rourke and Mr. Taylor, Mr. Frey volunteered to share his political affiliation, as did a number of the Commission members. This satisfied Mr. O’Rourke’s request, however, the recommendation to authorize legal representation to draft an agreement between the two bodies was dropped.

Mr. Frey stated that each member had received a copy of a grant request from the Flower Lover’s Garden Club/Crawfordsville Mainstreet submitted on behalf of the Flower Lover’s Garden Club. Mr. Frey stated his concern regarding the grant request stating that the Garden Lover’s Garden Club did not have 501 c3 status. Mr. Taylor verified that Mainstreet is a designated 501 c3 and could apply for a grant on their behalf. Both Ms. Dorothy Fogel and Ms. Kara Edie stated that they represented Mainstreet and would confirm the organizations participation. The grant request, in the amount of $1800, was to be used strictly for advertising the 2013 Garden Walk. Mr. Frey asked the Commission members to direct their attention to a handout (referred to as a “matrix”), which he proposed the Commission adopt as a guideline for awarding grant monies.

At this point, Mr. Steve Jacob, Chairperson of the Boone County Tourism Commissioner and President of the Boone County Convention and Visitors Bureau, entered the meeting. Mr. Frey asked to back up to item F on the agenda, and introduced Mr. Jacob.

Mr. Jacob revealed that the Boone County tourism agencies came about as a result of their desire to build a road in the Lebanon Business Park, further stating that a bond was issued and the Innkeepers Tax was intended to be used only to pay off the bond and then be terminated. He revealed that the tax remained in place, and spoke about the evolution of the Boone County tourism agencies. Mr. Jacob stated that the Boone County budget is $180,000 generated from a 5% innkeeper tax rate, and that they currently employ a part-time Executive Director, Jeri Day. He also stated that they do not currently have a Visitor’s Center, but aspire to positioning one at a location in downtown Lebanon.

Mr. Jacob cited a variety of “conventions,” events, and various shows (providing estimated room rentals for each) that are currently “on the books” to be hosted in Boone County. He provided one example where Boone County approved funding for a $5,000 digital billboard promotion of the Jr. Rodeo hosted at their fairgrounds. Mr. Jacob stated that Boone County desired motorcoach business and was seeking more hosting opportunities. He also stated that a larger facility with more capacity is still desired, and shared how their fairgrounds addresses a renter’s desire to serve alcohol on the premises. Ms. Lawless, Executive Director, Putnam County Visitor’s Bureau, asked Mr. Jacob about Boone County’s tourism affiliated memberships. Mr. Jacob stated that Boone County held only one State membership, and was uncertain as to which organization it was with. (Believed to be AICVB which stands for Association of Indiana’s Convention and Visitors Bureau.)

Ms. Lawless disclosed Putnam County’s $250,000 budget generated from a 5% innkeeper tax rate. She stated that the agency was established on a budget of $75,000, and has been in operation 18 years. Mr. Jacob inquired as to how Putnam County went about generating motorcoach tours. Ms. Lawless listed a number of memberships that Putnam County holds, but went on to reveal that the last motorcoach tour that Putnam County hosted, which included 7 motorcoaches, only generated $350 in tax revenue.

Ms. Bielecki asked Mr. Jacob if all of the events he had named were currently being hosted at their fairgrounds, and if the facility was actually a “4-H Fairgrounds.” Mr. Jacob stated that only a few had already taken place, but those events—as well as those events “on the books”—were all occurring at their fairgrounds. Mr. Jacob went on to say that their facility is the “Boone County 4-H Fairgrounds,” and the buildings were built by Boone County 4-H (using bond monies) on property owned and leased by Boone County. General discussion identified the different circumstances/ demographics/facilities of each of the three counties represented (Montgomery, Boone, and Putnam), and concluded that Montgomery County and Putnam County were more closely aligned with regard to facilities, events and attractions.

