

CITY OF LEBANON
TOURISM & MARKETING ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
November 18th, 2025

BE IT REMEMBERED that the Tourism & Marketing Advisory Committee of the City of Lebanon, Missouri, met on November 18th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m., in the Mother Road Meeting Room at the Cowan Civic Center located at 500 East Elm Street.

ROLL CALL AND DECLARATION OF A QUARUM

Upon roll call, the following members were present: Randy Palilla, Michelle Cochran, Mike Boggs, Rod Reid, Liz Mitchko, and Jim Rogers. John Guideon arrived at 1:33 PM.

A quorum was declared.

Staff members and others in attendance: Tourism Director Rebecca Rupard, Promotions Event Coordinator Stashia Porter, Lebanon Chamber of Commerce Director Ashley Mahan, Economic Development Director Brian Thompson, Representative of KJEL Bruce Wayne, and Lebanon City Administrator, Troy Schulte.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Rod Reid made a motion to approve July 15th, 2025, meeting minutes. Liz Mitchko seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

DISCUSSIONS OF AGENDA ITEMS:

Tourism Performance & Lodging Tax Update-

Tourism Director Rupard reported that final figures for Fiscal Year 2025 (July 1, 2024–June 30, 2025) show an increase in lodging tax collections and website visits compared to the prior year. She noted that the City's digital advertising has become more targeted, and staff believe this is contributing to improved performance, though it is difficult to attribute gains to any single factor.

She reminded the Committee that FY23 remains the strongest year on record since inception of the lodging tax but stressed that the city is "inching back up" and is optimistic that FY26 numbers will further increase with Route 66 Centennial and America 250 activities.

Rupard also reported that event and rental activity at City facilities is pacing well for FY26, with strong bookings and limited cancellations anticipated. Dirt events at the Cowan Civic Center will now be consolidated into one December–January period each year due to the labor, cost, and wear on the facility.

ADVERTISING AND MARKETING:

Route 66 Centennial Update-

Route 66 Centennial – "The Drive Home"

Committee Member Reid and Director Rupard provided an update on "The Drive Home," a national Route 66 caravan sponsored by America's Automotive Trust in Tacoma, Washington.

Key points included:

- The caravan will begin in Santa Monica and end at the Detroit Auto Show, traveling the length of Route 66.

- Approximately 15 official vintage automobiles and an additional group of private participants will travel with the tour.
- The group will overnight in Lebanon on January 10, 2026.
- Planned Lebanon activities include a podcast recording at Shepherd Hills, additional filming at the Lebanon–Laclede County Library, and lodging at the Manor House Hotel which has been fully reserved for the group.
- The Lebanon–Laclede County Route 66 Society has offered to sponsor and provide a meal at Smokin’ Jones, another Route 66 landmark building.
- The tour will be filming along the route, focusing on both the history of Route 66 and currently operating businesses, providing Lebanon with significant national exposure.

Rupard stated that the city will be “rolling out the red carpet,” with décor such as a literal red carpet and Route 66–themed balloons to create a festive and welcoming atmosphere.

National Route 66 Centennial Kickoff – Springfield, Missouri

Director Rupard reported that the National Route 66 Centennial Kickoff will be held in Springfield, Missouri, as a three-day event. The budget is multi-million dollars, with major sponsors such as Bass Pro and others. The event will include a concert at the Missouri State University arena and is expected to receive national media coverage, including potential live segments from the Today Show. She further noted that the Manor House Hotel in Lebanon is already sold out for that weekend, indicating strong spillover demand into Lebanon lodging from the Springfield event.

Lebanon Route 66 Festival – June 5–6, 2026

Committee Member Mike Boggs provided an update on the 2026 Lebanon Route 66 Festival:

- The festival will expand to two days, June 5–6, 2026.
- A concert by “Asleep at the Wheel” is planned for the evening of June 5 as part of the band’s Route 66 Centennial Tour.
- Traditional festival activities will be held on June 6, including the Bigfoot monster truck, the Smokey and the Bandit tribute group, and other returning attractions.
- The City of Lebanon will serve as title sponsor for the festival.

The Committee discussed that moving the concert to Friday evening will shorten the long Saturday schedule for car owners and attendees and is expected to increase attendance and improve the participant experience. Members generally agreed that the 2026 festival is likely to be the largest to date.

Route 66 Signage, Passport, and Media

Rupard reported that Lebanon will install an official Route 66 Centennial shield sign at Boswell Park, funded by a \$25,000 grant. Parks staff will pour the base and assist with installation. The sign is intended as a photo opportunity and to draw travelers further into Lebanon.

She confirmed that Lebanon will continue participating in the Route 66 Passport Program, with passports sold at the library, where visitors receive stamps and a sticker and are routed through the museum. While passport numbers are slightly down from last year, staff expect activity to increase as the centennial approaches.

Rupard also discussed recent photo and video shoots funded by a tourism grant, including classic car scenes with the Route 66 Society, downtown shopping footage, and Bennett Spring imagery. These materials will be used by the City’s ad agency to create updated print, digital, and video advertising, with a strong emphasis on Route 66 and the 2026 centennial year.

She noted that advertising will be targeted to the Kansas City area ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, to encourage visitors in that region to make side trips to Lebanon during their time in Missouri.

America 250

Director Rupard updated the Committee on America 250 (A250) planning.

Planned city-sponsored events include:

April 25, 2026 – A free community concert featuring Diamond Rio at the Cowan Civic Center, with capacity for approximately 5,000 attendees.

July 3, 2026 – A community picnic in Downtown Lebanon (coinciding with First Friday), including free hot dogs, street closure, and live entertainment. Dawson Hollow is tentatively scheduled to perform, and the downtown pocket park is expected to be completed by that time.

