

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY HOTEL MOTEL TAX BOARD
THURSDAY, JULY 31, 2025
CENTURY CENTER, BENDIX ARENA

Members Present

John Anthony	Carmen Piasecki
Becky Fletcher	Gary West
Mark McDonnell	Kyle Willis
Rob DeCleene	Ron Zeltwanger
Micki Kidder	Paul Phair

Members Absent

Jenny McNeil

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 a.m. by President Anthony. Casey Krempec conducted roll call.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

President John Anthony entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the 5/29/25 meeting. Gary West motions to approve and Carmen Piasecki seconds, motion carries.

TREASURERS REPORT

Ron Zeltwanger presented the financial report, summarized below:

- Reviewed June 30th financials for five funds. Balance as of January 1st, \$12,238,760.
- Year-to-date receipts: ~\$4.6M; expenditures: ~\$7M; end-of-June balance: ~\$9M.
- Hotel Motel Tax Fund started the year at ~\$6.3M, with ~\$2.9M received in first two quarters (up \$0.5M year-over-year).
- Disbursements: ~\$3.8M; end-of-June balance: ~\$5.4M.
- Estimated year-end carryover: ~\$6.9M, indicating growth in reserves.
- Rolling four quarters revenue: ~\$6.8M (up from \$6.2M last year).

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

John Anthony gave his president's report, summarized below:

- Positive discussions with city and Century Center on capital funding and operating models.
- Hotel numbers are strong, outpacing state and national trends.

AGENCY REPORTS

VISIT SOUTH BEND MISHAWAKA – Jeff Jarnecke presented, summarized below:

1. Tourism Growth & Occupancy

- Tourism numbers are up 20–25% year-over-year, outperforming state averages. While other regions in Indiana are flat or declining, Saint Joseph County is seeing strong growth.
- Short-term rentals (especially during football season) have doubled in room nights booked, with higher average daily rates (ADR).
- During the week of July 14th, the county averaged 82% hotel occupancy, nearly selling out due to five major events. Some visitors had to be redirected to hotels in Elkhart due to full occupancy.

2. Major Events Driving Tourism

- Events like football games, AYOP (America's Youth on Parade), and other large gatherings are filling hotels.
- During AYOP, cars from 20 different states were counted, showing broad regional draw.
- Five events for one weekend brought in about 5,000 participants plus families and friends.

3. Construction Projects Impact

- Synergy Cells and Amazon Web Services (AWS) projects in New Carlisle have generated 73,000 hotel room nights to date.
- AWS construction will continue for another 10 years, with ~6,000 construction workers on-site daily, many staying in local hotels.

- Spillover effects are seen in LaPorte and Elkhart counties, with hotel occupancy up 11% and 4–5% respectively, attributed to these projects.

4. Regional Hotel Data

- Saint Joseph County: ~5,200 hotel rooms
- LaPorte County: ~2,600 hotel rooms
- Elkhart County: ~3,600 hotel rooms
- Both neighboring counties are experiencing occupancy growth due to regional events and construction.

5. Fall Activations & Upcoming Initiatives

- Game Day Express: Branded Transpo bus partnership for visitors, encouraging easy access to campus.
- College Welcome Weeks: Increased activations with local colleges and universities.
- Youth Hockey Tournaments: Starting at Compton at the end of August.
- Leeper Park Tennis Court Reconstruction: Fast-tracked government project, wrapping up by early September.

6. Tourism Master Plan Progress

- Eight months into the creation of a tourism master plan, with ongoing progress.
- Stronger connections with Notre Dame and other colleges for fall events and visitor experiences.
- Plans for a three-day music festival at Saint Joseph County Fairgrounds in August next year, expected to draw 25,000 people per day.
- Miracle League Park (special needs-friendly) in Mishawaka, ready by summer 2026.
- George Wilson Park: Year-round skiing, tubing, snowboarding, ready by spring 2026.

7. Visitor Experience Enhancements

- Secret shopping project with Veneto Labs to improve experiences at five local attractions.
- Focus on creating unique, revenue-generating experiences at existing venues.

8. Anecdotes & Community Impact

- Construction workers and visitors are contributing to local restaurant and hotel business.
- Positive feedback from visitors about local amenities and events.
- Emphasis on making Saint Joseph County a desirable place to live and visit

MISHAWAKA SPORTS FIELDHOUSE

Nick Kleva, Director of Events, Marketing and Sponsorship, reported and summarized below:

Summer Camps & Youth Engagement

- Multi-Sport Camp: First-ever camp featured pickleball, soccer, basketball, and volleyball. 64 kids participated. Ended with a visit from two Notre Dame football players, media coverage, and awards ceremony.
- Total Summer Camps: 11 camps hosted in June–July, including 3 turf, 3 volleyball, and 4 basketball camps, totaling over 650 campers.

