

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

<b><u>Members Present</u></b>	<b><u>Members Absent</u></b>
John Anthony	Carmen Piasecki
Becky Fletcher	Gary West
Mark McDonnell	Kyle Willis
Rob DeCleene	Ron Zeltwanger
Micki Kidder	Paul Phair
	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.

# Hotel Motel Tax Board Minutes

7/31/25

Pg. 2

- 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

## Hotel Motel Tax Board Minutes

7/31/25

Pg. 3

- 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.

# Hotel Motel Tax Board Minutes

7/31/25

Pg. 4

- 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:

# Hotel Motel Tax Board Minutes

7/31/25

Pg. 5

- 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)

# Hotel Motel Tax Board Minutes

7/31/25

Pg. 6

- 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.

JA:CLK