

**Southwest Montana**  
**General Board Meeting – Townsend, Brochure Exchange**  
**Minutes – April 21, 2016**

Participants: Board members: Pamela Kimmey, Dave Williams, Crystal Denton, Kerri Kumasaka, Ross Johnson, Kristen Swenson, Marlene Holayter, MaryEllen Schnur, Desiree Shogren, Amber Wood-Jensen, Leona Rodreick, Paul Marsh, LaRinda Spencer, and Executive Director Sarah Bannon. Additional participants, Tempest Technologies: Shawn Peterson and Debbie Carlstrom, Partners Creative: Suzanne Elfstrom, Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development: Barb Sanem, Stephanie Munk, Karena Bemis, Lisa Barcco, Jennifer Bunser, Vic Sample, Kenzi Clark, Kara Osborne, Jan Thorne, Marcia Bieber, Nancy Marks, Ernie Forrey

We had the meeting at the lovely Broadwater County Museum. This is a large wonderful historical museum which is well worth the trip. We each received a complimentary tub of delicious, wonderful spun honey from Hamilton Honey Bees.

At 10:48 President Pamela Kimmey called the meeting to order. She thanked Townsend for hosting the meeting and for such a wonderful welcome. We went around the room and each person did a self-introduction.

Amber Wood-Jensen moved to approve the minutes as submitted via email. Kristen Swenson seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

For public comment many people talked about the events happening in their communities. There was no additional public comment related to the agenda or otherwise.

Sarah Bannon gave the financial report. Handouts were given with detailed information on expenditures and income. As of March 30, 2016, the state account had \$38,499.54 in its account and the money market had \$16,182.72 in its account. As of March 31, 2016 the membership fund had \$15,950.95 in its account.

For the executive director report Sarah talked about the National Youth Summit in July for junior high and high school students. It is free for the students and they will be staying at Montana Tech July 19 – 22. This is an interactive summit and students will be problem solving as well as having fun activities. Also have been working on the marketing plan and budget for fiscal year 2016 / 2017. We have had requests for 19 ½ boxes of travel guides not including our call center requests. Another 20 boxes have been given away thus far from the office. We have been working with Partners Creative on the Influencer Mommy Blog for this summer.

Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative gave several marketing and public relations updates. We had a custom landing page, online banner ads, native inclusion with truewest.com, yellowstonepark.com road trip promo, content amplification, and print advertising. The banners had an overall click-through rate of .18% which is above industry standard. True West performed the best with a strong click through rate of .41%. Suzanne showed some of our creative. We also had impressive results on the yellowstonepark.com road trip promo and the content amplification. The landing page had 6250 sessions to date and the average time on the page was 5:20 minutes. Top engagements were popular tours, ghost towns, the main site, and scenic routes. We still have the bicycling campaign to come out this summer.

Suzanne talked about our mommy blogger which is a mother who takes trips with her husband and two children. She is Kimberly Tate of “Stuffed Suitcase.” She has a blog, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram account all with impressive followers. She also works with Traveling Mom which has extremely high following. She and her family will tour the area in June and will post photos and information of the area. The plan is for this information to get out to the followers and inspire them to take a trip to Southwest Montana.

Pamela asked about the landing pages and the advantage of having them on a separate page over having the information come directly to our website. Lots of discussion ensued on this regarding the capture of the statistics. We will look at having the landing pages on our website now that we are converted to a new responsive website and can capture the information.

Rebecca Schmitz submitted a MARS Stout telemarketing report. They have mailed 5,272 Southwest Montana Travel Guides and received 4,393 inquiries at the call center. 3,925 were reader service leads mostly from MyYellowstonePark.com and Better Homes & Gardens. 354 were email requests from the southwestmt.com website. 107 were telephone calls and 7 were postcards from last year's Explore History campaign. Most inquires came from Washington, California, Texas, and Oregon. Most interest was in history and ghost towns, wildlife watching, Lewis & Clark Trail and family activities.

We discussed the Of Sage and Stone website. The Montana Preservation Alliance is looking to donate their content to another organization. Sarah will get more information on all that is entailed with this.

We broke for lunch. We watched a film "Bittersweet" that discussed the making of the Missouri River dams in the surrounding Broadwater area. Nancy Marks from Townsend gave us some very touching information on the hardship and the unfair process that was involved in the taking of the land. Many lives were permanently altered and devastated in the creation of these dams we now use for water recreation.

We had the 2016 / 2017 marketing plan and budget discussion. A handout was given of the proposed narrative which included strengths and opportunities and goals. A new opportunity for us is to market our "Southwest Montana Ghosts." The region has many ghost tours and resident "ghosts" that are of interest to many travelers and tourists. This will go along well with the ghost towns and history as well. We will also work on getting a photo / video library and many more photos. Much discussion took place on what to do for this. Do we go with a program or do we have Tempest Technologies help design one for us that we can have tailor made. Shawn had checked into a program that was really good that is out there, albeit has a costly monthly charge that would really add up over time. Suzanne was checking on what Partners Creative uses as well.

Our budget estimate from the state was \$385,000. We went through the budget and the different line items. We accounted for an increase and decrease in a few of the line items. Lost Trail Pass will not be open this year. The visitor center now will be in Darby so we dropped that line item. Superhost has changed immensely and will now go mostly in the schools. This line item was dropped to \$1 for now. To account for the new photo /video library and the purchase of photos we put in \$13,000 which includes \$3590 rolled in from last year's budget. Kristen Swenson and Amber Wood-Jensen moved and seconded the motion to approve the budget. It was passed unanimously.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies discussed the website. Things are going well. We continue to need lots of photos for the website, Facebook, Twitter, and our other social media channels. Suzanne needs them as well for Trip Advisor, advertising and the travel guide. We are struggling with the *Lively Times* calendar of events. It isn't user friendly and people are somewhat reluctant to go and put their events on the input page. People are encouraged to do this and in the meantime we will be seeing what we can do to get a better system. We will work with Norm Dwyer at MTOTBD and see if any changes can be made to the current system. Otherwise, we might consider partnering with other regions and CVB's to see about creating our own event program. Norm has been great to work with and is now on his own for this type of work. The state is out for RFP on a new ad agency and website master plan but for now Norm is on his own without the past contractor and without the new contractor.

Debbie Carlstrom talked about Facebook and we are asking people to share any information they like that comes out from Southwest Montana. This helps with the events and with exposure of the region. The ski joring video has now had over 4 million views! Shawn will be working with Pat Doyle on the state parks to discuss the two featured state parks in our area and also, for creating itineraries between the parks. We will put state parks on the agenda for next time.

Kristen asked if we could work on getting information to highlight other areas in the region. People are encouraged to come up with itineraries from their cities to other areas that will highlight attractions and scenic drives. If anyone has a special event coming up or area that might be a good fit for filming please let us know. Mike is also doing video with drone.

It was decided we don't need a June meeting so our next meeting is September 15<sup>th</sup> in Virginia City.

Pamela thanked everyone for coming and Townsend for being such great hosts. The meeting was adjourned at 1:45 p.m.