

**From:** [Bruce Barron](#)  
**To:** [Graskey, Lindsey](#); [Paine, Jim](#)  
**Subject:** Call From Bill Elliott  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 16, 2022 11:32:17 AM

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Mayor and Commission Chair

I received a call from Bill Elliott of the Lodging Association. I had sent him an email earlier in the day as he and they(the lodging assn) had not given me any response to earlier inquiries for information and documents that could be useful in the whole room tax dollar arena. They have several documents on their website and advertise that they have expertise and the ability to answer questions. Fine and dandy. My inquiry occurred before getting the Mayor's email and attachments yesterday. I reconstructed the conversation into a written narrative in case I need it.

Mr. Elliott was not responding to what I was asking about. He was calling me to lobby for me to change my vote and renegotiate with Travel Superior. He described his interpretation and understanding of state statutes. He was telling me that the City and the Travel Commission have no choice but to work with and work thru a "travel entity" and that is Travel Superior in our town. Essentially I replied that, for whatever reasons the City chose to set up a Travel Commission, that is what happened late last summer and fall. I was not privy to discussions and had no knowledge of any issues or even the process. But I was asked to serve as a room tax payer. As far as I know, the City acted properly and we were all given instructions as to our responsibilities which we take seriously.

Many times I told Mr. Elliott, that if the City is wrong then that is where you should go to fix it. Calling me is not the right step. Calling other commissioners? That is up to you I said But my guess is that you would and should get the same response. It is the City's commission.

As far as his view that the Commission should be managing the relationship with Travel Superior, I said again that is not what I was asked to do. I said all we have done is to put a piece of our dollars (250 out of 6 or 7 hundred thousand) out to open bid for advertising and marketing. There were three replies and we voted 4-1 for an agency that was direct. While Travel Superior styled themselves as an ad and marketing agency of some type, that was not the winning proposal. There certainly are other services and opportunities for Travel Superior to engage the commission. But they are not an ad agency.

Bill Elliott has been on the job less than two years and, at his admission, has no experience in our type of situation (commissions). I ended the phone call by thanking Bill. And stressing again that our Commission is following the guidance provided to us from the City of Superior. Its not for me (us) to reconstitute the Commission. That is an issue he can take to the City itself – the mayor, the city council, the city attorney. If they make changes then they will notify the commission, I am sure. But I am not the one to call. Its not at my pay grade.

Other commissioners may or may not get called or lobbied. I think it may be a one-off because of the coincidence of me sending an earlier email.

But because I got the call, I felt I should notify you both.

Geez. Volunteer positions aren't all fun an games. Not like the daily positives and excitement you elected officials enjoy!

Enjoy your day!

Bruce

**From:** [Bruce Barron](#)  
**To:** [Paine, Jim](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Request: TIC Center Grant Applications - Superior/Douglas County 2019  
**Date:** Thursday, March 17, 2022 9:39:55 AM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[FY20 TIC July Superior.pdf](#)  
[FY20 TIC Jan Superior employer cost.pdf](#)

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Mayor

Attached are two of the files that were supplied as public documents. These are applications for the, well you will see. Here is the link to the Travel Wisconsin website for additional information.

<https://www.industry.travelwisconsin.com/industry-resources/grants/tourist-information-center-tic-grant-program/>

Be aware that Travel Superior/Visitors Bureau has applied for and been granted each \$7500 grant they applied for. \$15,000 per year as you see published. I did not request any documents from pre-Travel Superior time periods.

Note: Grants were applied for in the name of the applicant as you see. No where in the reporting documents provided to the City of Superior by Travel Superior have I been able to see where those dollars have been deposited into the Travel Superior/Visitors Bureau account nor do I see where they have been recorded as income to the TS/VB on any statement. The agent at Travel Wisconsin (a state agency) stated several times that the checks are written to the Chamber of Commerce, even though the Chamber of Commerce did not apply for these funds. It is my understanding that all of the Welcome Center wages and expenses have been paid by room tax dollars and reported as such while embedded in the bulk data provided in the TS quarterly and annual reports that are also public documents. It seemed an unusual practice if that is what is in fact occurring. I mentioned this issue with to City Attorney previously. I am not accusing anyone of anything. I am just noting the public documents and verbal statements of Travel Wisconsin.

Bruce

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**From:** Van Hoorn, Maria - TOURISM <mvanhoorn@travelwisconsin.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, January 11, 2022 8:27 AM  
**To:** Bruce Barron <barronbruce@outlook.com>  
**Subject:** RE: Request: TIC Center Grant Applications - Superior/Douglas County 2019

Dear Bruce,

Please find the Superior Travel Information Center (TIC) Grant application submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Tourism in 2020 that contains the information from 2019, which you requested by phone on December 21, 2021.

I hope you find this information helpful. This completes the Department's response to your open records request dated November 29 and December 21, 2021 and includes all public,

non-privileged records the department currently has responsive to your request.

Thank you,



**Maria Van Hoorn**

Deputy Secretary

Wisconsin Department of Tourism

3319 West Beltline Highway | PO Box 8690

Madison, WI 53708-8690

Direct: (608) 266-2345

[TravelWisconsin.com](http://TravelWisconsin.com)

**From:** [Bruce Barron](#)  
**To:** [Paine, Jim](#); [Graskey, Lindsey](#); [joann.jardine@gmail.com](mailto:joann.jardine@gmail.com); [psadvertising@charter.net](mailto:psadvertising@charter.net)  
**Cc:** [Becken, Stephanie](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Commentary and Notes Part 1 - The Travel Center Proposal  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 13, 2022 10:44:32 AM  
**Attachments:** [Travel Development Commission Meeting - Part 1.pdf](#)

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To All

I found the April 7<sup>th</sup> meeting to be disturbing on many levels.

I have attached my notes and commentary on matters that were before the Commission at the April 7<sup>th</sup> 2022 meeting.

Part 1 concerns the Travel Center proposal.

The material I have attached is rather long.

Read it or toss it.

It expresses my views and what I think should be done.

I have a right to my views and I have a right to express my opinions.

If there are factual matters that I misperceived or need to be corrected then I am certainly open to it.

If I have reached the wrong conclusions I certainly would be glad to change them.

I have copied Stephanie in case this document needs to be added as a supplement to any file or needs to be forwarded to any other officials or city employees.

I do not expect the writings to be private nor confidential.

Guys, I thought the commissioner endeavor would be fun and good for the City of Superior. I did not expect or want to be a watch dog or whistle blower or a rocker of the boat.

I did not know a thing about how the city operated. What I have learned is mostly good stuff. I also learned about some things that ought to be dealt with and fixed.

Bruce

**From:** [Bruce Barron](#)  
**To:** [Paine, Jim](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Commentary and Notes Part 1 - The Travel Center Proposal  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 13, 2022 1:33:49 PM

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Thank you Jim for your comments.

Especially relating to Chair Lindsey. I like her a lot. And I respect Lindsey as well. I likely was on edge following the Bong session. My notes Part 1 reflect how it all came across to me at the time. It may be useful for Lindsey to know that things can come across in ways not intended. Surely she and I can discuss and you certainly can pass my comments along.

My Notes and Comments Part 2 – relating to the Bong situation, will likely be withheld and not sent out in the same fashion. I may only choose to share my notes and views with you. But you might not like it. I believe you can understand my unwillingness to be more public. As you know, the Bong situation causes a wide chasm between us on fundamental levels. I do not know and rather doubt that rephrasing a proposal will justify tossing out state statutes (they don't enforce and they won't win a law suit) nor will; it justify tossing out the TDC application and its language and requirements. The Bong would need to make some serious changes and take on some significant projects with the intent to 1) raise money for them and 2) generate actual overnight stays. Rephrased operating subsidies does not cut it for me.

No doubt they can potentially be developed as the operator of the Travel Center and frankly I think they should (but I said that in my notes). It is far more efficient to fund the Bong at the TIC than to pay what I believe is a disqualified operation.

Frankly the Commission and the City should demand that the Chamber-Travel Superior make the \$150,000 first year contribution to the Bong while a more comprehensive plan can be developed. If the Commission goes it alone, the odds are that you will have a lawsuit on your hands and, whether it prevails or not, the discussion may broaden far beyond second floor at City Hall. Operating subsidies are operating subsidies no matter what ribbon you tie and what lipstick you apply.

