

INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON TOURISM, SMALL BUSINESS, AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Minutes of the 2nd Meeting of the 2026 Interim

July 16, 2026

Call to Order and Roll Call

The second meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Tourism, Small Business, and Information Technology was held on July 16, 2026, at 1:00 PM ET/12:00 PM CT in Room 149 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Representative Kim King, Co-Chair; Senator Shelley Funke Frommeyer, Member; Senators Rick Girdler, Scott Madon, and Matt Nunn; and Representatives Shane Baker, Beverly Chester-Burton, Ryan Dotson, Daniel Fister, Chris Fugate, Vanessa Grossl, John Hodgson, Nima Kulkarni, Chris Lewis, Shawn McPherson, Adam Moore, Ashley Tackett Laferty, Aaron Thompson, Bill Wesley, Mitch Whitaker, and Richard White.

Guests: Eddie Lutz, Director of Attraction & Resource Sales, Ark Encounter, and Anna Katherine Scalf, Business Development Coordinator, Ark Encounter.

LRC Staff: Janine Coy, Christian Deeter, Austin Johnson, and Samantha Gerhart.

Approval of June Minutes

A motion was made by Senator Madon and seconded by Representative Fister to approve the minutes of the June 18, 2026, meeting. Minutes were approved by voice vote without objection.

Ark Encounter Impact: 10 Years

Eddie Lutz, Director of Attraction & Resource Sales, Ark Encounter, discussed the 10th anniversary of the Ark and how it has become one of our state's main tourist attractions. Mr. Lutz emphasized how strategic public incentives, private investment, and collaboration have generated significant returns for the state's economy.

In response to Chair Funke Frommeyer, Mr. Lutz explained that no taxpayer money was used to build the Ark, but they were part of the Kentucky Tax Incentive.

In response to Chair Funke Frommeyer, Mr. Lutz explained there were conversations about building the Ark in other states.

In response to Senator Nunn, Mr. Lutz described the strengths of Kentucky's tourism and how the state's history attracts more visitors.

In response to Co-Chair King, Mr. Lutz stated that many Kentucky residents enjoy seeing how many tourists from different states visit the Ark.

In response to Representative Kulkarni, Mr. Lutz explained how the parent company of the Ark is a nonprofit organization, but the Ark itself is a for-profit company.

In response to Chair Funke Frommeyer, Mr. Lutz explained how the number of employees fluctuates throughout the year, and he is unsure if they pay occupational tax for those employees.

In response to Representative Baker, Mr. Lutz stated that he is unsure of the number of visitors from different countries who have visited the Ark and explained how the number of visitors per year has been consistent.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned.