

**Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau
Board of Directors Board Meeting
Gateway Convention Center – Collinsville IL
Thursday, June 17, 2021**

8:00 a.m.

Present: John Hopkins, Lauren Pattan, Mitch Bair, Michael Barker, Karen Brncic, Tom Guarino, Sandy Hefner, Mike McCormick, Jennifer McClure, Dave Miller and Patty Rotermund

Absent: Kristi Hyten, Brian Campbell, Linda Jun, JD Lorton, Cathy Luttrell, Cameo Holland, Doug Stotler and Erin Ventimiglia

Staff: Cory Jobe, Barbara Strack, Stephanie Tate, Katie Bennett, Sydney Peckham and Lauren Richey

Guest: Tim Seebert, Gateway Convention Center

Call to order: The meeting was called to order by John Hopkins, and everyone went around the room and introduced themselves.

Chairman opening remarks: John welcomed everyone to the in-person board meeting, and thanked Mitch Bair and Tim Seebert for providing the venue and breakfast. John then acknowledged this would be his last meeting as Chairman and offered a heartfelt thanks to the board and staff at the Tourism Bureau, including the current team and those who have since left. He reminisced about the accomplishments the Tourism Bureau has had during his tenure, including: moving the satellite office to our new location, changing the name from Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau to Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, the expansion into new counties, increasing the location of board meetings to other areas in our region, surviving the pandemic, and being part of the team who brought Cory Jobe to our Bureau. John thanked all the board members for the opportunity to be Chairman and said it has been a worthwhile endeavor.

President opening remarks: Cory thanked Mitch and Tim for providing the meeting space and breakfast, and said he is happy to finally have a full in-person meeting after 15 months of hybrid meetings. Cory said he is optimistic from our efforts during the spring legislative session. The 37 certified DMO's in the state were awarded \$69 million of the ARPA funds for the next two years, which means our LTCB grant will be fully funded for FY 2022 and 2023. Cory worked with Senators Rachelle Crow and Doris Turner, along with State Rep. Katie Stuart to secure a \$4 million grant for the preservation, development, planning and marketing of Historic Route 66 in Illinois. This will allow for a great opportunity to work with Collinsville, Edwardsville and Litchfield. The state also awarded \$10.5 million in Tourism Attraction Program (TAP) grant funding, which is the largest dollar amount ever awarded. This program helps to develop new or enhance existing tourism attractions to grow visitation and overnight stays in Illinois. The TAP notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) is expected to be made available mid-July. Cory plans to continue to have conversations at local, county, state and federal levels of government on funding opportunities.

Board Minutes and Financials: John asked the board to review the May board minutes and financials. Michael Barker made the motion to approve both the May board minutes and financials; Mike McCormick seconded the motion. All members were in favor and the motion carried.

COMMITTEES:

Personnel Committee: John said the Handbook changes were presented and reviewed at the May board meeting. Mitch Bair made the motion to approve the Handbook changes; Michael Barker seconded the motion. All members were in favor and the motion passed.

Finance Committee:

John said the Finance Committee presented the FY 2022 budget at the April board meeting. Cory said we expect to see an increase in the LTCB grant, but don't have a confirmed amount yet. Mitch Bair made the motion to approve the FY 2022 budget as presented, with the provision the budget will be amended as new grant monies come in. Michael Barker seconded the motion. All members were in favor and the motion passed.

Nominating Committee:

Lauren said last year, we suspended bylaw articles and appointed those up for renewal to a one-year term due to the pandemic. Those seats are up for renewal but for a 2-year term this round. Lauren made the motion to renew for a 2-year term to expire on June 30, 2023: Brian Campbell- City of Alton appointee, Jennifer McClure- Higher Education seat, Cameo Holland- City of Alton appointee, Sandy Hefner- Jersey County appointee, Mike McCormick- at-large member and Lauren Pattan- a restaurant seat. Stacy Frierdich-Hinrich's lodging seat is currently open, but we plan to confirm that seat soon.

For the board members whose term expires this month, Lauren made the motion to nominate for a 3-year term to expire on June 30, 2024: John Hopkins- At large member, Michael Barker – City of Alton appointee, Kristi Hyten – Edwardsville appointee, Linda Jun- City of Alton appointee, JD Lorton- Attractions seat, Patty Rotermund- lodging seat, Erin Ventimiglia – restaurant seat.

Lauren then made the motion to nominate Tim Seebert as our Convention board member, who replaces Cindy Warke. His seat will expire June 30, 2022.

