



EXPLORE TWO RIVERS MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Thursday, May 21, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

3rd floor Two Rivers City Hall
1717 E. Park Street
Two Rivers, WI 54241

MINUTES

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m. by the Board chair, Michael Ditmer.

2. **ROLL CALL:** Michael Ditmer, Curt Andrews, Melissa Nyssen, Cherry Barbier, Mike Mathis, and Lyssa Schmidt. Absentees included Amanda Latour and Erin Dembski. Staff attended included Caitlyn Meola. Guests included Kyle Kordell, Jeff Sachse, and Kevin Stoer.

3. **APPROVAL OF APRIL BOARD MEETING MINUTES:** The Board reviewed the minutes of the April 2026 meeting. A motion was made by Mike Mathis and seconded by Cherry Barbier to adopt the minutes.

4. NATIONAL TRAVEL AND TOURISM RECAP

- **National Travel and Tourism Week Celebration:** The Board reviewed the recent National Travel and Tourism Week event, noting high levels of satisfaction with the local, community-focused approach and the successful engagement of vendors and attractions. The group discussed potential improvements for future events, including extending the social hour to allow for better vendor interaction, ensuring attendees have enough time to visit with participants, and the idea of rotating future event venues to different local sites.

5. VISITOR GUIDE

- **Visitor Guide 2027:** Director Meola announced that Visit Manitowoc plans to publish its own visitor guide for 2027 to pursue their own brand identity
- **Digital and Print:** Data was presented on direct guide requests from Explore Two Rivers, noting that for quarters one and two, there were 87 total individual requests, with 64 coming from Destinations Wisconsin and 23 directly via the website. 60% of these requests originated from outside Wisconsin, supporting the need for out-of-market advertising. As of May 20, 2026, 25,500 guide pieces had been distributed across 129 locations, including hotels, libraries, and visitor centers, demonstrating that printed guides remain a vital resource for visitors planning trips from home. It was recommended to maintain a one-year printed individual guide for Explore Two Rivers for 2027.
- **Sister City Partnerships:** During the discussion on content, the board reached a consensus that while the guide should feature Two Rivers, it should not be exclusively focused on the town but should also include broader regional attractions, such as Manitowoc, Kewaunee, and Mishicot, to maintain maximum appeal for visitors.
- **Budget Impact:** The board formally moved to proceed with an independent Two Rivers visitor guide for 2027. They approved earmarking \$10,000 of room tax funds as a base for the project, with the understanding that total costs could reach \$20,000 depending on final print quantities and offset by ad revenue, and they agreed to maintain distribution levels comparable to previous years to remain competitive. Michael Ditmer made the official motion to approve the individual 2027 visitor guide; Curt Andrews seconded the motion.

6. I LOVE TR NEXT STEPS

- **Workshops Recap:** The board debriefed on the recent workshops conducted by guest speaker, Ryan Short. The discussion turned to terminology and training, with suggestions to avoid the term "brand" to prevent negative community perceptions and instead focus on "community ambassadors," along with a plan to develop onboarding documentation to help new employees understand the community's history and the economic value of tourism.
- **Next Community Meeting:** The board discussed scheduling the next "I Love Two Rivers" ambassador meeting for late June to maintain momentum. They explored ways to integrate "I Love Two Rivers" branding into upcoming summer events, such as concerts, the farmers market, and the parade, using banners and portable yard signs.

7. DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

- **Budget Update - Revenue Performance:** Room Tax Treasurer Curt Andrews presented an up-to-date budget report, noting that while room tax revenue experienced a slow start in January and February, performance improved in March, with an expectation of seasonal growth through September. There was a decision to exclude RV campsite revenue from current forecasts due to uncertainty, and the reallocation of travel expenses was brought back to the original \$2,600 approved budget amount due to upcoming outreach opportunities. It was noted that the previously budgeted \$25,000 commitment for a concession stand was removed from the budget because the anticipated grant did not materialize, though it remains a potential priority for future funding if matching opportunities are identified.
- **Mid-West Marketplace Update:** Caitlyn Meola reported on attending the Midwest Marketplace conference in La Crosse, where she engaged with approximately 35 tour operators to promote Two Rivers. Future travel plans include attending the Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers event in October, which is considered a high-priority opportunity for securing future group tour bookings.
- **Business Partnerships and Digital Engagement:** Director Meola described a new initiative partnering with Rick Carey at Cobblestone to include a QR code on materials in hotel rooms, allowing guests to scan for curated information about Explore Two Rivers. This project also involves collaboration with Sepia, aiming to provide non-local visitors with easy access to digital guides and local activities.
- **77" Tall Ship Excitement:** It was confirmed that the historic tall ship "Inland Seas" will officially dock in Two Rivers from July 27 to July 28 with a handful of students. Logistics regarding the itinerary are currently pending, as this was organized with NOAA, the marine sanctuary.
- **Marketing Updates:** Meola updated the board on current marketing efforts, including the launch of TikTok and LinkedIn accounts for Explore Two Rivers. Future strategy involves focusing on sponsored social media advertising and creating content across TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram reels to reach and engage with a broader audience.
- **Promotional Activities:** Mike Mathis announced they will be featured on a few episodes for Discover Wisconsin, with a kayaking segment scheduled for June.
- **Community Map Updates:** The participants discussed the condition of community maps located at the Mars Trail and the beach. Caitlyn Meola identified that the current posters are outdated and require a reprint. They noted that Sean has provided an updated map, and they will proceed with the reprint to ensure the information slots are current.
- **Secretary Resignation and Recruitment:** Caitlyn Meola shared the resignation letter from board member Todd Milton and presented a draft job description for the vacant secretary position, to be filled by an existing member or otherwise open to the public.

8. **ADJOURNMENT.** Curt Andrews initiated the motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike Mathis seconded the motion. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 11:01 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Caitlyn Meola, Tourism Director