



Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF TOURISM
JB Pritzker, Governor

Illinois Tourism Coordinating Committee Meeting
May 15, 2026

Members/Attendees Present: Matt Berry (ICCB), Luke Davison (DoA), Senator Sara Feigenholtz, Eric Angerer (Legislative Assistant for Representative Nicole La Ha's Office), Toby Trimmer (IDNR), Charles Watkins (Lt. Governor's Office), Becky Locker (DCEO), Catie Sheehan (IOT), Lisa Link (IOT)

Guests Present: Rachel Bollinger (HR Director, Illinois Board of Higher Education), Elaine Doht (IOT)

Catie Sheehan, Illinois Office of Tourism Deputy Director, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

This is the first meeting for the Illinois Tourism Coordinating Committee-- consisting of 13 members, though we are still awaiting some appointments from IDOT, Speaker of the House and the Senate Minority Leader.

Introductions were completed for attending members.

Catie introduced Senator Feigenholtz who was attending via audio.

Catie mentioned that the bylaws were distributed on May 14, 2026 via email. Catie showed the bylaws on her presentation which was available for members on the WebEx to view. She also gave a brief summary of the bylaws.

The Committee is established under the Illinois Tourism Promotion Act. The purpose is to coordinate tourism promotion and development efforts across state government.

Membership includes the Lieutenant Governor, multiple state agency leaders (or designees), four legislative appointees, and the Director of DCEO, who serves as Chair, though we are looking to change that legislatively so that the responsibility isn't on our agency director. Members serve voluntarily. Vacancies are filled by the relevant appointing authority upon request. Catie gave a big thanks to Mackenzie Hess and Tito Quinones on the DCEO legislative team for working with all the appointments.

New members must complete the Open Meetings Act training within 90 days unless they have been completed elsewhere. All members must comply with State Officials and Employees Ethics Act requirements, including annual ethics and harassment training and filing statements of economic interest. Our General Counsel's office has access to those records. If you have completed the training, you will not need to submit proof to us as we will be able to attain it.

Attendance must be in person or via approved virtual means. Proxies may attend and observe but they cannot count toward quorum or vote. Members may not vote or participate in discussions when they or an immediate family member have an actual or potential conflict of interest. Representing stakeholder sectors is expected, but conflicts arise if actions benefit a specific business the member is connected to. Potential conflicts must be disclosed and reviewed by the DCEO Ethics Officer before participating. Let the Tourism office know if you have conflicts and they will be able to get you in touch with the General Counsel's office.

Toby Trimmer offered to approve; however, Catie stated that there are not enough members for a quorum. This meeting will proceed with subject matter only.

The Committee must comply with the Illinois Open Meetings Act. The meetings will be quarterly. An exact schedule has not been completed yet but will be forthcoming. Changing bylaws can be completed through this meeting if needed. Amendments require written proposal at one meeting and approval by majority vote at a subsequent meeting. Bylaws may be repealed by majority vote.

Catie introduced Lisa Link, Illinois Office of Tourism Assistant Deputy Director, to give a Tourism office overview.

Lisa read the mission: The Illinois Office of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents. We are committed to making Illinois a model of inclusivity and a celebration of diversity.

Tourism is funded partially by the dedicated percentage of state hotel-motel tax. Tourism has five employees in Springfield who work in the fiscal, management, grants, sports and outdoor recreation fields. There are also three employees in Chicago who work mainly in the public relations and marketing fields. Our partners help with managing Tourism including BVK, creative agency; Spurrier Group, media buying and sponsorship (along with multiple subcontractors); MMGY, domestic and international public relations and trade; People, Inc., Enjoy Illinois magazine; Tazewell County Resource Center, consumer/bulk fulfillment; Western Illinois Tourism Development Office, eight visitor information centers.

Toby Trimmer asked if someone could give a refresher on tourism hotel/motel tax? How it is divided for clarity. Senator Feigenholtz stated that it is very complicated but is better than it was five years ago.

Becky Locker explained how the funds are distributed. Hotel/motel taxes are collected by the Department of Revenue. There is a formula per statute that states how they are to be distributed. A portion is distributed to the tourism promotion fund which supports tourism efforts, DCEO, IDNR, Department of Agriculture, to help with various assets throughout the state. It also funds a handful of grants through DCEO. Some funds are used to pay bonds and debt through Sports. Some of the funding goes to the General Assembly fund.

Toby asked about our lodges, cabins, etc. (Staved Rock for example), and do we collect that tax as well? Becky answered yes to Toby's question. Catie stated that our new Outdoor Recreation Manager started yesterday. She is starting to look a little deeper into that to find out what outfitters are counted towards the hotel/motel tax as campsites do not go towards us.

Tourism partners, including 38 certified convention & visitors bureaus statewide, promote travel and overnight stays. They are also funded by our grant programs. Some of those grant programs are Local Tourism & Convention Bureau (LTCB), International Tourism, Route 66 (over at the end of the centennial year), Tourism Private Sector, Marketing Partnership, Tourism Attraction, and Tourism Incentive.

