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City of Loves Park, City of Rockford, City of South Beloit, County of Winnebago,  
Village of Cherry Valley, Village of Machesney Park, Village of Rockton, Village of Roscoe;  
Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, Rockford Park District

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## **Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, November 7, 2023**

2:00 p.m.

Webbs Norman Center  
401 South Main Street, Rockford, IL

### **Call to Order**

The regular meeting of the Winnebago County Tourism Facility Board was called to order by Board Chair Bobbie Holzwarth at 2:01 p.m.

### **Roll Call**

Present: Mayor Tom McNamara, Mayor David Schroeder (Proxy Jim Claeysen), Mayor Carol Gustafson, Winnebago County Chairman Joe Chiarelli (Proxy Jas Bilich), John Groh President & CEO Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, Jay Sandine Executive Director Rockford Park District, Bobbie Holzwarth RACVB Board Representative, and Martesha Brown Rockford Park District Board Representative. (76.2% representation)

Absent: Mayor Tom Fitzgerald, Mayor Steve Johnson, Mayor Greg Jury, and Mayor John Peterson.

### **Public Comment**

There were no members of the public present who wished to address the Board.

### **Bi-Annual Board Officer Elections**

Mr. McNamara **nominated** Ms. Bobbie Holzwarth, designated representative of the RACVB Board and Ms. Martesha Brown, designated representative of the RPD Board as Board Co-Chairpersons. Nominations were closed.

Ms. Holzwarth and Ms. Brown were **named** as Board Co-Chairpersons 4(ayes) 0 (nays) 0 (abstain) 4 (absent) (76.2%) by voice vote.

## **Consent Agenda**

**Motion** by Mr. McNamara, seconded by Mr. Bilich, that the Board **approve** the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- A. February 21, 2023 Board Meeting Minutes
- B. 2024 WCRTFB Board Meeting Calendar

**Approved** 4(ayes) 0 (nays) 0 (abstain) 4(absent) (76.2%) by voice vote.

## **Financial Update: Hotel Tax Receipts**

Mr. Sandine presented the financial report and reviewed the information provided on the collection of hotel taxes and the current issue with the collection of taxes by Expedia. Attorney Gino Galluzzo is working with Attorney Meyers from the City of Rockford to resolve the matter, and should have more information for the Board in the near future. There was a discussion of the collection of taxes from other independent rentals such as Airbnb and VRBO throughout the area, as well as medium size hotels. The Board received and reviewed the audit report that was provided for 2022 regarding the WCRTFB Board accounts.

## **Updates by John Groh**

Mr. Groh provided a presentation on current trends in tourism in the region including hotel rates, demand, occupancy, and supply changes which show the Rockford area is still catching up from the covid years, but positive progress is being made in the region. There was a discussion of occupancy rates for weekdays versus weekends, and Mr. Groh shared that while the market has softened somewhat in 2023, it is comparable to prior years. It is anticipated that the return to pre-pandemic numbers may take up to five years.

Mr. Groh reviewed preliminary data from information gathered through recent resident surveys in the community as part of the Comprehensive Tourism Development Plan. Much of the input work into the master plan has been completed, the next phase of the plan for visioning is underway, and he expects an overall launch of the plan in April, 2024.

## **Updates by Jay Sandine**

Mr. Sandine provided updates including the reopening of Riverview Ice House following construction to rehabilitate the facility, the status of the IDNR grant to benefit the expansion of Clarence Hicks Memorial Sports Park, the creation of a homebase for RPD Buddy Sports programs at Darryl Lindberg Park, continued support for advancements at Beyer Park through a renewed relationship between IWBC and Friends of Beyers, and the continued progress on bike trails at Atwood Park.

In closing, Mr. Sandine announced that the Park District was recognized and inducted into the USSSA Hall of Fame at a ceremony over the past weekend.

## **Tournaments and Events update from RACVB and RPD Teams**

Mercyhealth Sportscore One Manager, Derek Papich, gave a summary of the USSSA Hall of Fame ceremony and dinner and presented the award to the Board members. He

thanked Louis Mateus and Lindsay Arellano for their partnership in making Mercyhealth Sportscore One programs and tournaments possible. He shared that the RACVB will be inducted into the USSSA Hall of Fame in 2024.

Ms. Arellano, RACVB Vice President of Sales and Service, reviewed the upcoming tournaments, tradeshow, recent site visits at Reclaiming First facilities, and bids and prospects that are currently pending. There is a high demand for the use of the facilities. Calendars are full for the coming year and beyond with bookings for weekend tournaments and local league usage throughout the week.

Mr. McNamara asked if the opening of the new pickleball facility in Loves Park has impacted the number of players at the UW Health Sports Factory, and if there is a plan to continue to hold semi-professional hockey games at Riverview Ice House, as was done with the reopening. UWHSF Facility Manger Milton Phillips said pickleball play continues to be steady at the facility, and Mr. Sandine confirmed occasional semi-professional hockey games are under consideration for the future at RIH.

**Other Board Discussion**

Mayor Carol Gustafson shared that the Village of Roscoe has had success with disc golf tournaments and asked about that type of programming in the Rockford area. Mr. Sandine reviewed the history of disc golf within the Park District, including one of the country's top courses at Anna Page Park, and the use of Mercyhealth Sportscore Two, which allows the RPD to host many tournaments as the sport continues to grow. He also discussed the draw of BMX biking and West Rock Wake Park in bringing visitors from outside the area.

**Adjournment**

**Motion** by Mr. McNamara, seconded by Mr. Bilich that the Board **adjourn** the meeting at 3:07 p.m.

**Approved** 4(ayes) 0 (nays) 0 (abstain) 4 (absent) (76.2%) by voice vote.

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Board Co-Chair, Bobbie Holzwarth

Attest:

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Board Assistant Secretary, Jennifer Peterson

BOARD APPROVED: