



City of Broken Arrow

Minutes Visit Broken Arrow

City Hall
220 S 1st Street
Broken Arrow, OK
74012

Chairman Brian Dean
Vice Chair Tommy Yardy
Ben Buie
Lisa Ford
Craig Hagin
Kathy Muskrat
Sarah Lopp
Sonja Schneider
Trevor Swanson

Tuesday, October 14, 2025

Board Chambers

1. Call to Order

Chairman Brian Dean called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

2. Roll Call and Introductions

Present: 7 - Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean
Absent: 2 - Sarah Lopp, Ben Buie

3. Presentations

A. 25-1449 Presentation by Clarity of Place with highlights of Broken Arrow's new five-year Tourism Strategic Plan

Tina Valdecanas, a representative from Clarity of Place, presented Item 25-1449, an overview of the Tourism Strategic Plan being developed for Visit Broken Arrow in partnership with city staff and consultants. The plan's purpose is to strengthen Broken Arrow's visitor economy by identifying ways to attract more overnight visitors, enhance the city's appeal, and provide data to support future policy and investment decisions. The process involved multiple phases: understanding the city's and tourism goals, conducting assessments and benchmarking against peer cities such as Edmond, Rogers, and Franklin, and engaging local stakeholders through interviews and focus groups to gather input on the community's strengths, challenges, and aspirations for tourism growth.

Key findings highlighted Broken Arrow's strong assets—including the Rose District, parks, museums, sports venues, and upcoming amphitheater—and the city's competitive hotel market. The analysis underscored the need to connect these assets, expand authentic visitor experiences, and leverage tourism's role in economic development. The team developed five strategic imperatives: capitalize on infrastructure investments to extend visitor stays; increase visitor spending by promoting unique local experiences; engage more local businesses in tourism; elevate Broken Arrow's veterans heritage tourism as a signature offering; and grow the city's creative and cultural sectors through film and arts initiatives.

The final plan will include rationale, recommended strategies, and sample tactics for implementation. The next step is to finalize the document with feedback from city leadership and the Visit Broken Arrow team, producing a polished, user-friendly version that summarizes the plan's findings, imperatives, and implementation roadmap for ongoing use and communication.

4. General Visit Broken Arrow Business

A. 25-1413 Consideration, discussion, and possible approval of the meeting minutes from the September 9, 2025, Visit Broken Arrow meeting

MOTION: A motion was made by Lisa Ford, seconded by Tommy Yardy

Move to Approve Item 25-1413, meeting minutes from the September 9, 2025, Visit Broken Arrow meeting

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

B. 25-1367 Consideration, discussion, and possible approval of the nomination and election for Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Visit Broken Arrow Board with a term expiring September 30, 2026

It was announced that recent board reappointments included Council Members Lisa Ford, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, and Tommy Yardy, and that Sarah Lopp would join the board as a new member at the next meeting. With the new board established for the next two years, it was explained that it was time to nominate a chair and vice chair. It was asked and confirmed that current officers could continue serving if re-elected.

MOTION: A motion was made by Lisa Ford, seconded by Craig Hagin

Move to Approve Item 25-1367, re-election for Chairman and Vice Chair, retaining Brian Dean as Chairperson, and Tommy Yardy as Vice Chair of the Visit Broken Arrow Board, with a term expiring September 30, 2026

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

C. 25-1379 Consideration, discussion, and possible approval of and authorization of the 2026 regularly scheduled meetings schedule for Visit Broken Arrow

Makala Barton, Tourism Manager, presented Item 25-1379 and explained that each year the clerk's office must publish the official meeting dates by December 15. The upcoming schedule keeps meetings on Tuesdays at 3:30 p.m. every other week. Unlike last year, when the November meeting had to be rescheduled due to Veterans Day, this year's schedule remains consistent.

MOTION: A motion was made by Lisa Ford, seconded by Kathy Muskrat

Move to Approve Item 25-1379, authorization of the 2026 regularly scheduled meetings schedule for Visit Broken Arrow

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

D. 25-1451 Consideration, discussion, and possible approval of the Gatesway Powwow sponsorship request in the amount of \$4500, pending the required follow-up report submitted by the deadline and the required receipts submitted to be approved by Visit Broken Arrow for reimbursement

Dawn Newrider from Gatesway described the Disability Awareness Powwow as an event created to celebrate inclusion and honor the strength and spirit of individuals with disabilities. Now in its second year, the powwow aims to raise community awareness in Broken Arrow and beyond, emphasizing that every person, regardless of ability, has a valued place in the community. The event unites Native and non-Native participants through dance, drumming, art, and shared culture, featuring about 19 vendors from across the country and support from numerous organizations. Highlighting its mission of advocacy, visibility, and unity, the speaker requested a \$4,500 sponsorship from Visit Broken Arrow to help fund the growing event and recognize the city's role in supporting inclusion.

During the discussion, organizers of the Disability Awareness Powwow explained that the requested \$4,500 sponsorship from Visit Broken Arrow would cover hotel rebates, contingency costs such as tents for bad weather, contest prizes, and food for volunteers and vendors. The event, taking place that weekend, has already raised about \$7,500 through fundraisers such as an Indian taco dinner and other community efforts, but still needs the remaining funds to cover expenses fully.

They described the powwow as a growing two-day event held at the Gatesway campus, featuring dancing, drumming, art, and cultural celebration for both Native and non-Native participants. Last year's first-ever powwow drew about 275 attendees over a single day, and this year's expansion aims to double its reach. Organizers emphasized its potential to become Broken Arrow's next signature community event—comparable in recognition to the former Gatesway Balloon Festival but less weather-dependent.

They noted strong enthusiasm within both the Native and disability communities, as well as growing interest from tribes such as the Muscogee (Creek) and Cherokee Nations. However, formal sponsorships were not secured in time this year. The event continues to build momentum as an inclusive, culturally rich festival celebrating advocacy, unity, and community engagement.

MOTION: A motion was made by Tommy Yardy, seconded by Brian Dean

Move to Approve Item 25-1451 the Gatesway Powwow sponsorship request in the amount of \$4500, pending the required follow-up report submitted by the deadline and the required receipts submitted to be approved by Visit Broken Arrow for reimbursement

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 -

Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

E. 25-1462 Consideration, discussion, and possible approval of a film incentive rebate in an amount not to exceed \$41,000

Makala Barton, Tourism Manager, explained that the following two agenda items concerned a new film project represented by Cassidy Lunnan. She reminded the board that in February, Visit Broken Arrow approved a \$100,000 film incentive rebate program and later granted up to \$59,000 to the film *Horrificed*, which went smoothly and is awaiting post-event verification. The current request is for a second film with a much larger budget that would typically qualify for over \$100,000 under the 10% rebate structure. However, only \$41,000 remains available

in the fund.

Production is now expected to generate 550-800 hotel room nights, an increase from the original estimate of 250-300. Ms. Barton also proposed a separate \$12,500 hotel rebate item to support the project further. This additional incentive would help reflect the film's expanded economic impact on the community through hotel stays and local spending. She clarified that both items pertain to the same movie and then invited Ms. Lunnen to speak.

Cassidy Lunnen introduced herself as a film producer who moved from Los Angeles to Tulsa in 2021 and has since produced several films and series in Oklahoma, including *A Thousand Tomorrows*—a Netflix series shot partly in Broken Arrow. She explained that her new project, backed by Sony Affirm (Sony Pictures' faith-based division) and Mucho Mas Productions, is a \$6.7 million theatrical film based on a true story of forgiveness and unity in Pomona, California, where a murdered youth pastor's parents forgave his killer, leading to a dramatic drop in local violence.

She said the production expects over \$1 million in local spending and between 550 and 800 hotel room nights, with 5–7 of the 25 filming days in Broken Arrow and a crew of more than 100 people. Filming locations may include the Broken Arrow Courthouse. Ms. Lunnen emphasized that the city's film incentive program helps attract productions like hers and that Broken Arrow's logo would gain national exposure in association with a significant theatrical release from Sony Affirm, whose past successes include *Heaven Is for Real* and *Soul Surfer*.

She noted the broader economic benefits films bring—crew lodging, restaurant and entertainment spending, and community engagement—and expressed excitement about the opportunity to highlight Broken Arrow on a national stage. Even if the city's available rebate is less than the complete 10%, she said the production is committed to filming in Broken Arrow and believes the partnership will showcase the city's growing role in Oklahoma's film industry.

MOTION: A motion was made by Brian Dean, seconded by Trevor Swanson

Move to Approve Item 25-1462, a film incentive rebate in an amount not to exceed \$41,000

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

F. 25-1469 Consideration, discussion, and possible approval of an event rebate in an amount not to exceed \$12,500, pending the required follow-up report submitted by the deadline and the required receipts submitted to be approved by Visit Broken Arrow for reimbursement

MOTION: A motion was made by Lisa Ford, seconded by Trevor Swanson

Move to Approve Item 25-1469, an event rebate in an amount not to exceed \$12,500, pending the required follow-up report submitted by the deadline and the required receipts submitted to be approved by Visit Broken Arrow for reimbursement

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

G. 25-1423 Consideration, discussion, and possible approval of and authorization to execute of a Professional Services Agreement with Broken Arrow Film Festival, Inc. for the Broken Arrow Film Festival and Convention to be held in 2026

Makala Barton, Tourism Manager, introduced a new initiative inspired by the city's growing film activity—a proposed Broken Arrow Film Festival. She explained that Brad Heath had approached the city about the idea roughly six months earlier, and the concept quickly gained support. The plan combines a traditional film festival with a convention component, something unique in Oklahoma. The City of Broken Arrow would serve as the event host, with Mr. Heath acting as a consultant while city staff and a dedicated committee collaborate on planning and execution. Ms. Barton emphasized that the goal is to establish the festival as an annual event, leveraging the city's film momentum to attract visitors, enhance visibility, and further promote Broken Arrow as a destination for arts and entertainment. She then invited Mr. Heath to provide more details on the event's vision and logistics.

Brad Heath introduced himself as a Broken Arrow native and veteran media producer with 30 years of experience in film and television, having worked with Fox Sports, FX, Disney, and on productions like *Reservation Dogs*. He explained that his idea for a Broken Arrow Film Festival grew from the city's recent success with film incentives and the rapid expansion of Oklahoma's film industry. While other cities like Oklahoma City, Stillwater, and Paul's Valley host film festivals, he believes Broken Arrow has the opportunity to create a distinctive event that combines a festival with a convention component and could eventually rival Oklahoma City's long-running DeadCenter Film Festival.

The proposed festival would be an annual event held in early October, featuring multiple film categories and international submissions to draw filmmakers and visitors from across Oklahoma and nearby regions such as Dallas, Wichita, and Fort Smith. Mr. Heath noted that typical film festivals attract about 200 attendees per day, with roughly 30 percent traveling from outside the area, creating measurable economic benefits through hotel stays, restaurant spending, and local business engagement.

He emphasized that the Broken Arrow Film Festival could serve as a cornerstone of the city's emerging identity as a film destination—complementing recent productions like *Horrid* and *Live Like That*—and providing a showcase for independent filmmakers seeking distribution. Mr. Heath said the festival would help complete the city's broader vision of cultivating a creative, film-friendly community and ultimately position Broken Arrow as a hub for both filmmakers and filmgoers in the region.

Board members discussed Brad Heath's request for \$50,000 to launch the first Broken Arrow Film Festival. It was asked whether they could review the proposed budget before approving funding, since this was the city's first time sponsoring such an event. Ms. Barton confirmed that a detailed budget had been provided to staff, but was inadvertently omitted from the board packet. She explained that the total project cost exceeds \$50,000 and that the city is being asked to cover the first-year expenses to help establish the festival. In future years, she said, she would be expected to fund herself through sponsorships and ticket sales.

Mr. Heath outlined the main expenses, including venue rental at Regal Cinemas, VIP hosting, compensation for judges reviewing potentially hundreds of film submissions, and marketing materials. He emphasized that his own compensation was not included—he would only be paid if the festival turned a profit. He described plans to host both a film festival and a convention under one umbrella, using Regal's upstairs theaters for screenings and vendor booths, and possibly expanding to the Stoney Creek Hotel in future years if attendance grows.

Mr. Heath said the goal is to attract regional and national filmmakers—not just locals—boosting tourism and local business activity. He detailed visibility benefits for the city, including Visit Broken Arrow and city logos featured before each film block, on passes, merchandise, and social media. The event would include a student film category for high

school participants, general admission passes for the public, and discounted entry for city employees.

Mr. Heath elaborated on how submissions would be managed through FilmFreeway.com, the industry-standard festival platform. He mentioned plans for breakout sessions featuring notable filmmakers and judges, including PJ Sosko, an experienced actor and producer. Board members expressed appreciation for Mr. Heath's expertise and organizational plan, noting that his experience made them more confident about supporting the festival's launch as a signature annual event for Broken Arrow.

MOTION: A motion was made by Lisa Ford, seconded by Tommy Yardy

Move to Approve Item 25-1423 authorization to execute of a Professional Services Agreement with Broken Arrow Film Festival, Inc. for the Broken Arrow Film Festival and Convention to be held in 2026

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 -

Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

H. 25-1452 Consideration, discussion, and possible approval of forming of a temporary working committee to discuss possible updates to sponsorship grant requests

Makala Barton, Tourism Manager, explained that before she joined Visit Broken Arrow, the board had restructured its funding approach around 2023 by replacing the old hotel-night grants with broader community sponsorship grants. The hotel-night program remains tightly defined—\$500 for every 12 verified room nights—but sponsorship requests have become increasingly common and lack clear parameters. She noted that some events now request large, arbitrary amounts, such as \$8,000 for a \$10,000 event, without consistent criteria.

While Ms. Barton emphasized her support for community events, she expressed concern about accountability and the need to ensure responsible use of hotel tax funds. This year, roughly \$30,000 has already been committed to community sponsorships, and she believes the board should reevaluate how funding is distributed to maintain balance and transparency.

Ms. Barton proposed forming a small working committee of three board members, along with herself and Erin Hofener, Marketing & Communications Coordinator, to review the current system, research how other cities manage similar programs, and draft more straightforward guidelines. The committee would meet once for about an hour to develop recommendations for the full board's consideration at a future meeting.

Council members strongly agreed with Ms. Barton's concerns, saying the board needs stronger checks and balances for sponsorship grants. It was noted that without clear accountability, Visit Broken Arrow might provide significant contributions—such as \$4,500—when the actual event expenses were far lower, raising questions about where the excess funds go. Ms. Barton agreed, explaining that she currently lacks the authority to adjust or deny requests and presents them as submitted, which reinforces the need for clearer standards, such as tying funding to visitor numbers or capping awards based on an event's total budget.

The board agreed to form a small working group to review and refine sponsorship policies. Brian Dean, Kathy Muskrat, and Sonja Schneider volunteered to serve on the committee with Ms. Barton and Ms. Hofener. They discussed logistics to ensure the group stays below quorum limits and agreed to schedule a meeting soon to draft new guidelines for the full board's consideration.