These grants give money back to the programs to build attractions, programs, and events in their respective areas. It's been very successful and the CVB partners are experts in their areas.

Catie Sheehan stated that some of the grant programs for next fiscal year have been posted this week. Route 66 will go to the end of the year. Half of the amount was requested for this year. Route 66 and international grants are only open to certified CVB's. They are both posted now. For the next month or so, the Marketing Partnership grants are not just open to CVB's. They are also open to entities across the state. Hopefully those will get posted today. Later on this summer, hopefully the tourism attraction and private sector grants will be posted.

Hotel stays look strong. In FY25, hotel occupancy in Illinois hit its highest point since before the pandemic in 2019. This year's hotel demand is steady. From July through March of FY26, hotel occupancy is holding steady compared to last year and is slightly higher than two years ago. Hotel prices are rising in a healthy way. The average price people are paying for hotel rooms (ADR) is up 3% compared to FY24.

Revenue per hotel room is growing. Last year (FY25), hotel revenue per available room (RevPAR) rose more than 7% compared to FY24. This year (July–March of FY26), RevPAR is up again, about 5% compared to FY24. RevPAR, Revenue Per Available Room, is a key performance metric in tourism industry. It measures how well a hotel is utilizing its available rooms to generate revenue.

Travel through Illinois airports is also up. In March, passenger traffic at Illinois airports grew 6.5% compared to last year. At O’Hare, the increase was even stronger at 11%, while the national average stayed flat. Tourism is doing quite well in Illinois.

Catie presented an overview of the advertising campaign via the presentation slides.

Our current spring/summer advertising campaign is running in 23 regional markets across 11 states, including four fly markets. We’re also running Spanish language ads across several mediums. It’s a \$16 million campaign that runs from April until July. This includes 23 drivable regional markets across 11 states including: Minneapolis, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Madison, Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Evansville, Paducah, Des Moines, Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Peoria, Quincy, Rockford, Champaign-Springfield. The ad campaign also includes three national fly markets: Denver, Houston and Atlanta. The brand-new campaign is called Meet in the Middle, featuring the popular song by Maren Morris, The Middle. Our Meet in the Middle campaign stays rooted in our core brand idea but brings fresh energy with vibrant colors and expression. We’re positioning Illinois as uplifting, dynamic, and full of possibility. Creatively, it introduces a new voice and look that feels warm, optimistic, and in motion, with print helping bring that sense of presence to life. It builds off our Middle of Everything platform, but brings it to life in a fresh, distinctive way – showcasing Illinois as a place where experiences, cultures, and people truly come together. Not only are we excited about the song in these ads, but also the Illinois icons that we created and launched in this campaign. From seasonal favorites like the Chicago Riverwalk and Navy Pier, to outdoor escapes like Matthiessen State Park and Garden of the Gods, to historical sites like the Lincoln Tomb and Route 66 Legends Neon Sign Park, the campaign encourages travelers everywhere to meet in the middle of outdoor adventure, small town charm and big city wonder.

Catie will send out link to [EnjoyIllinois - YouTube](#) with the TV ads on it.

Catie showed, via the presentation, examples of creative overviews, video, Spanish videos, prints, digital, Pinterest, and paid social ads. Different locations and diverse offerings, including LGBTQ+, are part of the advertising campaign.

Tourism also works with People, Inc. to produce a magazine two times a year (Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer). We released the Spring/Summer 2026 issue magazine to encourage residents and visitors alike to experience the state's abundant opportunities and make the most of the warmer weather seasons. The magazine serves as inspiration for anyone planning an Illinois adventure or milestone. Copies can be requested by reaching out to the Tourism office.

Catie opened the floor for questions.

Charles Watkins stated that the bylaws specifically state that designees cannot participate in discussions. This is something he would like to discuss offline. He has some comments about the presentation but is prohibited from discussing them. Catie stated that this is something they can change in the bylaws as the bylaws haven't been voted on yet. At this point it is subject matter only. Becky stated that there is a public comment section where questions can be addressed. Catie stated that we are now in that section so he can discuss it now.

Charles asked if the bylaws are in draft form. Catie stated that they are and that the legal team drafted them and the committee will probably vote on them in the next meeting. Charles stated that both he and the Lt. Governor will have some concerns about what levels should be considered for the designee. He stated that this is something that needs to be addressed. He understands the concerns about Legislatively having the Director of DCEO specifically named as the chair. There are also the same concerns regarding the Lt. Governor. He stated that he will take a closer look and will discuss it more at the next meeting as he will be the designee at that meeting also.

Becky stated that they will make way to the General Assembly to allow for designees for the Director and Lt. Governor. She will check the language to make sure the Lt. Governor is in there as well. That was a flag when working to get the committee back up and running. Catie asked if the attorney or legal team can change in the bylaws. Becky stated that yes, we can take a look at that as the intent is that any designee can participate and vote if person cannot attend for the Director and Lt. Governor. However, for example, if Toby cannot attend and has a proxy attend in his place, his proxy can attend but cannot vote.

Toby Trimmer motioned to adjourn. Matt Berry seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned at 10:33 am.