

McCurtain County Tourism Authority Minutes

Held Tuesday, September 16, 2025 - 1 PM

The meeting was held in the Broken Bow Area Chamber of Commerce at Broken Bow Chamber meeting room at 113 West Martin Luther King Drive in Broken Bow.

Chairman Dave Smulyan called the meeting to order at 1:08 PM. He had everyone introduce themselves to our new board member Michelle Blackmore who was sworn in on August 18, 2025.

Board Members were present: Dave Smulyan, Wenda Blankenship, Jerry Don Smith, Michelle Blackmore, and Ed Fulmer. **Absent Board Members:** Josh Latta. Executive Director, Charity O'Donnell, was also present. Guests in attendance were Matt Farley and Erin Acuff with ICG, McCurtain County Clerk Trish Ricketts, and District 1 County Commissioner John Williams. Debbie Lawson arrived later at 2:15 pm.

Special Projects Grant presentation by Trish Ricketts for Christmas Lights for the courthouse: Trish explained to the board the items in her grant proposal request. The board asked a few questions as to what her plan is and where these proposed lights are planned to go and she answered them. Then Trish left at 1:15pm.

Discussion and possible action to amend the fiscal year ending 2026 budget to align with the fiscal year actuals for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025:

Charity explained that we amend our budget every year when actual numbers come in. We projected we would bring in \$4,275,000.00 and we only brought in \$4,256,786.74. So, we ended the year \$18,000.00 less than projected on lodging tax income. The general fund interest came in \$36,000 more than expected, and we had \$217,588.00 of last year's budget that wasn't spent that will be carried over.

Charity explained that she left the trash line item in there where it has been the past few years and the same with the reserve line item. These were the biggest reasons for the amendment. She explained that ICG's budget is \$4,348,988.00. Most everything that was amended went to advertising with just a little added to Audit and Travel. This would make our total budget \$6,233,779.16.

Ed Fulmer made a motion to approve the budget amendment as presented. Jerry Don Smith seconded the budget. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Wenda inquired about the current status of the trash project. John Williams responded, noting that the board had previously allocated a significant amount of money for trash cleanup efforts. He stated that through his involvement with the current Solid Waste board, he has learned that they now have access to grant funding for various needs related to the project.

John further explained that the program can utilize inmate labor and is covered by insurance when operating on state highways. Additionally, instead of Solid Waste handling the cleanup, he has now involved ODOT, which is currently paying the county jail for the use of inmate labor to clean up trash along state highways.

However, this shift in focus to state highways has resulted in the neglect of county roads. John acknowledged that since the jail is being compensated for work on state highways, there is little incentive to focus on county roads. Despite this, he emphasized that inmates can still be used for cleanup on county roads.

John noted that a new Solid Waste board is now in place and is actively considering launching a dedicated trash pickup program. He is currently working with them on this initiative. He also asked the board if the previously allocated funding was still available, to which the board confirmed yes.

At this point, Charity reminded everyone that the last three legal opinions from the District Attorney clearly stated, in various forms, that tourism funds cannot be used for trash cleanup. In response, John mentioned that he has spoken with the Lt. Governor, who suggested that John coordinate with State Representative Eddie Dempsey to request an official Attorney General's Opinion on the matter.

John also spoke with DA Mark Matloff, who reportedly supports revisiting the issue to see if a different legal outcome can be reached. John confirmed he is actively working on this.

John said that the current trash project budget of \$1,117,307.00 could be used to help launch the cleanup program. However, he emphasized that future tourism dollars should be directed toward promoting the area and attracting visitors, rather than continuing to earmark funds for cleanup.

Charity added that at the beginning of this project, the team had a call with the Lt. Governor to inquire about potential state funding to help get the project off the ground. The Lt. Governor was reportedly very supportive and expressed interest in using this as a model for similar programs statewide.

The board asked several follow-up questions, which John answered. He was then asked to continue keeping the board updated on the progress.

John Williams left the meeting at approximately 1:30 PM.

Advertising Update: Matt Farley and Erin Acuff from ICG were present to provide an update on data they have received, marketing efforts, and partnerships. Erin began by sharing insights from Datafy research, noting that visitation numbers and tax revenue are up compared to the previous year. She highlighted that the Dallas market continues to be our strongest, with a 24% increase in visitor days. This indicates not only more visitors from Dallas but also that they are staying longer. July's tax revenue was the highest on record, which reflects visitation from May and June. Wenda added that June appeared to be the biggest month we've ever had in terms of activity.

Matt addressed findings from the earlier Tourism Economics study, explaining that it revealed discrepancies in how and when lodging tax dollars are being collected. He stated that Datafy provides more accurate and reliable data than previous methods and emphasized that fluctuations in lodging taxes often correlate with fluctuations in pricing. Wenda commented that there's still confusion among local lodging providers regarding how to properly pay lodging tax.

The conversation shifted to the recent tourism summit. Matt said the event was well received, with helpful feedback and strong community engagement. He emphasized the importance of local collaboration, particularly in the development of the new website, which was designed to be more user-friendly and accurate. He recommended hosting the summit annually, and the board agreed. Matt then walked the board through updates to the website, including new filters, such as geographic filters, to improve trip planning for visitors. He mentioned that Steve has been working closely with local cabin companies to help them move their listings over to the new platform. There was also a discussion about UTM tags and the need to educate local businesses on how to use them effectively.

Erin reviewed the marketing efforts that have been running so far this fiscal year, which include outdoor advertising, digital campaigns, video, display, native ads, billboards, wallscapes, and advertising on the DART train. She shared that the team is currently preparing for the fall campaign. The production team will be filming this week and plans to return next month to gather content for the fall and winter seasons, as well as to produce videos highlighting local impact.

Erin proposed a few strategic changes based on the new data. She suggested reducing investment in secondary markets in order to expand efforts within the Dallas market, which continues to show strong performance. However, OTT and social media advertising will continue in the secondary markets. She also discussed

ongoing retargeting efforts, which should improve the performance and effectiveness of their digital advertising.

Matt concluded with an update on the Dude Perfect partnership. Since ICG began discussions with the group, Dude Perfect launched The Outdoor Channel in April and has attracted major sponsors such as Bass Pro and Sony. While our budget is small compared to these large brands, ICG has secured a few elements of partnership. However, he clarified that we will not have creative control over the content they produce. That said, Dude Perfect is familiar with our area, plans to visit and film here, and will promote the region through their platform. Based on the current timeline, Matt said it looks like any public-facing collaboration will likely happen in the spring.

Discussion, Consideration and possible action to approve renewal of the contract with ICG: A motion was made by Jerry Don Smith and seconded by Ed Fulmer to approve the renewal of the advertising contract with ICG. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion and possible action to approve a new auditor to do annual audits: Wenda Blankenship made the motion to hire Drew Kimble to be our new auditor since our previous auditor is retiring. Jerry Don Smith seconded the motion. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion, Consideration, and possible action to approve amending requisitioning and receiving officers: Charity discussed that one of the receiving officers needs to be switched now that we have a full board. We had an issue in August where both Dave and Wenda were out of town for an extended period, and she couldn't get purchase orders signed. Wenda Blankenship made the motion to remove herself from the receiving officer and to put Michelle Blackmore in her place. Ed Fulmer seconded the motion. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Debbie arrived to talk about her grant at 2:30pm.

Debbie Lawson with Idabel Industrial Development Authority (IIDA) presented her advertising grant request. IIDA is hiring someone to make a video about Idabel to promote Idabel for tourism and economic development. Debbie explained that they are spending \$19,500 and they asking us for a grant of \$3,500 to cover a portion of this.

Discussion, Consideration, and possible action to approve Advertising Grant as presented by Debbie Lawson for IIDA: A motion was by Jerry Don Smith and seconded by Wenda Blankenship. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, abstained. (Ed serves on the IIDA board)

Debbie left the meeting.

Discussion, Consideration, and possible action to approve Special Projects Grant as presented by Trish Ricketts for Christmas Lights for the courthouse lawn: The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion and possible action to approve the July minutes: A motion was made by Jerry Don Smith to approve the July meeting minutes as presented; the motion was seconded by Ed Fulmer. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Consideration and possible discussion about the State Park Board position: The board voted to table this until next meeting. A motion was made by Ed Fulmer and seconded by Wenda Blankenship. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Discussion and possible action to approve the financial report as presented: Charity O'Donnell presented the financial report Ed Fulmer motioned to approve the Financial Report as presented, seconded by Jerry Don Smith. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

Purchase Order amounts for July and August were presented and reviewed: Ed Fulmer made a motion to approve the purchase orders and seconded by Wenda Blankenship. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.

New or unscheduled Business: Charity mentioned 3 upcoming opportunities, Open Meetings class taught by the Attorney General's office on October 21st in Tulsa. OTIA Lt. Governors Summits are November 4 in McAlester and November 6th in Stillwater. These all occur before we meet again so if anyone on the board wants to attend any of these to let her know so they can be registered. Charity plans to try to attend the Open Meetings class and one of the summits.

Adjournment: A motion was made by Ed Fulmer to adjourn the meeting, and the motion was seconded by Wenda Blankenship. The meeting ended at 2:45 pm. The motion carried. 5-0 Dave Smulyan, yes; Wenda Blankenship, yes; Jerry Don Smith, yes; Michelle Blackmore, yes; and Ed Fulmer, yes.