

Southwest MT
General Board Meeting – Butte Brewing Company
Minutes September 16, 2014

Participants: Board members: Julie Shelton, Ellen Baumler, Pat Hansen, Fay Najjar, Becky Henne, Mike Mergenthaler, Amber Wood-Jensen, Lynette Kemp, Dale Carlson, Dave Williams

Members and guests: Leona Rodreick, Mark Hughes, Trina Peterson, Pat Doyle, Heidi O'Brien, Speaker: Mike Garcia

Partners Creative: Suzanne Elfstrom, Tempest Technologies: Debbie Carlstrom, Bert Carlstrom

9:30 a.m. President Julie Shelton welcomed everyone to the meeting. She thanked Mike Garcia for hosting the legislative luncheon and letting us hold our meeting prior to the legislative forum. We went around the room and did a self-introduction.

The minutes from last meeting were previously sent out by email .Mike Mergenthaler moved to approve the minutes as submitted. David Williams seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

For public comment, Leona Rodreick, Forest Service Public Relations Officer, announced that because of budget cuts the office in Deer Lodge will close this month and the office in Whitehall will be closing at the end of the year. People will be able to get permits at the I-90 Conoco in Deer Lodge and at the Hardware Store in Whitehall. After several years of requests, the Forest Service will now be on Facebook hosted by the Department of Agriculture.

David Williams said that the Prison Museum will be open seven days a week through most of December and will start up again in January. They will have the haunted house this year and possibly for a couple of weeks.

Dale Carlson said that Bannack State Park will have living history Thursday through Sunday. They will also be having ghost walks. Bannack Days went well with about 5000 people attending. They are 95% back from the flood that occurred last year.

Ellen Baumler said that the Montana History Conference will be going on and they will have a Cemetery Workshop on the care for tombstone and more. The cost is \$75 and people can still attend.

Mike Mergenthaler said that Helena is celebrating their 150th year on October 30th, the day Helena got its name. Ellen Baumler has written a book about the history of Helena that will be available.

For financial reports Sarah said that we have \$101,142.43 in our checking account and \$45,948.24 in our money market account. We have \$10,253.51 in our membership account. Amber moved that the report be approved and Becky seconded the motion.

For the director's report Sarah said the maps are out and if anyone wants some to let us know. The Lewis and Clark Brochures are out from a multi-state cooperative effort lead by the National Park Service. They have asked how the brochures are doing. Dillon has requested more but that was all the information we have as it is too soon to know right now.

We had requests for money from Tourism Matters which is our lobbying group and from Voices of Tourism which is a broad spectrum education program for tourism. After much discussion on the two requests, Becky Henne moved that we spend \$1800 out of membership funds for Voices of Tourism. Amber seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Mike Mergenthaler moved that we take \$1000 out of membership for Tourism Matters. Ellen Baumler seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

For the president's report, Julie Shelton reported that lots of work had been put toward the Tear-off Map. We have been working on membership and we are making headway on the new birding brochure.

Next, we had our speaker, Mike Garcia, executive director of Voices of Tourism. He gave us background information of which he spent most of his life in the military and was the Military Public Affairs Officer which involved many groups and crisis management. He has been with Voices of Tourism for a year. Mike researches and reports on the broad economic benefits of tourism. He educates legislators, candidates, businesses and the local people. He has been working on the legislative forums and getting information out wherever he can. He is now doing Facebook and twitter as well as a website which offers more information for any of us to use. Mark Hughes asked about the sale of federal lands and the information on that. Mike explained that that is an issue but his part is more educating and not so much as taking on some of the hot button issues as that would detract from the original intent of Voices of Tourism.

Julie talked about Sarah's evaluation that takes place during the summer. They have offered her 4.5% increase in salary. Amber moved that the increase be approved. Becky seconded the motions and it passed unanimously.

Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout had sent an inquiry report. It covered June through August. We had 1,101 inquiries and mailed out 2,784 guides to a variety of recipients. Most inquiries came from "*Better Homes and Gardens*," the Southwest Montana website. Some inquiries from an ad we didn't have to pay for in the "*History Channel / Warrior Magazine*" and also some inquiries came from the *Yellowstone Journal*.

Top interests were history and ghost towns, regional hot springs, wildlife watching and rock hounding opportunities. Inquires came from Montana, California, Florida, and Washington.

Debbie Carlstrom from Tempest Technologies reported on social media and the website. The leading page after the front landing page is the itineraries followed by ghost towns and the blog. The newsletter has picked up 17% more readers up to 6200. She talked about Twitter and Facebook and would like to do some contests on Facebook. We are looking for prizes which will help promote the places they come from. It will include a caption and a picture. Facebook is up to 21,000 fans. Debbie has just set up Instagram and will see how it goes. Everyone is encouraged to send in pictures. She said that Trip Advisor drives lots of traffic to the website. The traffic from social media is about 50% social media, 50% Facebook and 2% twitter.

We are partnering with the Helena TBID on bike filming. Burt reported on the Southwest Montana Blog. We are building a community mostly from Facebook. We have lots of crossover. It is a slow process but growing. They are looking for content and pictures.

We talked about the travel guide and the lodging listings. Becky Henne said she would like to keep the lodging listings in the travel guide and so did Fay Najjar. We set up a committee and Sarah will send out a doodle to set up a meeting time.

Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative talked about Trip Advisor. She said that Trip Advisor did a redesign and consequently our click-through rates have dropped. She has been working with them on this. Because of this, they are not raising our costs for the next year. The cost for Trip Advisor with our community pages is \$13,300. This is \$6600 for the pages and \$6600 for the ad buy. The funds for this now must come out of state funds as we no longer have the funds in membership as in the past. Suzanne asked about the possibility of having the communities putting funds toward this? Much discussion ensued on this. Our current contract is good until the end of December. We will discuss at our next meeting.

Suzanne had a draft of the birding brochure on the projector and a handout. She has worked with a couple of birding experts for the project. Sarah will send out a pdf to the membership for feedback.

Our next meeting will be at the Lewis and Clark Caverns on October 23rd. Our meeting on November 20th will be at the Forest Service in Dillon.

Meeting adjourned at 11:25 a.m.