

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY HOTEL MOTEL TAX BOARD
THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2025
THE ICE BOX 1421 S WALNUT ST, SOUTH BEND IN
8:30 A.M.

Members Present

John Anthony	Carmen Piasecki
Becky Fletcher	Gary West
Mark McDonnell	Kyle Willis
Jenny McNeil	Ron Zeltwanger
Micki Kidder	

Members Absent

Paul Phair
Rob DeCleene

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 2/18/25 meeting. Gary West motions to approve and Micki Kidder seconds, motion carries.

TREASURERS REPORT

Ron Zeltwanger presented the financial report, summarized below:

First Quarter Performance (2025)

- **Starting balance:** \$6.35 million
- **Receipts:** \$1.6 million
 - Compared to:
 - \$1.25M (2024)
 - \$1.5M (2023)
 - ~\$1M (2022)
- **Disbursements:** \$3.132 million
- **Ending March balance:** \$4.828 million
- **Remaining budget for rest of year:** \$2.9 million

Outlook & Trends

- Front-loaded spending has reduced available funds to **\$1.85 million** (not accounting for new revenue).
- Historically, the final three quarters average **under \$5M in receipts**.
- Projected **\$6.8 million year-end carryover**, helping grow the reserve.
- Rolling annual receipts:
 - Past 3 years: ~\$6.6M
 - Previous 4 quarters: ~\$6.1M
 - Year before: Just over \$6M

Bottom Line

2025 is off to a strong start, showing higher first quarter receipts and a healthy projected reserve—even with heavier early-year spending.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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

Hospitality Revenue Highlights (Jan–Apr 2025)

- **Hotel revenue surged 26%** over the same period last year, an unprecedented increase.
- Growth driven by contributions from:
 - Amazon
 - New EV plant
 - Late December home playoff game
- **Important note:** This jump reflects **room revenue**, not tax revenue (which lags actual stays).

- With these results now being collected, **Q2 revenue is projected to rise even more.**

Venue Appreciation – Icebox Event

- Strong gratitude expressed for the venue, “Icebox,” hosting the event.
- Attendees described the space as uplifting, fresh, and impressive— “wow” being the common reaction.
- Praised for its welcoming atmosphere and high-quality facilities.

Sentiment & Outlook

- Teams are energized by growth and the environment.
- Expectation is high for continued revenue momentum through Q2.
- Deep appreciation for the leadership and investments that made this possible.

John welcomed Michelle Riccio, General Manager of the Icebox, for comments and questions on the updated facility.

Michelle reported:

Facility Renovation Highlights

- Deep appreciation for community support, especially from long-time team members.
- The space now feels refreshed and modern, described with the “new car smell” sentiment.
- Extensive renovations completed:
 - Entire lobby rebuilt
 - New pro shop, skate rental area, and expanded restrooms (15 stalls in the ladies' room)
 - Updated Rinks 3 & 4, including locker rooms and Zamboni room
 - New offices, concession stands, and storefront spaces
 - Upgraded compressor system for the entire rink operation
 - Enhanced parking and two striking new entrances
 - Waiting on state-of-the-art TVs and visual walls
- **Total investment:** \$12 million

Overall Sentiment

- A heartfelt sense of pride and gratitude echoed throughout.
- Excitement to show off the revamped facility to visitors and stakeholders.

AGENCY REPORTS

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

Hospitality Surge & Room Nights

- **Q1 2025 set a record**, with estimated **45,000 room nights** largely driven by Amazon, Synergy Sales development, and tourism related to the EV battery plant.
- **South Bend International Airport** saw a **25% growth** in passenger traffic.
- **Compared to statewide trends**, St. Joseph County is outperforming LaPorte (+3–6%) and Elkhart (+0.5%) counties, while other counties saw slight declines (1–1.5%).
- Growth reflects the successful absorption of **700 new hotel rooms** since 2017, pushing occupancy rates and Average Daily Rates (ADR) to record levels for 3 of the past 4 months.

