

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

Minutes of the 3rd Meeting of the 2026 Interim

August 27, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The third meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Economic Development and Workforce Investment was held jointly with the Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology on August 27, 2026, at 2:00 PM ET/1:00 PM CT in the 2nd Floor Conference Room, Freedom Hall, at the Kentucky State Fair in Louisville, Kentucky. Senator Phillip Wheeler, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Phillip Wheeler, Co-Chair; Representative Josh Branscum, Co-Chair; Senators Gary Boswell, Gary Clemons, Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Jason Howell, Scott Madon, and Matt Nunn; and Representatives Robert Duvall, Al Gentry, Vanessa Grossl, Kevin Jackson, Kim King, Matthew Lehman, Matt Lockett, J.T. Payne, Scott Sharp, and Wade Williams.

Guests: Philip Koester, President & CEO, Waterfront Botanical Gardens; Megan Bibelhauser, Vice President of Marketing & Experience, Waterfront Botanical Gardens; Austin Bradley, Superintendent, Breaks Interstate Park; and Grondall Potter, Pike County Representative, Breaks Interstate Park.

LRC Staff: Peter Wright, Janine Coy, Austin Johnson, and Samantha Gerhart.

Approval of June and July Minutes

A motion was made by Senator Funke Frommeyer and seconded by Representative King to approve the minutes from EDWI on June 18, 2026, and July 16, 2026. Minutes were approved by voice vote without objection.

From Landfill to Living Landmark

Philip Koester, President & CEO, Waterfront Botanical Gardens, and Megan Bibelhauser, Vice President of Marketing & Experience, Waterfront Botanical Gardens, provided an update on their progress in transformation of the gardens and the plan to continue expanding their gardens after the current phase of work has been completed. Ms.

Bibelhauser discussed the programs that have been created to promote education and community engagement. Mr. Koester discussed how the \$4 million investment given to them by the General Assembly has been used, and plans to start charging admission fees.

In response to Representative Jackson, Mr. Koester stated that the \$4 million investment went to a major building project and the total cost of phase 2A will be \$10.5 million.

In response to Representative Grossl, Ms. Bibelhauser explained how many of the Bonsai trees were donated and noted the significant social interest in the art of Bonsai. Mr. Koester stated their priorities moving forward are building a visitor center and children's garden.

In response to Senator Boswell, Mr. Koester stated that more than 80% of visitors are from out of state during peak weekends.

Creating Economic Impact Through Conservation and Recreation

Austin Bradley, Superintendent, Breaks Interstate Park, and Grondall Potter, Pike County Representative, Breaks Interstate Park, explained the history surrounding Breaks Interstate Park, the developments they have built in the past, and the different activities the park offers. They said the plan is to continue developing the area to attract more visitors.

In response to Chair Wheeler, Mr. Potter and Mr. Bradley explained how Virginia provides over \$600,000 in funding for their portion of the park while Kentucky provides \$200,000 per year for its portion.

In response to Senator Funke Frommeyer, Mr. Bradley explained how they have tried to recruit private investors, but no one accepted their bid request in its entirety.

In response to Senator Funke Frommeyer, Mr. Potter discussed how the park has the structure in place to maintain control of zoning and would be involved if any changes are made.

In response to Representative Whitaker, Mr. Bradley and Mr. Potter explained the history surrounding Daniel Boone's journey on Pine Mountain while searching for the westward passage.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.