MOTION: A motion was made by Brian Dean, seconded by Tommy Yardy
Move to Approve Item 25-1452, forming of a temporary working committee to discuss possible updates to sponsorship grant requests

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 -

Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

5. Board members' Opportunity to Address Visit Broken Arrow on General Topics Related to City Business or Services (no action may be taken on matters under this item)

Makala Barton, Tourism Manager, gave a brief administrative and financial update. She noted that the latest STR (Short-Term Rental) data was unavailable for the month. Still, she reported several major expenditures, including another payment to Clarity of Place, a \$20,000 scholarship disbursement to the Performing Arts Center, and the new Visit Broken Arrow truck wrap. September's lodging tax collections increased slightly from the previous year, and year-to-date revenues are also up, marking a strong start to the fiscal year.

Ms. Barton announced that Visit Broken Arrow successfully secured the American Junior Golf Association (AJGA) tournament for Indian Springs—an event expected to bring hundreds of traveling junior golfers—and that the National Grange Conference, projected to draw about 500 attendees, will be hosted in Broken Arrow in August 2026. Michaela also mentioned she would speak on a Guthrie Film Incentive panel to discuss how municipalities can structure film incentive programs.

Finally, she reminded the board that the next meeting will be on the 18th and that new member Sarah Lopp will be in attendance. She also encouraged board members to RSVP for the upcoming State of the City luncheon on December 10, where the city will cover the cost of their tickets but needs confirmations soon to finalize table reservations.

Erin Hofener, Marketing & Communications Coordinator, enthusiastically shared updates on the upcoming Christmas season in Broken Arrow, announcing that the annual Tree Lighting and Christmas in Broken Arrow kickoff will take place on November 13. She distributed flyers and posters listing confirmed city holiday events. She noted that this year's kickoff will feature many returning favorites, including Grady Nichols, student choirs, Santa and Mrs. Claus, along with two exciting new additions: the Oak-Okie Igloo Village, where guests can rent heated igloos outside Arts@302 for private dining experiences, and a live reindeer at the tree lighting.

She added that weather forecasts look favorable—hoping for “the fun kind of snow, not the cancel-my-event kind.” The second major holiday event, Carols and Cocoa, will be held on December 12. Ms. Hofener aims to build on last year's success, likely featuring saxophonist Justin Eccles with his band, alongside performances by Rayma Middle School, Arts@302, and the Senior Center choirs. The event will be free to the public, with food trucks serving cookies, cocoa, and sweets in a festive plaza setting.

Additional holiday activities include Sensory Sensitive Santa at Arts@302, Wedding Wednesday with Santa, free carriage rides through the Rose District, and roaming carolers throughout the season, creating a classic Hallmark-style holiday atmosphere.

The board held a lighthearted but thoughtful discussion about using the song “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” as Broken Arrow's official holiday theme, since it was written by Broken Arrow native Ralph Blane. Ms. Barton explained that the mayor has long wanted to tie the city's Christmas branding to that connection, and she asked that research be conducted

to determine whether the song’s copyright has expired or, if not, what permissions would be required to use it officially.

Ms. Hofener noted that she had previously referenced the phrase indirectly in marketing materials, using it as part of poster text rather than an event title to avoid legal issues. Board members joked about copyright limits and shared anecdotes about past experiences with music licensing, including projects that had to be altered or denied permission. Sonya volunteered to help with outreach or research, emphasizing that the goal is to celebrate Broken Arrow’s local link to the song’s composer, not to profit from its use.

It was confirmed that Ralph Blane was indeed the songwriter and that his former home is still in her neighborhood. The group agreed that staff would investigate copyright ownership, attempt to contact the rights holders or Mr. Blane’s family if necessary, and pursue permission if feasible. If not, they would explore alternate holiday branding ideas while ensuring all efforts remain fully compliant with copyright law.

6. Tourism Director Report Including Updates on the Following:

A. 25-1414 Presentation and discussion of the Tourism Manager's Report

Makala Barton, Tourism Manager, stated that she presented her report during the above discussions.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:40 p.m.

MOTION: A motion was made by Brian Dean, seconded by Lisa Ford
Move to Adjourn

The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Trevor Swanson, Sonja Schneider, Kathy Muskrat, Craig Hagin, Lisa Ford, Tommy Yardy, Brian Dean

Chairperson

Secretary