Tournament Activity

- Basketball Tournament: Hosted a stop on a Midwest circuit with 64 teams and ~350 room nights.
- AYOP Baton Twirlers: Facility used for practice by ~150 participants, aiming to expand involvement next year.

Volleyball Dominance

- Neva Volleyball: Registration for 2025–26 season opens soon. Expected growth from 183 teams to 1800–2000 participants.
- Boys Volleyball: New IHSA approval opens growth opportunities and potential for boys-only tournaments.

Basketball & Youth Development

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- Five Star Basketball: Wrapping up season with championship wins. Focus shifting to fall youth leagues and AAU travel teams.
- Youth Development League: Grades 1–5, weekly practices and games. Successful pilot last fall, returning this year.

Pickleball Growth

- Database of 1,500 players. Strong turnout even in summer due to indoor air conditioning.
- Mishawaka Midwest Open: Scheduled for October. Goal: 600 players. New divisions added (over 60 singles).

Baseball & Turf Programming

- Canes Bay Baseball: Tryouts for 2026 teams drew over 200 players.
- Turf Training: Speed, agility, and balance classes for multi-sport athletes.

Upcoming Programming

- Neva Volleyball Tryouts: Boys – August 24; Girls – September 28 through November.
- World Team Pickleball Camp: October football weekend, including camp + game experience.
- Youth Basketball League: Grades 1–8, weekend games through fall.
- New Turf Offerings: Flag football, T-ball, youth soccer leagues.

Tournament Season Outlook (Jan–May 2026)

- 20 of 22 weekends booked:
 - 8 Neva volleyball weekends
 - 3 external volleyball tournaments (new partnerships)
 - 8 basketball tournaments
 - 1 football tournament (new addition)
- Major Contracts:
 - Hype Nation/Level 12: March tournament with 100 teams on all 19 courts.
 - Adidas Circuit: Potential live periods attracting 100 teams and hundreds of college coaches.

Hotel Room Night Impact

- Volleyball Tournaments: Regional travel events bring ~200 room nights each.
- MLK Tournament: ~200+ room nights.
- March Tournament: ~500 room nights projected.
- Mother's Day Weekend (Mishawaka Mayhem): ~1,200 room nights.
- Basketball Tournaments: Estimated 700–1,000 room nights per event.
- July Tournament: Potential 4–5-day event with early arrivals and college coach attendance.

Tourism Impact Analysis

- Volleyball is the top tourism driver:
 - 10 basketball courts convert to 19 volleyball courts.
 - Up to 152 teams per day via wave scheduling.
 - High facility engagement, dining, and hotel stays.

CENTURY CENTER

Rebekah Love, General Manager, reported for the Century Center, summarized below:

Financial Overview

- Capital Fund 671 (Q2):
 - Revenue: \$23,000
 - Expenses: \$50,000+
 - Major expense: kitchen equipment purchase (installation expected next week).
- Operating Budget 670 (Q2):
 - Net gain: \$460,000+
 - Both revenue and expenses are trending upward compared to last year.

Hotel Room Nights

- Year-to-date (YTD): 11,111 hotel room nights.

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- 2025 Projection: Over 17,000 room nights.
- 2026 Projection: Already trending 20% higher than 2025, with 14,000+ room nights undersigned or pending contracts.

Loss & Recovery

- Lost Grand Designs event (typically 400–600 room nights) due to market conditions.
- Offset by increased attendance at other events like the robotics competition.

Confirmed Events

- Barletta Dealer Show:
 - 1,000+ hotel room nights.
 - Dealers from across the country.
 - Includes off-site event at Four Winds Field.
- Robotics Competition:
 - 1,000+ attendees/day over 4 days.
 - 92 U.S. teams + 8 international teams.
 - Director of the international event expressed interest in returning next year.
- Irish Classics Gymnastics:
 - Scheduled for March.
 - 400+ hotel room nights.
 - First gymnastics event was hosted at Century Center.
- Indiana Prosecuting Attorney Child Support Conference:
 - Returning for the first time since 2008.
 - 450+ hotel room nights.

Maintenance & Infrastructure

- HVAC system failure during robotics event was managed manually for 3 days by staff until repairs were completed.
- Fire system inspections were conducted for the first time in 48 years.
- Other updates:
 - Window washing
 - Parking bollard repairs
 - Sump pump and drain maintenance
 - River light switch replacement underway

Strategic Outlook

- Despite losing one major event, Century Center is on track to exceed previous years in hotel room nights and revenue.
- Strong pipeline of events for 2026 already in motion.
- Continued investment in infrastructure and equipment to support growth.

