

MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING OF THE GURNEE VILLAGE BOARD	
GURNEE VILLAGE HALL FEBRUARY 24, 2025	
Call to Order	Mayor Hood called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m.
Other Officials in Attendance	Patrick Muetz, Village Administrator; Austin Pollack, Assistant to the Village Administrator; David Ziegler, Community Development Director; Heather Galan, Public Works Director; Brian Gosnell, Finance Director; Erica Wells, Assistant Finance / HR Director; Ellen Dean, Economic Development Director; Nick Leach, Village Engineer; John Kavanagh, Fire Chief; David Douglass, Deputy Fire Chief; Brian Smith, Police Chief; Jeremy Gaughan, Deputy Police Chief; Willie Meyer, Police Commander; Matt Bandler, Police Commander; Jason Kalinowski, Police Commander.
Roll Call	<b>PRESENT: 5 - O’Brien, Balmes, Thorstenson, Woodside, Ross</b> <b>ABSENT: 1- Garner</b>
Pledge of Allegiance	Mayor Hood led the Pledge of Allegiance.
<b><u>A. DISCUSSION ITEMS</u></b>	<p>1. Lake County, Illinois Convention &amp; Visitors Bureau and “Big Three” report on tourism, business developments and upcoming season operations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maureen Riedy – President, Visit Lake County</li><li>• John Krajnak – Park President, Six Flags Great America</li><li>• Randy Ebertowski – General Manager, Gurnee Mills</li><li>• Brianna Ruggia – General Manager, Great Wolf Lodge Illinois</li></ul> <p>Visit Lake County – Maureen Riedy – President</p> <p>Maureen Riedy, President of Visit Lake County (VLC) Convention and Visitors Bureau, reviewed a Power Point presentation with the Board. She started by reviewing the Board of Directors and stated Gurnee has ample representation on the Board of Directors. VLC includes 16 community partners as well as Lake County. North Chicago and Wauconda are the newest community members. VLC serves the entire County and as a regional service provider, it is eligible for funding from the State of Illinois. Ms. Riedy stated Lake County has overtaken Gurnee as the largest investor. The County now includes \$150,000 in its annual budget and shares a portion of hotel taxes collected in the unincorporated areas.</p> <p>She next reviewed VisitLakeCounty.org and discussed promotions related to Gurnee. In the past 12 months, 145 events in Gurnee were listed and promoted. Digital marketing included 390 digital posts of Gurnee events and 152 blogs that mentioned Gurnee events and businesses. She stated digital marketing efforts focus on both large attractions, as well as smaller events and attractions.</p> <p>Next, seasonal campaigns were reviewed including Spooks &amp; Spirits Fall campaign, Holiday campaign, Lake County Flavor Festival and Summer Marketing campaign. Ms. Riedy also stated the Visit Lake County Visitors Guide will once again be published and remains very popular.</p> <p>VLC continues to focus on Group Sales initiatives. This includes recruitment of sports tournaments, meetings, reunions and tour groups. Over the past year, there were 32 referrals for Gurnee venues with 19 groups secured. She stated VLC was using Lake County ARPA funding to secure groups through a Business Incentive Program that helps offset hotel costs.</p> <p>Ms. Riedy next reviewed visitor spending by category for Gurnee in 2024. She stated a “visitor” is defined as devices more than 50 miles from their home or work location. Attractions were 32.6% of spending, food 25.9%, accommodations 21.0% and retail 17.6%. She next</p>

reviewed average visitor spending by category. The average spend on accommodations was \$298, attractions \$187, retail \$144, outdoor recreation \$135, transportation \$96, nightlife \$81 and food \$65. She stated the food average appears low and is based on averages, which include grocery stores and restaurants.

Ms. Riedy concluded by thanking the Village for its continued support. She stated Gurnee is a key partner and has been a strong supporter for many years.

Six Flags Great America – John Krajnak – Park President

John Krajnak, Park President Six Flags Great America, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation with the Board. Mr. Krajnak stated 2024 was a very strong year for the Park. He stated Sky Striker opened in mid-June and thrilled over 180,000 riders before the season end. The Park also debuted the Windy City Sports Bar & Grill, which was a huge success. He then reviewed changes related to Frightfest, which included a chaperone policy and five total haunted houses with two being new. He stated three had themes such as SAW, Stranger Things and Texas Chainsaw Massacre. These houses were very popular with guests.

He stated 2024 was a great year overall with the Park exceeding attendance and revenue targets. The Park is in the top three for attendance and in-park revenue compared to the legacy Six Flags parks. Mr. Krajnak stated the merger with Cedar Fair was completed July 1<sup>st</sup> and now the company has 42 parks total verses 27 previously. He stated the Gurnee park achieved the highest margin performance of all domestic parks in the new organization.

He then reviewed what was new for 2025, including Wrath of Rakshasa coaster. This is a record-breaking dive coaster with the steepest drop (96 degrees) and most inversions (five). The ride is 180 feet tall, has a beyond-vertical drop from 171 feet and will hit speeds up to 67 miles per hours. He stated this is the first new coaster at the Park in six years.