July 4, 2026 – A large public fireworks show at the Lebanon Airport, modeled after prior events that drew approximately 15,000 attendees, with food trucks and vendors on site.

Rupard emphasized that the first seven months of 2026 will be extremely busy, but that these events will bring substantial tourism and economic activity to Lebanon.

Bennett Spring Hatchery & Park Update

Committee Member Jim Rogers provided an update on Bennett Spring State Park:

- The contractor previously hired to renovate the fish hatchery has been terminated, and the project is effectively stalled.
- The hatchery renovation is now behind schedule, and current estimates indicate completion may not occur until 2027.
- The construction site is unsightly and has had a negative impact on visitor perceptions, especially among families who previously came specifically to see the hatchery and feed the fish.
- Due to the hatchery's condition, trout stocking patterns have changed. Most fish are now supplied from the Ava hatchery, typically 1–3 days per week, with limited stocking locations due to truck access.
- Anglers are sensitive to stocking dates and locations, and the changes have affected angler satisfaction and park attendance.

Rogers also noted that it takes approximately 14 months to grow a trout, meaning that even once hatchery work resumes, a full recovery will be delayed. Bennett Spring remains one of Missouri's most heavily used state parks with a high rate of repeat visitors, making the hatchery issue particularly important for local tourism.

City Administrator Troy Schulte offered to coordinate a conference call with the Missouri Conservation Commission, State Representatives, along with local stakeholders, to request a clear timeline and action plan for completion of the hatchery. The Committee expressed support for engaging state leadership and potentially sending a formal letter from local partners to emphasize the importance of the project to tourism and the regional economy.

Upcoming Events-

Director Rupard and Committee members reported on additional upcoming events and business activity:

- Mayor's Christmas Tree Lighting is scheduled for the upcoming Thursday evening, followed by Christmas on Commercial on Friday, December 12, which will include the Light Up Lebanon Lighted UTV Parade. Online registration is available through the VisitLebanonMO.org website, and early registrations already include entries from outside the immediate area. Last year's parade included 147 UTVs, and staff anticipate strong participation again this year.
- Lebanon Christmas Parade (organized by the Chamber of Commerce) will be held on Saturday, with over 100 entries already registered and an estimated 8,600+ attendees last year (based on Placer.ai data). Chamber Director Ashley Mahan reported that attendance likely exceeded 10,000 and that a special guest from Kansas City will appear in the dignitary lineup.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Committee members provided updates on their respective industries and businesses:

City Administrator Schulte provided several citywide updates:

The City of Lebanon has initiated a full rebranding process, including new colors and logos for all departments. Stakeholder input has been collected, and the city expects initial concepts from the consultant in December, with the goal of unveiling the new brand during America 250 and carrying it into the Route 66 Centennial year. The rebranding will guide entrance signs, water tower paint schemes, and departmental branding.

The city is considering formally renaming Elm Street to "Route 66" within city limits. This would be a legal name change requiring address changes. Schulte emphasized that the City would consult with affected Route 66 businesses and property owners before proceeding and that the goal is to enhance marketing value without placing undue burden on businesses.

City crews will also recreate a historic Route 66/Highway 5 street sign for display, with the original preserved at the library and reproductions installed along the corridor. Additionally, the city plans to paint Route 66 shields on the pavement along Elm Street at key locations in early spring.

Schulte reported that the Lebanon Community Golf Course is undergoing significant improvements and could be used as a tourism asset, including potential co-branded packages (golf + lodging + Bennett Spring). The city is open to partnering with local tourism stakeholders on fundraisers and golf-related visitor packages.

He also updated the Committee that the city will conduct a hotel market study, noting heightened lodging demand and multiple inquiries from potential hotel developers. The group discussed that additional hotels would help accommodate both business travelers and the increased tourism expected in 2026.

Liz Mitchko with Lebanon I-44 Speedway reported that a reality-style television series titled "Speedway" has been filmed at the track and is being pitched to major streaming platforms. The producers have committed to filming the entire 2026 season if the series is picked up. New racing classes are being introduced, with racing semi-trucks and monster truck events planned due to popular demand.

Brian Thompson with Lebanon REDI highlighted significant commercial activity on the south side of town, including developments such as Plaza Tire, Buffalo Wild Wings, Jersey Mike's, Pancheros, and a new car wash, as well as ongoing industrial and job-creation efforts.

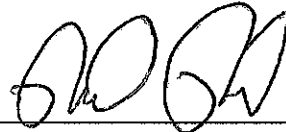
Rod Reid reported that international interest in Route 66 is already high, with groups from Norway, Australia, Ireland, and other countries deliberately traveling in 2025 to "get ahead" of anticipated 2026 crowds. The City and Route 66 Society have also supplied Route 66 promotional materials for events such as Route 66 Day at the U.S. Embassy in the Czech Republic.

Reid offered information on direct-import Lebanon Route 66 hats (embroidered caps at an estimated cost of \$4-\$7 each). Committee members and local businesses may purchase hats directly from the vendor for retail, giveaways, or special promotions.

New committee member *John Gideon* (Heritage Bank of the Ozarks) introduced himself and described how housing and lending projects, such as new apartment developments near the middle school, support long-term tourism and community growth by increasing the number of residents and families who live, shop, and invest in Lebanon.

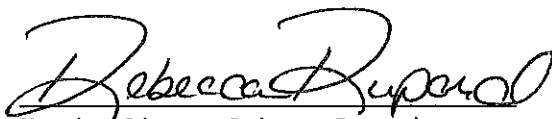
ADJOURNMENT

Liz Mitchko made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike Boggs seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.



Chairman Rod Reid

ATTEST:


Tourism Director Rebecca Rupard

Minutes Approved: 4/21/26