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PEPIN TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, October 22, 2025

CALL TO ORDER. Sue called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm

ROLL CALL: Present: Sue F, Katie K, Pat S, Jenny B, Denise P, Mary P. Guest: Craig Anderson Ruskin, Pepin Schools Superintendent, Gabby P (by Zoom)

SHORT-TERM RENTALS. We welcomed Craig Anderson Ruskin, the Superintendent of Pepin Area Schools, and Nicole Evers, a member of the Pepin School Board, to the meeting. Craig shared that he has been living in Nelson for about a year. He had wanted to find a home in Pepin, but at the time of his move, there were no available houses here that met his family's needs.

Sue explained that the tourism commission has heard many comments from both the village board and the community about the negative impact of short-term rentals on housing availability for new residents. They are raising concerns that this situation has led to fewer options for those looking to move to Pepin, ultimately affecting school enrollment. She emphasized that before the village board decides to impose limits on short-term rentals, the commission wants to gather factual data rather than hearsay to share with the board, which is why the school representatives were invited to speak on historical school enrollment statistics.

Craig reported that in the 2004 school year—the earliest year for which he could find data—K-12 school enrollment was 325 students. The projected enrollment for the 2026-2027 school year is 220 students. He speculated that several factors might have contributed to this decline: families are having fewer children than in the past, and households are aging. Pepin is surrounded by two rivers, bottomlands, and hills that restrict the village's growth. There are also challenges in attracting manufacturing jobs due to limited growth potential, and many residents are forced to commute to earn a living wage. Additionally, many homes serve as second or vacation properties, driving up property values.

This school year, the Pepin school gained seven new students (compared to nine last year), but 23.6 students residing in the district currently attend other schools due to open enrollment in districts like Durand and Ellsworth. He estimated that 10 to 12 potential Pepin students are homeschooled.

The discussion concluded with the question: Do we have initiatives in place to attract families? Given that our local school serves as the hub of the community, we need to consider how to

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mitigate the impact of all factors contributing to the housing shortage. The village should explore how to balance tourism opportunities with the needs of our school and find ways to establish a beneficial relationship with the school while improving career opportunities for residents.

Craig and Nicole were thanked for attending and offering their viewpoints.

SECRETARY'S REPORT. The September 17, 2025 Tourism Commission meeting minutes were discussed. A motion was made by Denise to accept the minutes; seconded by Sue. Vote was called; all ayes, no nays; motion carried.

TREASURER'S REPORT.

- Invoices to pay include HW Marketing for \$2,722.505. A motion was made by Sue to pay the HW Marketing invoice; seconded by Katie. Vote called, all ayes, no nays, Motion carried.
- Tourism Account balance: \$64,297.30
- Grants: The Pepin Peppies have submitted a grant for \$1500 to add additional lighting to the park. A motion was made by Jenny to approve the grant; seconded by Denise. Vote was called; all ayes, no nays; motion carried.
- Grants: Villa Bellezza submitted a grant proposal for \$5000 to market the Christmas Market and After Market Sale. Their holiday season will feature cooking classes, Pepin Nouveau, and the transition of the outdoor market to the Indoor Winter Café in December. Katie reported that the Christmas market is 85% filled as of today. A motion was made by Sue to approve the grant, and Denise seconded the motion. Vote was called; all ayes, no nays; motion carried.

WEBSITE UPDATE. After it was determined that destinationpepin.com would not need to be made inactive for the theme update, Sue approved the change to take place immediately. The theme is now up and running, and Gabby reports that the site is functioning well on large and mobile devices.

HWY 35 ENHANCEMENTS. Pat reported that she and Aaron investigated putting up a Christmas swag on Second Street, however, the old poles have been removed so it's not possible to put up a swag this year. We will put this on our summer agenda. The village will install a limited number of snowflake lights along Hwy 35 this year because most of the fixtures are in poor condition. The commission will purchase new pole lights for Hwy 35 during the Jan-March discount sale.

VILLAGE MAP/FLYER. The map should serve multiple purposes for tourism: points of interest, lodging, golf cart routes, etc. Jenny offered to work on this project, and she will coordinate with Mary on the map's features.

LAURA PARK LIGHTING: Sue suggested that we purchase more lighted trees for the park to extend over the park to the east. There are adequate electrical outlets to handle them.

DIRECTIONS: Mary reported that Jan Buntz has made contact with a company that is offering new signs for new businesses and managing the current signs.

NEW TOURISM COMMISSION BUSINESS:

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- Denise reported that the River Road Do on the Go event for women's weekend is being finalized for November 22, and she's had good participation from businesses in the area.
- Trunk or Treat will be held on Oct 31 along the block in front of the Village Hall. The Lion's will serve hot dogs in front of the parish hall.
- The Pepin Fire Department's chili fundraiser is being held at the school on October 26 from 11:00 am to 2 pm.

NEXT MEETING. Wednesday, November 19 at 4 pm

ADJOURN. There was no further tourism business to discuss, and Katie made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Jenny. Vote called, all ayes, no nays. Motion carried.

Sue Fedie