Final note. This is not what I signed up for. I chose to research and question out of my ignorance and desire to come up to speed. Others in positions of responsibility have backed away from taking clear action including undertaking a full investigation. I know that people have raised warning flags before. People in City Hall should get off their tails and catch up to some of these issues. The lid is likely off the can now. The meeting is a public record. Nothing to hide now. That includes the \$600 grand that the city sat by and let accumulate under the City's watchful and doubting eyes. How much of that is going to be consumed by the Chamber in their efforts to spend the dollars "according to statute" he said? I can tell you that distrust of city commissions is pervasive. I can tell you that distrust of the previous arrangements with the Chamber (by any name they use) is pervasive. The belief that Superior works for the few and the friends of the few is almost universal. I guess I was naïve. But I was happy being naïve.

Superior needs some reforms doesn't it. I guess someone needed to say no to someone and some practices. I would fire the City Council Finance Committee.

I am sending a letter of resignation of my membership at the Chamber. I have an additional letter in my briefcase.

Bruce

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**From:** Paine, Jim <painej@ci.superior.wi.us>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 13, 2022 11:45 AM  
**To:** Bruce Barron <barronbruce@outlook.com>  
**Subject:** RE: Commentary and Notes Part 1 - The Travel Center Proposal

Bruce,

Having re-read your notes, I have a few thoughts.

First and foremost, I do not believe that the Commission is under any obligation to provide a contract or any funds whatsoever to Travel Superior or the Visitor Center. As you know, I have my own concerns with the way in which that organization has promoted tourism and I doubt the overall necessity and efficacy of a visitor desk. As they are a past recipient of hotel motel funds and they are an established visitor desk, they are entitled to apply, but that's it. I had been under the belief that the commission must contract with some kind of tourism entity but the law is clear that the contract need not include the award of any funds. Furthermore, Travel Superior is not the only tourism entity in Superior. The Bong has provided ample evidence that they meet the statutory definition of a tourism entity and any contract with them, in any amount or with no funds at all, would satisfy the law.

Your opinion that the Travel Center desk should not be funded is valid. I agree.

Your notes are thorough and I learned several shocking things from your observations. I believe you've made some errors but the bulk of it looks sound. I'd like to address two errors that stood out to me:

1. I am not aware that the city has any contract at all with Travel Superior, the Visitor Center, or the desk. We have a contract with the Bong (the P-38 fund) which allows them to host the museum on our land. That contract requires them to host a visitor desk and give that space, rent free, to the Chamber of Commerce until 2025(or 2026). Travel Superior is not mentioned. The city has ended all other contractual relationships with Travel Superior and the Chamber of Commerce to the best of my knowledge. To be quite frank, even if the Commission awarded a contract to Travel Superior, the Council may not approve that contract.
2. I believe you've misunderstood the disposition of the Chair, Councilor Graskey. While she certainly speaks with politeness and deference, I don't believe that it indicates any close relationship with anyone in particular, especially Mr. Pederson. While she knows him well, I believe she shares many of the frustrations of her fellow commissioners. It is, however, her duty as the Chair to run the meeting as impartially as possible and that requires respect and

deference to all parties.

Again, please feel free to call with any more questions or for a longer discussion.

Jim

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**From:** Bruce Barron <[barronbruce@outlook.com](mailto:barronbruce@outlook.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 13, 2022 10:44 AM  
**To:** Paine, Jim <[painej@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:painej@ci.superior.wi.us)>; Graskey, Lindsey <[graskeyl@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:graskeyl@ci.superior.wi.us)>;  
[joann.jardine@gmail.com](mailto:joann.jardine@gmail.com); [psadvertising@charter.net](mailto:psadvertising@charter.net)  
**Cc:** Becken, Stephanie <[beckens@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:beckens@ci.superior.wi.us)>  
**Subject:** RE: Commentary and Notes Part 1 - The Travel Center Proposal