MORRIS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Amber Schisler, Director of Ticketing & Strategy, reported for The Morris, summarized below:

Capital Fund & Construction Progress

- Fund 416 (Capital Fund):
 - Q2 Revenue: ~\$90,000
 - Q2 Expenses: ~\$4.2 million
- Major spending is attributed to the Raclin Murphy Encore Center construction.
- Visual updates included:
 - Second-floor lobby and VIP bar area ("Community Cabaret")
 - Donor wall and memorabilia room (featuring autographed guitars and posters)
 - Sensory room for overwhelmed patrons and nursing mothers
 - Central light fixture installation in the main lobby

Ticketing Insights

- Ticketing Revenue:

- 2025 is pacing similarly to previous years, with a peak in March–April.
- May 2025 saw the highest ticket sales revenue for that month in the past five years.
- Ticket Volume:
 - Q2 ticket numbers exceeded the five-year average.
 - Only 2024 surpassed 2025 due to the launch of the "Movies at the Morris" program.

Event Attendance & Revenue

- Ain't Too Proud (Broadway show): 4 performances, 3,100 attendees, ~\$45,000 revenue.
- SBSO Pops & Masterworks: 2 concerts, 1,300 attendees, ~\$17,000 revenue.
- Movies at the Morris:
 - Free public events like *Wicked Singalong* and *Encanto Singalong* drew ~1,000 attendees.
 - Designed to attract first-time visitors and enhance community engagement.

Hotel Room Night Impact

- Visitor Tracking via Placer AI:
 - Q2: ~33,000 attendees stayed >90 minutes.
 - Estimated hotel room nights: 579, based on two guests per room.
 - Includes cast and crew stays (e.g., *Les Misérables* cast of ~100).
 - Downtown hotels show strong engagement, though not all visitors are overnight guests.

Data & Methodology Notes

- Hotel room night estimates are conservative and based on time spent at hotels.
- There is no direct link between ticket purchases and hotel bookings yet, but cast/crew stays are confirmed contributors.

Strategic Takeaways

- MPAC maintains strong performance in ticket sales and attendance.
- Capital investments are transforming the venue into a more inclusive and engaging space.
- Free programming is successfully attracting new audiences.
- Events are contributing meaningfully to local tourism and hotel occupancy.

OLD BUSINESS

Kyle Willis presented on the Nominating Committee report, summarized below:

- All current officers agreed to continue serving another term.
- No other board members expressed interest in leadership roles.
- Motion to approve the slate was passed unanimously.
- Sentiment: strong support and satisfaction with current leadership
- Mark motioned to approve the slate, Becky seconded, motion carried.

Rob DeCleene presented on the Allocation Committee report, summarized below:

Century Center

- Operations Allocation:
 - Increased from \$1.275M to \$1.45M.
 - First increase since 2023.
 - Adjustment compensates for a lower-than-expected request in 2024.
- Building & Structures Allocation:
 - Recommended: \$800K.
 - Intended to be matched 2:1 from Century Center reserves.
 - New model in collaboration with the city to fund capital improvements.
- Capital Refreshments:
 - Includes upgrades to carpets, chairs, tables.
 - Aimed at improving guest experience and enhancing facility marketability.

Convention & Visitors Bureau (CBB)

- Operations & Marketing Grants: No changes.
- Special Projects Allocation:
 - Increased to \$2.75M.
 - Supports initiatives beyond the Tourism Capital Investment Fund (TCIF), including:
 - Dogleg Social in Mishawaka
 - The Yard on Hill Street in South Bend
 - Miracle Park
 - Music Festival mentioned in Jeff Jarnecke's report
- Tourism Grants: Maintained at \$225K.

Overall Budget Impact

- Total Allocations for 2026: \$8,081,437
- Projected Reserve: \$5,160,000 carried into next year
- Emphasis on strategic investment in destination development, placemaking, and quality of quality of life.

Board Feedback

- Strong support for the allocation strategy.
- Motion to approve the allocations was passed unanimously.
- Anecdotal feedback from a visitor highlighted the success of local enhancements like the Link Trail
- Gary motioned to approve, Paul seconded, and motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

- No new business

ADJOURNMENT

Visitor Experience Highlight

- A visitor from Nashville staying at the Morris Inn shared unsolicited praise for the Link Trail, saying: "It's about time they did something like that."
- This anecdote was shared as a real-time affirmation of the board's investments in placemaking and public amenities.

Enhancing the Visitor Experience

- The board discussed how recent and upcoming developments—like the Link Trail, Fieldhouse expansions, and tourism infrastructure—are creating a more attractive environment for both residents and visitors.
- There's optimism that construction workers staying in the area might invite their families to visit on weekends, further boosting tourism and hotel occupancy.

Sentiment from the Board

- The board emphasized the philosophy: "You build a place people want to live. You build a place people want to visit."
- This statement encapsulated the meeting's theme of strategic investment in quality of life and tourism-driven economic development.
- Gary moved to adjourn the meeting, Paul seconded, and motion carried
- Meeting adjourned at 9:23am.