Nebraska Tourism Commission Meeting Minutes

October 15, 10:00am CST
Location: Homestead National Historical Park Education Center
8523 NE-4
Beatrice, NE 68310

Commission Chair David Fudge called the meeting to order at 10:02am.

Commissioners present: Darrin Barner, John Chapo, David Fudge, Roger Kuhn, Rachel Kreikemeier, Maureen Larsen, Ashley Olson, David Wolf

Commissioners absent: Courtney Dentlinger, Barry McFarland, Robert Sabin, Paul Younes

Public Meeting Notice was published in the Lincoln Journal Star on October 8, 2026.

David Fudge welcomed attendees and encouraged Commissioners present to introduce themselves to the group.

John Chapo motioned for approval of the meeting agenda at 10:04am. Darrin Barner seconded.

Roll call vote – Commissioners in favor: Barner, Chapo, Fudge, Kreikemeier, Larsen, Olson, Wolf. Opposed: none. Abstain: none. Not present: Dentlinger, Kuhn, McFarland, Sabin, Younes. Motion carried with 7 in favor, 5 not present, none opposed.

Homestead National Historical Park staff welcomed the group.

David Fudge opened public comment period at 10:07am. With no members of the public coming forward, public comment period was closed.

John Chapo motioned to approve August 6, 2026, meeting minutes at 10:08am. David Wolf seconded.

Roll call vote – Commissioners in favor: Barner, Chapo, Fudge, Kreikemeier, Kuhn, Larsen, Olson, Wolf. Opposed: none. Abstain: none. Not present: Dentlinger, McFarland, Sabin, Younes. Motion carried with 8 in favor, 4 not present, none opposed.

Commission Chair Report

David Fudge noted an informal round table discussion regarding LR 310 will take place tomorrow, October 16, 2026, at 1pm at Mid-Plains Community College in North Platte. The intent is to examine the structure, duties, and potential consolidation of the Nebraska Tourism Commission within the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.

David Fund opened discussion of the Election of Officers. **At 10:13am John Chapo motioned to approve a slate of Executive Officers of the Nebraska Tourism Commission board to include David Fudge continuing as Commission Chair, Rachel Kreikemeier to serve as Vice Chair, David Wolf to serve as Treasurer, Ashley Olson to continue as At Large, and Robert Sabin to continue as Past Chair.** Roger Kuhn seconded.

Roll call vote – Commissioners in favor: Barner, Chapo, Fudge, Kreikemeier, Kuhn, Larsen, Olson, Wolf. Opposed: none. Abstain: none. Not present: Dentlinger, McFarland, Sabin, Younes. Motion carried with 8 in favor, 4 not present, none opposed.

Visit Nebraska Director's Report

Jenn Gjerde noted current staff member Emma Ebito has recently accepted the promotion to Marketing Manager of Visit Nebraska. Micheal Collins will be taking on the role of overseeing the annual Nebraska Tourism Conference coming up in February 2027. The RFP process is underway for Visit Nebraska advertising, content/publishing and public relations services and will continue into spring of 2027. Jenn Gjerde shared a letter with Commissioners received from the Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition concerning the discontinuation of the seasonal Travel Counselor Program. David Wolf also discussed potential grant opportunities for Western Nebraska Tourism Coalition to continue taking part in the Denver Stock Show event.

Visit Nebraska Program Updates

Jenna Bartja updated the group regarding the upcoming Adventure Travel Workshop. Heather Hogue provided the current grant guidelines for the program that opened earlier in the week to all Commissioners. Emma Ebito updated provided updates regarding the upcoming 2027 Nebraska Tourism Conference and noted it will be the 50th Anniversary of the event.

Commission Committee Reports - Marketing Committee

Jenn Gjerde provided a slide show of the summer 2026 advertising campaign along with exposure rates that noted an impact of $26.11M in direct influenced spending for the period of May 2026 – July 2026. Print and digital ad examples were shown. Kool-Aid was included in the Atlas Obscura podcast. Travel Zoo paid promotion results were noted.

Ben Jones provided an overview of social media strategies including video trends and reels, Meta adjustments, and influencer engagements. Earned media was exceeding a $45M impact for July-September 2026. Emma Ebito shared the recent food-focused photography shoot and content development in the Omaha, Lincoln, Kearney and Loup City restaurants. Jenn Gjerde shared the 2027 Nebraska Travel Guide cover photo and noted it was a collaboration between the Nebraska State Historical Society, Game and Parks Commission and Visit Nebraska. Jenn Gjerde also provided samples of the new student postcards that include an interactive I-Spy game.

Lilly Uhlmann discussed the Nebraska Passport program successes of this summer. The Passport Pals Facebook group has experienced more than 379,000 page views so far in 2026. Final number of summer program participants will be available later this winter. Holiday Passport stops have been announced and will feature 24 stops across the state and will take place November 13-January 10.

Commission Committee Reports – Finance Committee

Rachel Kreikemeier provided an overview of the agency financials, including spending authority, cash balance, budget status reports, general ledger reports for August and September along with lodging tax deposits.

David Wolf motioned to approve August and September 2026 general ledgers at 11:06am. Maureen Larsen seconded.

Roll call vote – Commissioners in favor: Barner, Chapo, Fudge, Kreikemeier, Kuhn, Larsen, Olson, Wolf. Opposed: none. Abstain: none. Not present: Dentlinger, McFarland, Sabin, Younes. Motion carried with 8 in favor, 4 not present, none opposed.

Upcoming Meetings

The upcoming meeting dates of the Nebraska Tourism Commission as proposed:

November 18, 2026 – Virtual meeting to review final Strategic Plan document

February 11, 2027 – Lincoln (Nebraska Tourism Conference)

May 12, 2027 – Grand Island

August 31, 2027 – Norfolk

October 14, 2027 - Ogallala

Maureen Larsen motioned to approve the meeting schedule at 11:09am. Darrin Barner seconded.

Roll call vote – Commissioners in favor: Barner, Chapo, Fudge, Kreikemeier, Kuhn, Larsen, Olson, Wolf. Opposed: none. Abstain: none. Not present: Dentlinger, McFarland, Sabin, Younes. Motion carried with 8 in favor, 4 not present, none opposed.

Brief 11:15am recess as lunch was delivered and the group received a welcome to Beatrice message from Caleb Fjone.

Strategic Plan Committee

Jenn Gjerde lead Commissioners in an interactive project to pinpoint needs and solutions in each of the 5 pillars of the Strategic Plan. Recommendations will be incorporated into the final draft of the upcoming Strategic Plan to be reviewed in November.

John Chapo motioned to adjourn the meeting at 12:42pm. David Wolf seconded.

Roll call vote – Commissioners in favor: Barner, Chapo, Fudge, Kreikemeier, Kuhn, Olson, Wolf. Opposed: none. Abstain: none. Not present: Dentlinger, Larsen, McFarland, Sabin, Younes. Motion carried with 7 in favor, 5 not present, none opposed.

Respectfully submitted by Heather Hogue.