Short-Term Rentals & ADR

- **Airbnb/VRBO revenue:** \$6.8 million (YTD), up **41%** with **52% occupancy**, breaking non-football season records.
- ADR across hotels is rising, boosting income for both innkeepers and the local economy—even as statewide ADR still lags.

Visitor Origins & Behavior

- **Chicago and Indianapolis** continue as top feeder markets, with Ohio rising due to a general contractor from Toledo.
- Workers from Synergy Sales site frequently stay Tues–Thurs in local hotels; AWS construction will last **11 years**, with 5–6 heavy-build years up front.
- Expected addition: potential **data center** linked to the AWS facility.

Hotel & Venue Development

- **DoubleTree Hotel renovation** progressing floor-by-floor, with community reuse of furnishings via Goodwill. Completion expected fall 2025.
- \$12 million Icebox renovation completed earlier, boosting local pride and event capacity.

Economic Development Incentives

- **St. Joseph County tourism contracts** require use of local hotels for sponsored events.
- Chamber/city/county economic agreements currently **do not mandate** hotel usage—but Visit South Bend actively promotes courtesy blocks and special codes to channel bookings locally.

Events & Community Engagement

- Long-term bookings solid through **2028**, including:
 - ISA (Indiana Society of Association Executives)
 - Baton twirling championships (2,000+ participants from 31 states)
 - Continued growth in **sports tourism**: ~80 events, 150,000 visitors, 26K room nights from hockey alone
- **Rally Week** activated 29 restaurants: parents wowed by South Bend's hospitality outside campus areas.

Reflections & Results

- Occupancy growth is even more impressive given a **162-room increase** in hotel supply.
- Investments in infrastructure, tourism, and community partnerships are yielding tangible ROI.
- Continued enthusiasm around Visit South Bend, Mishawaka's efforts—evidenced by packed event schedules and expanding national attention.

POTAWATOMI ZOO

Josh Sisk, Executive Director, reported, summarized below:

Big Cat Tracks Project

- **Bidding soon**: 5 contractors expected to bid in about 2 weeks.
- **Phase 1 construction**: Includes the cat building, viewing windows, and restrooms.
- **Funding status**:
 - \$2M still needed for the full project (including playgrounds and amenities).
 - \$21M raised over 6 years across 4 capital campaigns—an impressive feat in the zoo world!
 - \$2.5M–\$3M raised privately within the first six months of the current campaign.
- **Timeline goals**:
 - Break ground by August.
 - Open by summer of next year.
- **Finance considerations**: Open to financing, despite traditionally funding without loans.

Zooluminate Event Success

- **Visitor turnout**:
 - Initial estimate: 60,000 attendees.
 - Actual: Over 65,800—and likely to surpass 70,000 by the weekend.
 - Mother's Day weekend saw record attendance: 21,000 in just three days.
- **Positive impact**:
 - Major boost in zoo visibility and reputation.
 - Overflowing praise on social media with little to no negativity.
- **Revenue boost**:
 - High nightly earnings (e.g., \$7,000 in beer and wine alone).
 - Increased memberships—even from non-traditional event attendees.
- **Cultural dimension**:
 - Partnership with a Chicago-based company run by Chinese staff.
 - 20 international workers on visas contributed to setup and operations.

- Strong teamwork and unique cultural exchange experience.

Operational Challenges & Plans

- **Parking issues:**
 - Overcrowding, chaotic parking—even in wooded areas.
 - Local neighborhood concerns about repeated weekend traffic surges.
 - Exploring creative solutions (e.g., partnerships with nearby schools, shuttle services).
- **Infrastructure updates:**
 - Rethinking entrance layout, sidewalks, and outdated POS systems.
 - Aim to streamline ticketing and improve crowd flow.

Visitor Data Highlights

- 50,000+ tracked ticket sales (excluding cash transactions).
- 21,000+ from outside St. Joe County—showcasing wide regional reach.
- Zip code data revealed attendance from across multiple states and countries like Italy and Puerto Rico.

Accreditation Prep

- Zoo up for reaccreditation by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA).
- Starts Sunday, June 15; team preparing for inspections.