Lauren asked if there were any comments or other nominations. There being none, Michael Barker seconded the motions. All members were in favor and the motions passed.

John said at the last board meeting, the proposed FY 2022 Officers were presented. There were: Lauren Pattan for Chairperson; Kristi Hyten for Vice-Chair; and JD Lorton as Secretary/Treasurer. John asked if there were any other nominations. There being none, Michael Barker made the motion to accept Lauren, Kristi and JD as the FY 2022 Officers; Mike McCormick seconded the motion. All members were in favor and the motion passed.

REPORT OF BUREAU ACTIVITIES:

The Visitor Center in Alton opened to the public on Tuesday, June 1. There has been a steady flow of visitors stopping in there and making purchases of old merchandise that we have in stock. Due to the high inventory levels of some items, we will be having a big sale on some select items soon. At the end of October, we will review and evaluate the numbers visiting the Visitor Center to gauge the future of visitor centers with travel.

The Tourism Bureau has entered into a six-month agreement with the Village of Hartford to open the tower back up for public tours. We have hired a couple of part-time staff and the Tower opened to the public last Friday, June 11. Hours of operation are Thursday – Monday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., until December. The tower was not in good shape after being closed several years, so we hired a restoration cleaning company to get it open and Brian Campbell has graciously agreed to pay for a new sign entrance, fix the flagpole and do some landscaping. We are seeking \$6,000 to restore the pump so the water fountain can work again as we are trying to make sure it is a great visitor

experience for all who go there. We have also designed new branding and creative campaigns for the tower.

There will be a Party at the Tower event, hosted by the Riverbend Growth Association, on Thursday, June 24 from 5-7 p.m. This will be the first in-person event for the RBGA since the pandemic began. We are excited to provide the venue for this event, and all board members are invited.

The new state tourism director, Karla Flannery, was in our area last week for a tour of our regional area. We made stops in Alton, Grafton, Edwardsville and Collinsville and visited with leaders, sites and attractions along the way and she was extremely impressed by all our region has to offer.

We also hosted the state senate tourism and hospitality committee tourism hearing last Thursday. The committee met for the first time outside of Springfield at the Fuller Dome at SIU-E. After the hearing, we hosted the committee members at the Hartford Tower and then dinner in Alton and then fireworks afterwards. Cory said Governor J.B. Pritzker listened to the hearing and called him to discuss tourism. They talked for over an hour.

Our new website will go live on June 30, and we will send a link once it goes live. We are hoping to have back access to view it next week.

Epic Burger Week wraps up tomorrow with 22 participating restaurants. Next up is our annual All Star Restaurant Week which runs July 9-18. We currently have 13 restaurants participating and the deadline is Monday, so we will make one more push for more to join. Our ad sales close on Friday for the Fall/Winter Go Guide, which is our bi-annual travel guide that is distributed at more than 60 locations.

We will be in the September/October issue of Midwest Living Magazine with a 4-page insert about Fall travel in our region. From Grafton to Alton to Collinsville to Edwardsville we will be reaching 275,000 targeted households in IL, IN, KY and MO.

There was an article in the Edwardsville Intelligencer regarding Edwardsville's annual investment of \$75K to the Bureau that was being questioned by some Aldermen at the Finance Committee meeting. Cory was not happy with the article and said it had flawed data. He had offered to attend this meeting, but was told he did not need to be there. The agreement between Edwardsville and the Bureau will be sent back to the Finance Committee for discussion again and Cory will present to them on June 24 at 4p.m. to answer any questions and promote regionalism.

Cory said he was grateful we are finally having an in-person board meeting because he wanted to publicly thank John Hopkins for his years of service and dedication to the Tourism Bureau as Chairman. John was then presented gifts from Cory and the Tourism Bureau.

Old Business: None

New Business: None

General Announcement: Sandy Hefner said there will be a ribbon cutting on August 20 for the new parking lot center behind Main Street, which will benefit downtown Jerseyville.

Dave Miller said the airport hosted a Mystery Tour bus for an airport tour. He said there were 40-50 seniors on the bus and they did not know where their destination was when they boarded the bus in Chicago. He was happy to show them around the airport. Katie said she met this group at a trade show in 2019 and helped plan their trip to our region.

Mitch Bair said he spoke at the Senate hearing with the tourism and hospitality committee and brought up the labor issue to the legislators.

Adjourn: A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Dave Miller and seconded by Patty Rotermund. All members were in favor and the motion carried.

Respectfully submitted by,

Cory Jobe
President/CEO

Lauren Pattan
Chairperson