



City of Duluth Communications Office

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SUBJECT: City of Duluth announces Tourism Marketing Working Group recommendations

BY: Kelli Latuska, Public Information Officer

City of Duluth announces Tourism Marketing Working Group recommendations

[DULUTH, MN] Today, the Tourism Marketing Working Group, appointed by Mayor Roger Reinert last March, released its recommendations.

The group was chaired by Karen Pionk, General Manager of the Sheraton Duluth Hotel. The group met weekly for six months to evaluate current marketing practices, identify areas for improvement, and develop strategies to enhance the visibility and economic impact of Duluth as a premier tourist destination.

“I am so grateful for Karen’s leadership in this effort,” said Mayor Reinert. If you want a tough job done, and done well, you ask Karen Pionk to lead the effort. Her ability to stay focused, gather incredible talent, keep that talent engaged, and at the end produce a quality result on time is unparalleled. There’s a reason she’s been on, and chaired, a significant number of boards in our region. That includes VisitDuluth and the Duluth Entertainment and Convention Center - especially applicable to this effort.”

“The recommendations put forth in this report underscore the importance of selecting a marketing firm that can not only manage a period of transition, but also lay the groundwork for future growth and success,” said Pionk. “Our goal is to ensure Duluth continues to thrive as a premier travel destination, now and for years to come.”

The Working Group recommended the selection of a firm via a Request for Proposals (RFP) to

provide destination marketing services for a two-year term, and under the oversight of Visit Duluth (VISD). This marketing contract will focus on key areas critical to maintaining and enhancing Duluth's appeal as a tourist destination. The structure and focus of the two-year contract will serve as a transition between the existing destination marketing model and a new recommended framework based on a destination marketing strategic plan.

The group also recommended the development of a long-term destination marketing model guided by the results of a governance study designed to align with the strategic goals set forth in a Destination Development Plan developed by the successful RFP bidder. This destination marketing strategic plan will be essential in shaping Duluth's future tourism landscape.

The working group also recommended a 10-year operating agreement between the City of Duluth and the Destination Management Organization (DMO) ensuring continuity and stability as these new initiatives are implemented.

"This report highlights the importance of carefully selecting via the RFP process a marketing firm that can effectively manage the transition period, while also setting the stage for future growth," said Pionk. "Both are required not just of the successful firm, but for the future growth and success of Duluth as a premier travel destination."

Mayor Reinert expressed his support for the group's work. "This report is a crucial step forward for Duluth's tourism strategy. The City is committed to working closely with the successful marketing firm, Visit Duluth, and other stakeholders to implement these recommendations and continue building Duluth as a destination of choice."

Mayor Reinert also expressed appreciation to the Tourism Marketing Group Members. They included:

Lydia DeGrood-maurices

Haley Hedstrom- Lake Superior Zoo

Lindsay Kern- Kern and Kompany

Mark Mahla Grandma's Restaurant

Shari Marshik- Upper Midwest Film Office

Josh Miller- Lake Superior Railroad Museum

Karen Pionk- Sheraton Duluth Hotel

Anna Tanski- independent consultant

Terese Tomanek- Duluth City Council

Brandon VanWaeyenberghe- formerly Duluth Superior Symphony Orchestra, Jason Vincent- Boat Club Restaurant and JayBee Travel

Tom Werner- Duluth International Airport.

“I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to this group of talented professionals,” said Reinert. “They represent local businesses, tourism organizations, community leaders, and marketing experts. Together, they contributed hundreds of hours of volunteer effort to assess the effectiveness of the existing marketing efforts, explore opportunities for collaboration and innovation, and develop these recommended strategies and actions to optimize the use of tourism marketing funds generated from Duluth’s tourism taxes.”

Formation of the working group underscored the City's commitment to fostering transparent and inclusive governance, engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes, and promoting responsible stewardship of public resources.

The current tourism marketing contract was issued for a three-year period and expires on December 31, 2024.

The full report is available on the City of Duluth’s official website. Read it in full here: <https://duluthmn.gov/mayor/tourism-working-group/>.

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