APPLICATION FOR TRANSIENT GUEST TAX FUNDS

August 14, 2015

Wayfinding Signage

1. Describe the project.

During the Visit Topeka branding meetings with Rodger Brooks International, it was found that Topeka is lacking in adequate wayfinding signage. City of Topeka Planning Director Bill Fiander gave a brief history of the existing signage. Below is his response.

In 2004 the City of Topeka embarked on a wayfinding sign system to navigate visitors and residents to popular local landmarks and destinations. City staff worked with consultants to identify these locations and design direction signs. Care was taken during this process to project an appropriate “Branding” of the City. Approximately 25 sites were identified and over 400 sign locations. Various signs types and designs were previewed with the final selections held to three types. The process produced a complete plan of a wayfinding network of signs throughout the City of Topeka. Implementation was broke down into phases, with the first phase consisting of just over 200 signs. Sign design, locations, construction and bid documents were prepared, and a company was hired to create and install the agreed upon signs. 97 signs were installed with 83 being paid by TGT funds and 14 by the city.

In the intervening years since purchasing and erecting the signs in phase I, the City has encountered obstacles in completing and maintaining the wayfinding system. The design and construction of the signs was inferior. Many of the signs fell into disrepair quickly, and no contingency plans were in place to address this issue. Identifying and securing funding also proved to be a challenge. The current status is an incomplete wayfinding system that contains many “gaps,” and consists of some signs that are “outdated” and some in a state of disrepair.

For nearly a year, Visit Topeka Inc. worked with Robert Brooks International, Seattle, Washington, to create a comprehensive, cohesive community identity campaign. Using discovery, input from local residents and research and feasibility studies, the firm worked with Visit Topeka Inc. to determine an appropriate direction and action plan designed to introduce the identity campaign through a well-planned process over a period of 12 to 18 months or more. Community participants in this process included Chamber and GO Topeka staff and board members, City Council representatives, downtown merchants and property owners, business professionals and community advocates. More than 2,000 Shawnee County residents responded to a survey requesting information about community assets. The primary goals of this branding effort are to differentiate Topeka from other Midwest communities, to showcase Topeka’s wide variety of events and many festivals and to provide a cohesive community identity that various organizations promoting Topeka can use with success. Updating the wayfinding signs to direct visitors and residents to Topeka attractions, points of interest and shopping areas will help reinforce the brand and drive economic impact with increased spending.

This project will plan, design and program the placement of wayfinding signs throughout Topeka with the assistance of the project team and local stakeholders. The project team will consist of the MTPO staff and partners, with “Visit Topeka” serving as the lead. The consultant will build on the existing wayfinding plan, assessing the condition and legitimacy of the signs currently in place, and then programming a phasing process to complete the system, working with stakeholders to include any new or overlooked destinations not included in the original plan.
2. **What is the total budget for the project?**

The wayfinding plan RFP was funded 20% by Visit Topeka ($14,580) and 80% by the cities MPO Policy Board to which the dollars are federal transportation planning grants ($58,320) for a total of $72,900. The projects estimated cost for completion is $650,000. This includes paying AXIA creative for the design, placement, and content of the signs and the city of Topeka conducted the implementation. On the assumption city staff could re-use half of the poles and go with smaller signs than there are now, we could estimate 150 signs for $4,000 per sign installed to equal $600,000. Another $50,000 would be needed to cover pedestrian and parking signage, predominately downtown, and changes to feature signage at the main entrances into the city.

3. **What are the funding sources other than TGT dollars for this project?**

At this time, there are no other funding sources for this project. If TGT dollars are not allocated, this project will not happen unless the city uses local tax dollars. Visit Topeka’s operating budget cannot allocate over 50% of its entire operated budget for this. The city will need to set aside $5,000-$10,000 per year for maintenance and upkeep once the signs are installed.

It should be stated that although this is a Visit Topeka project for tourism development, studies have shown that proper wayfinding is a quality of life enhancement for an entire community and is more important the just a tourism benefit.

4. **How much TGT funding is requested?**

$325,000 is requested which would allow the city to replace the 97 existing faulty signs. An additional $325,000 would be needed to complete the proposed project including pedestrian and parking signage as well as signage for the main entrances to the city. A completed program would enhance quality of life, tourism discovery, and economic development by driving people to key areas of the city.

5. **What will the TGT funds be used for?**

Paying AXIA creative for the design, placement, and content of the signs and the city of Topeka conducted the implementation.

6. **What are the economic development and tourism benefits to the city?**

Having proper directional signage in the city is crucial to the increased efforts of tourism helping from an economic development standpoint. The role of tourism is to bring visitors to the city to spend money locally. These signs are in fact advertising for all the city has to offer. Visit Topeka’s role is to bring visitors to the community. Once here, we need proper signage that will direct people to where they need to go while at the same time advertising other things for them to do. An example would be a family going to the ExpoCentre for an event and seeing signage for some of our historical venues. If we can get them to stay longer in town, it will be more likely that they will eat in Topeka, stay in Topeka, and buy gas in Topeka. The goal is the keep them here as long as possible once they are here. Again, these signs are not just for tourism, proper wayfinding signage enhances every aspect of a city.
7. What is the projected return on investment for the city (direct and indirect)?

Although this money is coming from TGT dollars, Visit Topeka strongly believes that it is very important to look at the sales tax collections as the driver for this project. A majority of the visitors will already be staying in hotels. The signage itself will not generate overnight stays. What will generate the stays is keeping visitors in town long enough to want to stay, eat, play. The major indirect benefits would be increasing visitation to some of the lesser known venues that will increase their revenues and hopefully allow them to operate on their own in the future.

8. What is the timeline for the project?

AXIA Creative will do their project and be ready for installation on January 25, 2016. The city planning department thinks installation will take place over the course of 2016-early 2017 provided there is funding available.

9. How many visitors will come to your project?

The signs will assist in the advertising of tourism venues around the city to draw additional visitors to each.

10. How will your project create overnight stays in Topeka?

See Answer to 6 regarding Economic Development. The most crucial aspect is that the signage can and will get visitors to visit more areas of the city, keeping them in town longer to where they will need to stay the night.

11. Is there additional information?

The AXIA Creative Wayfinding proposal, and AXIA Creative Project timeline are included.

Respectfully submitted by Visit Topeka

[Signature]

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Visit Topeka