Ms. Hess asked that Mr. Frey substantiate a couple of public comments: (1) alleged disdain among local innkeepers with the level of representation from the Visitors Bureau, and (2) a perception that the Visitors Bureau was not offering adequate support of existing events/attractions. Mr. Frey deferred to Ms. Copeland. Ms. Copeland stated that she hoped more could be done to attract business to the local hotels. Ms. Hess listed examples of various ways in which the Visitors Bureau had reached out to event coordinators to offer assistance, as well as, a myriad of forums in which they had been invited to provide suggestions and feedback. Ms. Copeland acknowledged the efforts of the Visitors Bureau, expressing her appreciation for assembled packages that were provided to her hotel. Mr. Perry (representing Holiday Inn Express) added that the Covered Bridge bus tour initiated by the Visitors Bureau was a huge success. Mr. Cash, representing Montgomery County Softball, complimented the Visitors Bureau on the instrumental part the organization plays in securing and hosting softball tournaments. He revealed the significant economic impact of softball tournaments on the local economy—especially the hotels and restaurants. Proceeding with one example, he noted that only 11 of the 65 teams entered in last year’s Strawberry Festival Tournament were local teams—meaning that 50+ teams spent the night at local inns. Ms. Hess stated that she had also been in contact with Lori Shaver with regard to the Visitors Bureau’s involvement at The Ironman and The Warrior Dash. Additionally, Ms. Hess retold the circumstances by which the Visitors Bureau was instrumental in successfully securing and hosting a swim event when called upon by the Indianapolis IU Natatorium. Ms. Hess also reported on the research she had done regarding the bi-annual audit that the Visitors Bureau is required to satisfy for the State Board of Audits. She reiterated that there are no accounting firms in Montgomery County who perform audits for 501 c3/504 c3 organizations. She reported that she had contacted other local organizations including Montgomery County Boys & Girls Club, Youth Service Bureau, and Muffy for audit cost comparisons. Lastly, she reported that the estimate provided by Greenwalt (the Indianapolis firm referred to the Visitors Bureau by Mr. Frey) was $9,500. Additional debates and opinions were aired with regard to micromanaging the Visitors Bureau’s affairs, and the ultimate control the county council has over the Innkeepers Tax.

Ms. Bielecki stated that she wished to make some comments and then return to the stated agenda. Ms. Bielecki acknowledged the various interests represented in the chamber and stated how she could personally identify with many of their positions, citing her involvement with the Visitors Bureau board, 4-H, Historic Ladoga, Innkeeper, business owner, etc. She emphasized that everyone in the room had a common goal, and that many opportunities were at hand. She stated that the absence of appropriate facilities was clearly Montgomery County’s biggest obstacle, and provided examples—along with Ms. Ropkey and Ms. Kenny—of the various requests that our community is forced to turn away. She recognized that while “putting heads in beds” might be the top priority for allocating funds, our stated commitment to “tourism” involves much more. Ms. Bielecki recognized Ms. Zachary with the Flower Lovers Garden Club and spoke on behalf of the various non-profit clubs in our county who fund a multitude of community projects using funds generated by hosting smaller events and tours. She reminded the audience that the Covered Bridge Festival began with housewives selling pies in their front yards. Mr. O’Rourke pointed out the Flower Club is responsible for planting and maintaining all of the corner pots in the downtown vicinity. Ms. Zachary stated that proceeds from the Garden Walk were used to finance this project. Mr. Taylor spoke to the level of appreciation he and other downtown businesses have for the planters. After remarking on how the planters are an important part of the City and County’s unified vision with regard to the beautification of downtown, Ms. Bielecki confirmed that funds were available, and made a motion to grant Mainstreet $1,800 to be passed on to The Flower Lovers Garden Club to support advertising of their 2013 Garden Walk. Ms. Copeland seconded the motion and it passed.

OFFICERS REPORTS

Mr. Frey provided Ms. Copeland with a report from the auditor’s office identifying $84,741.84 in the Montgomery County Innkeepers Fund. Mr. Frey moved to accept the Treasurer’s Report. Ms. Klein seconded, and the Treasurer’s Report was passed.

Ms. Kenny explained the packets containing promotional information that were presented to each of the Commission members. She stated that—only 8 days into 2013—she had already addressed 125 requests. She responded to Mr. Frey’s appeal for documented results, by revealing that the Visitors Bureau was initiating an Economic Impact Study to be performed by an independent firm that specializes in this field. Ms. Kenny provided information as to what types of promotional pieces are distributed, and stated that her assistant, Ms. Edie, had volunteered to produce a local Calendar of Events quarterly as opposed to every six months. Lastly, Ms. Kenny extended an invitation to everyone to come check out the Visitors Bureau.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Justice commented on the manner in which the new appointments to the Tourism Commission had been handled, especially with regard to those individuals whose terms were not yet up. Additionally she presented a written document to Mr. Frey.

Former Commission members inquired as to where the past minutes should be delivered and housed. Mr. Frey discussed this briefly with Mr. Taylor, and it was decided that the records would be placed in the Montgomery County Auditor’s office.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Guard made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Bielecki seconded the motion, all agreed, and the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly Bielecki