Park enhancements in 2025 include the Wrath of Rakahasa exit shop, food & beverage enhancements and new festivals/special events. He stated the front gates were renovated and include new security screening and entry pavilion.

Mr. Krajnak expressed his appreciation for VLC and the Village of Gurnee. He stated the support adds to the Park being successful.

He closed by stating the Park is starting to plan its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, which will take place in 2026. He will be reaching out to the Village to solicit its feedback related to this milestone.

Gurnee Mills – Randy Ebertowski – General Manager

Randy Ebertowski, General Manager Gurnee Mills, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation with the Board.

Mr. Ebertowski echoed what Mr. Krajnak said about the Village and VLC. He stated all the Village departments are best in class to work with and that the partnership with the Village is greatly appreciated.

He started by reviewing 2024 capital project completed and 2025 planned capital projects. Complete projects included security system upgrades, exterior concrete replacements, central plant chiller upgrades, parking lot resurfacing, new K-9 and K-9 vehicle, new security trikke, LED large digital format boards, parking lot light nodes, soft seating recovering and hardwood floor resurfacing. Upcoming 2025 projects include central plant chiller upgrades, parking lot resurfacing, EMS updates, entrance bollard replacement, new security trikke, soft seating recovering and hardwood floor resurfacing.

He next reviewed a list of stores that opened in 2024, as well as those coming soon in 2025. A few of the 2024 openings include Round 1, ReClectic and Pandora. 2025 openings include Primark, Boot Barn, Hey Dude and Miss A to name a few.

Next, Mr. Ebertowski reviewed 2024 events and upcoming 2025 events. 2024 events included the First Responder Expo, Back to School event, Boo Bash and Santa Parade. In 2025, the Tunnel to Towers 9/11 Never Forget mobile exhibit will visit the center. In addition, the First Responder Expo, Boo Bash and Santa Parade will return, as will the annual Rods for Remembrance car show.

Great Wolf Lodge Illinois – Brieanna Ruggia – General Manager

Brieanna Ruggia, General Manager, Great Wolf Lodge Gurnee, reviewed a PowerPoint presentation with the Board.

Ms. Ruggia stated everyone has been very welcoming and supportive since she came to Great Wolf Gurnee a few years ago.

Ms. Ruggia started by reviewing 2024 and 2025 capital investments. 2024 included \$4 million for roof replacement, towel folder, ironer, waterpark flooring, Timber Tacos and Woods End Creamy. 2025 includes \$6 million in investments for replacement of all rooftop HVAC units, final roof replacement, upgrading the waterpark filter, parking lot improvements, new kitchen upgrades, and full room upgrades including flooring, mattress and box springs, credenza and end tables.

Next, she provided a marketing update, stating the Wolf Out program showed a new 5% lift in awareness. She reviewed the seasonal awareness, stating it was below the previous year for winter and spring, but climbed in the summer months ultimately surpassing 2023.

Ms. Ruggia next reviewed the growth of Great Wolf Lodge. She stated that in 2015 there were 12 lodges. In 2025, that number has increased to 23 lodges.

Next Jeanette Ocampo, Director of Sales and Catering, Great Wolf Lodge, reviewed community partnerships. Partnerships include Naval Base Great Lakes, Warren Township Food Pantry, St. James Food Pantry, Warren Township High School, College of Lake County, Gurnee Days, Trunk or Treats and the First Responders Expo.

Mayor Hood thanked the presenters for their commitment to Gurnee and the people they work with and host. He stated the interaction between the Village and VLC and the Big Three is special. He is very thankful for the partnership. Mayor Hood stated VLC and the Big Three are one of the Village's best investments.

Questions:

Trustee O'Brien stated the presentations were excellent and thanked them for the information.

Trustee Thorstenson asked about the average spend on food. Ms. Riedy said she agreed the number appeared low and stated it was an average that includes grocery stores and restaurants.

Trustee Thorstenson asked what the Village could do to help out each entity. She stated they did not have to answer now and could take some time to think about it.

Trustee Woodside stated he appreciates the partnership over the years. He values the outside perspective that each brings to the conversation.

Trustee Balmes asked if Holiday in the Park would return. Mr. Krajnak stated the Park tried the event for five years and it did not generate revenue. He stated to end the event was a local decision. He continued to state the decorations have been loaned to other parks and he does not see if returning in 2025 or 2026 at this point.

Trustee Ross stated VLC held strategic planning session last week and is constantly looking to the future. She continued to compliment the VLC staff.

Ms. Riedy stated the Village never takes its attractions for granted and continuously works to assist in elevating the offerings.

2. Reminder: Budget Workshop #1: Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget Presentation – 5:30 P.M., March 3, 2025.

**Adjournment**

It was moved by Trustee Balmes, seconded by Trustee Ross to adjourn the meeting.  
**Voice Vote: ALL AYE: Motion Carried.**  
  
Mayor Hood adjourned the meeting at 8:08 p.m.

**Selene Beltran,  
Deputy Village Clerk**