

Allegan County Tourist Council



Allegan County Parks, Recreation &
Tourism
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<http://www.allegancounty.org>

Chairperson: Melissa Brower
Vice Chairperson: Debbie Laraway

Scott Beltman
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Hopkins

**Melissa
Brower**
616-550-3408
Fennville

Erin Gillmet
616- 274-9922
Dorr

**Debbie
Laraway**
269-416-0221
Pullman

**Tamara
March-Vispi**
269-286-4724
Allegan

**Elizabeth
Morse**
269-650-0211
Allegan

TOURIST COUNCIL MEETING– MINUTES

Tuesday, February 18, 2025, @ 10:00 am

County Services Building – Board Room -3283 122nd Ave, Allegan, MI 49010

Virtual Connectivity Option: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82807032684>

CALL TO ORDER: Laraway called to order at 10:01am

ROLL CALL:

Present: Melissa Brower, Scott Beltman, Erin Gillmet

Debbie Laraway (Zoom), Elizabeth Morse, Tamara March-Vispi (Zoom)

Absent:

Also Present: Brandy Gildea, Heather Stormzand

- Gildea introduced new member, Tamar March-Vispi and Erin Gillmet, and then had everyone introduce themselves to the new member.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

- **Chairman:** A nomination was made by Beltman, seconded by Morse to elect Brower the Chairman of the Tourist Advisory Board for 2025. The motion carried.
- **Vice-Chairman:** A nomination was made by Beltman , seconded by Gillmet to elect Laraway as the Vice-Chairman of the Tourist Advisory Board for 2025 The motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Motion made by Beltman, seconded by Morse to approve the May 21, 2024 minutes as presented. The motion carried.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None.

ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS: None.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Motion was made by Morse, seconded March-Vispi to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried.

PRESENTATION: None

REVIEW ITEMS:

1. Financial Review -

Gildea provided a brief overview of the Tourist Council (and the entire 208-751) funding. The Tourist Council has \$10,000 to spend. Approximately \$6,000 is spent annually on marketing and partnerships with WMTA and the Shoreline guide

- Brower asked about the Z-cards and how that was funded and if the Tourist Council will need to budget for this as well.
 - Gildea explained that z-cards are only purchased every five years and paid out of tourism and parks budgets.
 - It was discussed that the parks board has been looking at other methods of funding (for example: millage, fee increase) besides the shared casino revenues funds, that would help with the 208-751 fund.
 - It was discussed that the BOC and parks board are waiting for the results of the 2025 Allegan County Community Survey, which has a specific question about people's interest in funding support for parks, recreation, and tourism. Board members were encouraged to take the survey and share the word of the survey once its available for the public. Gildea will share the link with this board at that time.

RECOMMENDATION/ACTION ITEMS:

1. **2025 Tourist Council Meeting Schedule** -set the schedule for the rest of the 2025 meetings

A motion was made by Beltman, seconded by Gillmet to approve the schedule as amended. The motion carried.

Following is the 2025 amended schedule:

DATE	TIME	PLACE
February 18	10:00 am	Board Conference Room
June 3	10:00 am	Board Conference Room
August 19	10:00 am	Board Conference Room
December 2	10:00 am	Board Conference Room

DISCUSSION ITEMS:

1. **Tourist Council Board Planning** – Establish the Tourist Council's overall goals and set specific objectives to achieve them in 2025.

Gildea recapped the Tourist Council history (heritage trail, visitors guide, z-card, quorum issues, budget shortage) and the combined meeting with the parks board in May of 2024. With all these concerns Gildea then questioned the continued efforts of the Tourist Council, ensuring that the Tourist Council avoids

duplication of efforts already managed by Visitors Bureaus, Chambers, and Main Streets and optimizes the use of county funding and resources.

Brower discussed the concerns, that most of the joint meeting with the Parks Board focused on park and recreation topics and she believes that continuing to meet with them would be a loss of focus on tourism. Many of the other Tourist Council members agreed. Brower also stated that with the lack of quorums, funding and there are so many other efforts around Allegan County to help with tourism she would be okay to dissolve the Tourist Council. Gildea explained that she reached out to the Chambers/main streets within Allegan County and they do not need anything and even the past member Jenny who worked at Plainwell/Otsego Chamber and she could not think of any projects that are needed due to marketing already being done at their level.

March-Vispi does not see the need to join the Parks Board and to stay with the Tourist Council to move forward with a Tourist Council mission.

The board then went through some ideas that they could work on:

- March-Vispi – How to connect small farmers and roadside stands to tourism. Farmers market in Allegan is stagnate and not grown. Could the Tourist Dept work with the farmers and markets to help market their items.
 - There use to be a map of U-picks in the areas. How can we support the smaller farms
 - Gildea had then expressed concern about who is going to do this work? Are they willing to put the work in to do this. There was a wine tour that was talked about but was not pursued.
 - What are other ideas what are you willing to do? Then if there is still attendance at the next meeting talking about what other ideas you can have because we know that this puts you on the spot so this will give the Tourist Council members time to think of what is needed and what they are willing to do to support new projects.
- The Tourist Board agreed that they would come back with ideas as to how they can move forward with new projects. Coming back to just a Board meeting and no combined meetings with the Parks Advisory Board.
- Brower Suggested some ideas about what the group can think about to bring back some ideas and activities that they can work with this year in the Tourist Board. Allegan County as a whole, sponsored adds on FB, Farmers and small farms in the area, farmer's markets, where do we want to market and how and who can do these items.
- Morse thought about a paperzeen or something other than online. It would be different and something that no one else is doing right now.

- Beltman wondered how the distribution would work and how do we get this in the hands of Allegan County?

Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Newsletter – Review the draft and structure of the upcoming Parks, Recreation, and Tourism newsletter, ensuring it effectively communicates updates, events, and initiatives to the community.

- Brower asked about ad revenue and how can some businesses pay for ads in our newsletters.
 - Gildea explained that this can be done and we can talk more about this in the future.

NOTICE OF APPOINTMENTS:

Tourist Council Vacancy:

Vacancy 1: expires (12/31/2025)

Vacancy 2: expires (12/31/2025)

Vacancy 3: expires (12/31/2027)

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION: None

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: Tourist council members will be brainstorming ideas for projects that they will bring to the May meeting. These will be ideas that the Tourist Council can do and get involved with.

ROUND TABLE:

ADJOURNMENT: Next Meeting TC meeting – May 20, 2025 @ 10:00 am in County Services Building – Board Room -3283 122nd Ave, Allegan, MI 49010

A motion was made by Beltman, seconded by Gillmet to adjourn the meeting at 11:59am. The motion carried.