MISHAWAKA SPORTS FIELDHOUSE

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

Tournament Season Highlights (Jan–Jun)

- **Total Tournaments:** 25
- **Teams Hosted:** Over 1,800 (600+ traveling teams)
- **Visitor Impact:**
 - ~60,000 unique visitors
 - ~4,400 estimated room nights
- **Sports Variety:**
 - Volleyball, basketball, cornhole, cheer, soccer, pickleball
 - Planning to expand with wrestling, handball, and gymnastics
- **Premier Event:** *Mishawaka Mayhem* (Mother's Day weekend)
 - 247 teams (record number)
 - Full facilities and parking
 - Confirmed return for the next 2 years

Club & Program Updates

- **NEVA Volleyball:**
 - Spring program active
 - 11 teams headed to nationals in June
- **5-Star Basketball:**
 - 19 AAU teams
 - Hosting summer league and releasing fall programming
- **Pickleball:**
 - 1,200+ participants in database
 - Classes remain full
 - Selkirk partnership coming soon
- **Caines Baseball/Softball:**
 - Spring/summer matches ongoing
 - Hosting open house to recruit
- **Turf Programming:**
 - Balance, agility, lacrosse and soccer camps
 - Partnership with USL League Two team for rainy-day practices

Camps & Upcoming Events

- **Summer Camp Season Begins**
 - 8 camps scheduled (volleyball, soccer, football, baseball)
 - *Multi-Sport Camp* end of June featuring Notre Dame football players via Dick's Sporting Goods partnership
- **July Basketball Tournament**
 - 3-day event
 - College coaches expected
- **Fall Events (Oct–Dec)**
 - Fall Basketball League
 - Pickleball Tournament
 - Five Star Tournament
- **2026 Season Outlook**
 - 17 of 22 weekends already booked (Jan–May)
 - Focus on retention and growth of successful tournaments

Team Recognition

Special shout-out to the concessions team for their long hours and hard work during the tournament season, a key part of the team's success!

CENTURY CENTER

Dezha Moore, General Manager of Venues, reported for the Century Center, summarized below:

Financial Snapshot

Category	Revenue	Expenses	Net Change	Notes
Capital	\$15,000	\$37,000	-\$22,000	Ongoing construction and repairs
Operations	\$534,000	\$713,000	-\$178,000	Increase in both revenue and expenses vs. Q1 2024

- The **Hotel Motel Tax Board Capital** is reflected within the operations account.

Upcoming Robotics Competition

- **Event Scale:** 96 teams from 8 countries
- **Estimated Daily Attendees:** 1,600+
- **Hotel Impact:** Full bookings already underway
- **Future Hosting Potential:** Strong interest in becoming a *permanent host site* if successful

Hospitality Metrics

Quarter/Year	Room Nights
Q1 2025	4,706
Full 2025 (Projected)	17,000+
Full 2026 (Projected)	13,240

Maintenance & Upkeep

- **Garage Rekeying:** System updates in progress
- **Island Clean-Up:** Iris (Pup Patrol MVP!) helping manage goose droppings
- **Ongoing Repairs:** Focused on keeping facilities functional and guest-ready year-round

MORRIS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Dezha Moore, General Manager of Venues, reported for The Morris, summarized below:

Financial Overview

Category	Revenue	Expenses	Notes
Capital	\$67K	\$2.1M	Reflects construction project underway

Category Revenue Expenses Notes

Operations (Q1) \$261K \$398K Increased Broadway activity, colder winter, repairs

- Unexpected expense rise due to:
 - Later Broadway hours
 - 10% drop in winter degrees → higher natural gas use
 - Inspection cycles & surprise repairs

Raclin Murphy Encore Center Construction Update

- **Progress:**
 - Wood blocking, door frame installation, elevator work underway
 - Roof steel, ceiling, and interior framing in progress
 - Visible character of building taking shape!
- **Lighting Upgrade:**
 - Programmable fixtures installed
 - \$20K *under* budget—funds saved
- **Dark Period Extension:**
 - Now runs: Aug 11 → Oct 22 (due to structural surprises)
 - Still on track to open: **Dec 2025**
- **Phase 3 Bid:** Under city review, targeted to launch July