To All

I found the April 7<sup>th</sup> meeting to be disturbing on many levels.  
I have attached my notes and commentary on matters that were before the Commission at the April 7<sup>th</sup> 2022 meeting.  
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Bruce



**From:** [Bruce Barron](#)  
**To:** [Paine, Jim](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Commentary and Notes Part 1 - The Travel Center Proposal  
**Date:** Wednesday, April 13, 2022 9:10:08 PM

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We should have a discussion on how to make the Bong situation work. I have ideas. And they should be at the table for some discussions it will take all parties. A real solution is in order. Its been avoided for a long time. And it might not be that tough. Parties need to be in the same room to work together. The submit a proposal to then debate it is not the best format to develop ideas and directions. I will volunteer my time to work toward a solution. I bet you will volunteer as well. Who Else.

Sent from my iPhone

On Apr 13, 2022, at 3:24 PM, Paine, Jim <[painej@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:painej@ci.superior.wi.us)> wrote:

Thank you Bruce,

I think it's clear we need more discussion on the Bong museum. I doubt they are ready to proceed either. I'm going to encourage the commission to continue to hold that in committee so that they can develop the best possible proposal and you and I can further explore some of the legal issues involved. I hope and believe we'll be able to close this "chasm" and build not only a grant but a process that serves future applicants as well.

I hope you'll be able to make the meeting tomorrow, even if only briefly, so that we can attempt to approve the Swim contract, which must go to council. We'll need the whole commission for the quorum. Then the commission can decide what, if anything, they want to do about the Travel Superior proposal.

Thanks again,

Jim

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**From:** Bruce Barron <[barronbruce@outlook.com](mailto:barronbruce@outlook.com)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 13, 2022 1:34 PM  
**To:** Paine, Jim <[painej@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:painej@ci.superior.wi.us)>  
**Subject:** RE: Commentary and Notes Part 1 - The Travel Center Proposal

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Especially relating to Chair Lindsey. I like her a lot. And I respect Lindsey as well. I likely was on edge following the Bong session. My notes Part 1 reflect how it all came across

to me at the time. It may be useful for Lindsey to know that things can come across in ways not intended. Surely she and I can discuss and you certainly can pass my comments along.

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**Sent:** Wednesday, April 13, 2022 11:45 AM

**To:** Bruce Barron <[barronbruce@outlook.com](mailto:barronbruce@outlook.com)>

**Subject:** RE: Commentary and Notes Part 1 - The Travel Center Proposal

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**From:** Bruce Barron <[barronbruce@outlook.com](mailto:barronbruce@outlook.com)>

**Sent:** Wednesday, April 13, 2022 10:44 AM

**To:** Paine, Jim <[painej@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:painej@ci.superior.wi.us)>; Graskey, Lindsey <[graskeyl@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:graskeyl@ci.superior.wi.us)>; [joann.jardine@gmail.com](mailto:joann.jardine@gmail.com); [psadvertising@charter.net](mailto:psadvertising@charter.net)

**Cc:** Becken, Stephanie <[beckens@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:beckens@ci.superior.wi.us)>

**Subject:** RE: Commentary and Notes Part 1 - The Travel Center Proposal

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**To:** [Paine, Jim](#)  
**Cc:** [joann.jardine@gmail.com](mailto:joann.jardine@gmail.com); [psadvertising@charter.net](mailto:psadvertising@charter.net); [Graskey, Lindsey](#); [Kern, Keith](#); [Scherf, Rebecca](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Travel Superior  
**Date:** Tuesday, March 15, 2022 2:44:17 PM  
**Attachments:** [2203 TravelSuperior.pdf](#)

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Thank you Mayor Paine. The Commission worked hard and long to review the three candidates. At no time did the representative from Travel Superior make any assertion or claim the he or Travel Superior was required by state statute to be selected as the advertising and promotional agency. If so the very RFP process would be legal. It was clear in the presentations that Superior would be ill served by the incumbent in comparison to the other two candidates.

I appreciate continued guidance on the matter. It appears that certain parties believe that they are entitled to tax dollars in perpetuity no matter what the law and no matter what the performance.

Thank you.

Bruce Barron

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 15, 2022, at 12:01 PM, Paine, Jim <[painej@ci.superior.wi.us](mailto:painej@ci.superior.wi.us)> wrote:

Good morning Commissioners,

Yesterday morning, Chair Graskey and I received the attached letter from Destinations Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Hotel and Lodging Association. I've discussed this letter with the City Attorney and neither of us feels any real cause for concern. If you would like a longer conversation with him, you may contact him individually or I'm sure we can host a group discussion at a later meeting but, quite frankly, the argument laid out in the letter is so weak that I doubt you need to bother yourselves with it much further.

Having spent significant time reading the statute governing tourism commissions and consulting with our attorney and the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, here are my thoughts:

The letter is not written by a law office but by two lobbying organizations. This letter describes what they would prefer the law to say, not what it actually says. For example, they cite the statute (Wis. Stat. 66.0615 (1m) (d)2.) but then they completely misrepresent what it says. I'd encourage you to read it for yourselves:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/statutes/statutes/66/vi/0615/1m/d>

They interpret the statute to require a commission to contract with a “tourism entity”. No court has ever agreed with this argument and the plain language of the statute refutes it. If a municipality does not form a commission, it must contract with a tourism entity but a commission has no such obligation.

Furthermore, the authors of the letter falsely claim that Travel Superior is a tourism entity. They conveniently leave out one of the critical requirements that define such an organization in the statute: that they were a non-profit prior to January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015. As they do not meet the definition, the city or the commission are able to contract with many different organizations to carry out the work of “Tourism Promotion and Tourism Development”.

I believe this letter is little more than an intimidation tactic designed to frighten you into reversing your previous decision to recommend a contract with Swim Creative. They are clearly advocating specifically on behalf of Travel Superior and not on behalf of the City of Superior, our citizens, or our visitors. This is evident from the first sentence, which falsely claims that you have “taken action to no longer contract with... Travel Superior”. You have obviously made no decisions regarding Travel Superior, only Swim Creative. Nothing prevents you from contracting with Travel Superior in the future and you have not ruled out that possibility.

I am convinced that you have acted within your authority and that your decision was made in good faith. As such, you can depend on the City Attorney and I to defend you from this or any other unfounded challenge.

Thank you for your work so far and your patience as we move forward with this exciting new process.

Jim

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**From:** jhertel@destinationwisconsin.com <jhertel@destinationwisconsin.com>

**Sent:** Monday, March 14, 2022 9:37 AM

**To:** Paine, Jim <painej@ci.superior.wi.us>; Graskey, Lindsey <graskeyl@ci.superior.wi.us>

**Cc:** Ledin, Nick <ledinn@ci.superior.wi.us>; Bender, Warren <benderw@ci.superior.wi.us>; Van Sickle, Jenny <VanSicklej@ci.superior.wi.us>; Sweeney, Jack <sweeneyj@ci.superior.wi.us>; Fennessey, Brent <fennesseyb@ci.superior.wi.us>; Elm, Tylor <elmt@ci.superior.wi.us>; Ludwig, Ruth <ludwigr@ci.superior.wi.us>; Pierce, Robert <piercer@ci.superior.wi.us>; Kern, Keith <kernk@ci.superior.wi.us>; Prell, Frog <prellf@ci.superior.wi.us>; bellioth@wisconsinlodging.org; taylor.pedersen@superiorchamber.org; Sara Brish <sara@stevenspointarea.com>

**Subject:** Travel Superior

Please see the attached letter concerning the City of Superior and Travel Superior.

Please contact me or Bill Elliott of the Wisconsin Hotel & Lodging Association should you have any questions or feedback.

Sincerely,

*Julia Hertel, Executive Director*  
*Destinations Wisconsin*  
*PO Box 393*  
*Sun Prairie, WI 53590*  
*608-837-6693*  
*[www.destinationswisconsin.com](http://www.destinationswisconsin.com)*

**Bill Elliott, CAE**  
**President & CEO**  
Wisconsin Hotel & Lodging Association  
(262) 782-2851 ext. 10 | [belliot@wisconsinlodging.org](mailto:belliot@wisconsinlodging.org)  
125 N. Executive Drive, Suite 206 | Brookfield, WI 53005