

## **Regular September Richland Center Tourism Commission Meeting, September 8, 2025**

The meeting was called to order by Commission Chairman Ron Fruit at 4:00 pm.

Members present are Ron Fruit, Jayme Walsh, Toni McCarvel, and Karin Tepley. Dennis Fry arrived at 4:08.

Karen Tepley made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from the July 2025 meeting. Jayme Walsh seconded the motion, the motion carried unanimously.

### **2025 Budget Review:**

Director Richards reviewed the Year-To-Date annual budget with the Commission. Richards noted no categories are approaching over the proposed budget, he noted the "Marketing Category" of the budget had been increased a total of \$7,000 in July (\$2,500 by the Tourism Commission, \$3,000 additional by City Finance) towards streaming operations. There was light discussion but no notable concerns/questions.

### **July/August Bill Payment Approval:**

The Commission reviewed the listing of bill payments for the months of July and August 2025. Director Richards offered some explanation regarding a couple of new/different payments. No questions on existing payments for July/August. Member Tepley questioned if it would be reasonable to have all paper receipts/invoices at each meeting. Member Fry mentioned that he can see the report ahead of the meeting and if there were any questions on one of the expenses he can request that invoice be brought to the meeting. Chair Fruit echoed this sentiment and there was a concern for making the report more tedious than necessary as a high percentage of the payments are recurring month to month. The consensus of the Commission is to continue the current practice and if a Commission member has a question on an invoice they can bring that forward prior to the meeting.

Dennis Fry made the motion to approve the payment report for July/August, Karin Tepley seconded that motion. A roll call vote was held: Fruit-yes, Walsh-yes, McCarvel-yes, Fry-yes, Tepley-yes. Motion unanimously passed.

### **Wheels of Time/Hill Country Classic Power Grant**

The Wheels of Time Truck and Tractor Show completed an application for a \$2,000 grant for their 3-day event to be held 10/03-10/05 at the Richland County Fairgrounds. WOT have applied and successfully completed the verification for a tourism grant for several years in the past. Routinely guests come from a 3-state area to enjoy the show and all lodging is full during this weekend as a result of the show. Karin Tepley made the motion to approve a \$2,000 grant, Jayme Walsh seconded the motion. A roll call vote was held: Fruit-yes, Fry-Yes, Walsh-yes, McCarvel-yes, Tepley-yes. Motion unanimously passed.

### **Pine River Clean-up/Friends of the Pine Grant**

The Friends of the Pine LLC, a part of Southwest Partners, completed a \$2,000 grant to support clean-up and maintenance of the Pine River and to support a safe and enjoyable kayak experience on the Pine. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of application, all members of the commission acknowledge the importance of kayaking to the summer travel experience in the Richland Center area as it attracts overnight visitors from all over our target area. Toni McCarvel made the motion to approve a \$2,000 Tourism Grant to the

Friends of the Pine LLC, Karin Tepley seconded that motion. A roll call vote was held: , Walsh-yes, McCarvel-yes, Tepley-yes, Fruit-yes, Fry-Yes. Motion unanimously passed.

**Gray Media Streaming Advertising Discussion and Action.** Director Richards explained that the Commission had approved Streaming Advertising with Gray Media for the Chicagoland and Milwaukee areas thru September. Streaming advertising has continued to be a huge driver of visitors to our websites. Since we have utilized streaming advertising visitors to the Greater Richland Tourism website has increased from 20,223 in the full year of 2021, to 80,981 in 2024. It is also one of the identifiable reasons we have seen Direct Visitor spending increase in the Greater Richland Area the past 4 years.

Director Richards made the recommendation that the Commission approve continuing the streaming marketing effort through October at this time, in the amount of \$2,500 to continue our streaming operation through October of 2025.

Karin Tepley made the motion to approve spending \$2,500 to continue streaming advertising with Gray Media in the amount of \$2,500 to continue streaming advertising through October of 2025 in the Chicago market only. Jayme Walsh seconded the motion, a voice vote was held: Fruit-yes, Tepley-yes, Walsh-yes, McCarvel-yes. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **Hidden Valleys Publication Participation**

Director Richards brought forward the recommendation to continue our participation with the Hidden Valleys Magazine and online effort. Hidden Valleys has modernized their online appearance and has a robust distribution area of their magazine. Richland County previously paid for the area's participation and dropped out in 2021. In 2024, with a revamped magazine and online appearance Greater Richland Tourism renewed that relationship as the value was more evident and the effort became more effective. Toni McCarvel made the motion to continue participating as a sponsor with the Hidden Valley Publication for an annual cost of \$1,200. Dennis Fry seconded the motion, a voice vote was held, Fry-yes, Fruit-yes, Tepley-yes, Walsh-yes, McCarvel-yes. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **Department Updates:**

Director Richards offered several other updates:

- At the September meeting of the Richland Center Common Council City Administrator Ashley Oliphant and City Attorney Michael Windle discussed the relationship between the City of Richland Center and Greater Richland Tourism. For the past 3 years, Greater Richland Tourism has operated as a city department. However, as local townships have joined in this creates a conflict between the city, state statutes, and the participating townships when it comes to approving the budget and approval of expenditures. Additionally, when the Tourism Director was hired full-time and the entity was developed as Greater Richland Tourism the objective was to eventually set it up as a stand-alone, non-profit, organization from the City of Richland Center when it was financially mature and could operate separate from the city. Attorney Windle and Administrator Oliphant stated that now was the time to begin making that change due to the growth of the tourism entity and the conflict of the budget and expenditure process. The City Council gave Administrator Oliphant the directive to move forward

with the process of setting the Tourism Department up as a separate entity with the assistance of Attorney Windle.

- The Center Colorfest activities are planned and moving forward. Parade permit has been issued, Oakwood Fruit Farm, Wild Hills Winery, Friendship Quilters Guild, and other businesses have special events scheduled.

**Next meeting and topics.**

Member Tepley wished to discuss our Destination Wisconsin membership which was approved in the 2025 budget, and the value of the membership after looking at their online information at the next meeting.

It was determined that the next meeting is expected to be Monday, November, 3, 4:00pm.

The motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Tepley, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Walsh. Motion Carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:17 pm.