Ticketing & Shows Update

Show/Event Revenue Tickets Sold Notables

Umphey's McGee \$42K 1,608 First self-promoted show of the year

Bob Dylan \$63K Sold out First sellout since 2023

Kevin James \$39K 82% attendance High engagement

- **Ticket Fee Revenue:** \$150K
- **Sales Revenue:** \$1M+
- **FTC Ruling Compliance:**
 - \$5 transaction fee removed
 - Historic Preservation Fee now \$4.75 (up from \$3.50)
 - Net win for community (cheaper experience for ≤4 tickets)

Hospitality & Foot Traffic

- **Hotel Room Nights (Q1):** 428
- **Visitor Tracking:** 14,500 total visitors
- **Top Hotels:** DoubleTree, Aloft, Courtyard (via Placer AI)

Community Engagement

- **Fridays by the Fountain (Free Concerts):** Going *on tour* due to construction
 - June → Leeper Park
 - July → Howard Park
 - August → Seitz Park
- **Broadway 2025–2026 Season Announced:**
 - *Mrs. Doubtfire, Hadestown, Clue, Beetlejuice*

Sustainability & Energy Efficiency

- **Ameresco Energy Report (Year 1):**
 - Projects: LED lighting, specialty lighting, HVAC, roofing, plumbing upgrades
 - **Energy savings exceeded expectations** by \$7,965
 - **Total savings:** \$255,281

OLD BUSINESS

Micki Kidder presented on the TCIF report, summarized below:

TCIF Overview

- **Year:** 4th year of existence
- **2025 Funding Available:** \$2,000,000
- **Committee Members:**
 - John Anthony, Micki Kidder, Ron Zeltwanger, Paul Phair
 - Joe Thomas (County Council), Wesley Clark (hotel rep)
 - Jeff Jarnecke (VSBM)

Previous Awards Recap

Year	Project(s)	Investment
1	Icebox Facility	\$1,000,000
2	Indiana Dinosaur Museum, Indiana Invaders	\$1.2M total
3	No awards issued (proposal pause)	—

2025 Applications & Review

- **12 total proposals**
- **\$62M** in project value
- High quality, tourism-driven, community-enriching applications

Recommended Investments

1. George Wilson Park – Year-Round Snow Sports

- **TCIF Investment:** \$1.5M
- **Type:** Snowboarding, skiing, tubing
- **Partnership:** City of Mishawaka matching funds
- **Inspired by:** Liberty University's successful model
- **Expected Impact:**
 - Cash-flow positive
 - Hotel room nights
 - Enhanced local experience

2. Leeper Park Tennis Complex

- **TCIF Investment:** \$500K
- **Scope:** Tennis court reconstruction
- **Matching Funds:** Secured with city
- **USTA Support:**
 - Anticipated tournament attraction
 - Significant room night impact
 - Long-term community enrichment

Broader Strategy & Impact

- **Additional referrals:** Projects sent to Tax Board Allocation Committee
- **Goal:** Create tourism magnets & drive extended stays
- **Synergy with local events:**
 - Mishawaka Fieldhouse
 - Notre Dame Athletics
 - Seasonal festivals

Committee Action

- **Motion to approve:** Jenny McNeil
- **Seconded by:** Gary West
- **Motion carried**

NEW BUSINESS

New Business

- **Nominating Committee:**
 - Grateful thanks to *Kyle* and *Gary* for agreeing to serve once again.
- **Allocation Committee:**
 - Appreciation extended to *Rob, Micki, Gary, Ron, and John* for continuing service.
 - The committee will report back at the next scheduled meeting: **Thursday, July 31st.**

Closing Actions

- **Motion to Adjourn:** Made by *Gary*
- **Seconded By:** *Kyle*
- **Motion carried**
- **Meeting Adjourned:** 9:49 AM

ADJOURNMENT

JA:CLK