

**Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Helena
Minutes - October 25, 2017**

Participants – Paul Marsh, Stephanie Munk, Mike Mergenthaler, Karena Bemis, Bruce Binkowski, Kerri Kumasaka, Fay Conway, Mari Mraz, Richard Krott, Patrick Fix, Melanie Sanchez, Jennifer Davis, Becky DiGiovanna, Cooper Fisher, Jan Thorne, Jocelyn Dodge, Jim Tucker, Pamela Kimmey, Julie Schroder, Sandy Shull, and Executive Director, Sarah Bannon

MARS Stout -Rebecca Schmitz, Windfall Inc. - Jim McGowan, Erika McGowan, Kyle McGowan, Taylar Robbins, Megan Richter, Tia Metzger, Tempest Technologies - Shawn Peterson, Debbie Carlstrom, Katya Peterson, Linda Brown

Special Guests: Jan Stoddard, Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development, Chief Bureau of Industry Services and Outreach, and Barb Sanem, Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development Compliance Specialist

Our fill-in President Pamela Kimmey called the meeting to order at 10:40 a.m.. She welcomed everyone and thanked Stephanie Munk and Jim Tucker from the Comfort Suites for hosting the meeting. We went around the room and did a self-introduction.

Mike Mergenthaler moved that the minutes be approved as sent out via email. Jocelyn Dodge seconded them motion and it passed unanimously.

Since we had no public comment we moved into financial reports. Sarah had handouts for everyone to see the financials. As of September 30, 2017, we had \$97,091.97 in our checking account and \$66,255.14 in our money market. Our membership account had \$18,125.20. Mike moved that the report be approved ad submitted. Jocelyn seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

For the executive report Sarah talked about the Tourism Advisory Council meeting. Of great interest was that research has shown that most travel patterns are right through our region. Sarah had met with Glacier Country and Yellowstone Country and talked about working on a project together. We will get together with Windfall to discuss. The travel guide is taking up most of the time. We did get a great response for listings in the travel guide. Many calls will have to be made to follow up on past businesses that listed. The quarter report has been turned in to Barb Sanem. The annual audit takes place this week. We got a grant from the state to work with Lincoln on the fire /smoke disaster relief.

Rebecca Schmitz from the MARS Stout call center gave the inquiry report. From January through September 2017 we have received 7,483 inquiries and sent out 123,542 guides. Most inquiries were obtained through Yellowstone Journal Magazine, Southwest Montana Website, Sunset Magazine and in-house referrals from the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development. Most inquiries came from California, Texas, Washington, and Florida. Visitors are most requesting information on regional history and ghost towns, wildlife watching, Lewis and Clark Trail, and area hot spring resorts. Rebecca also included many of the interesting questions from some of the callers.

We talked about the Lewis and Clark Proposal of \$3000 which included two different brochures of the Lewis and Clark Trail and the Southwest Montana Discovery Trail. Discussion ensued on this and since Lewis and Clark are the third most requested information to our call center Mike moved to approve up to \$3000 for this proposal. Richard seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Taylor Robbins, our account manager, will be our main point of contact from Windfall. She gave a handout on the travel guide timelines and talked a bit about the layout. She said that they would like to put the strongest content first in the travel guide.

Tia Metzger from Windfall presented the Media Plan and had a handout for everyone. We are currently doing a joint venture with the state with Sojern. We are also placing ads in the Glacier Country Travel Guide, The Destination Missoula Guide and True West Magazine. Other placements presented were for Yellowstone Journal, Road Runner Magazine, and Backpacker Magazine. We will be doing Advanced Audience Targeting through Network Programmatic Digital Campaign, Trip Advisor, and Northwest Travel / Travel Guides Free. We will be using Sizmek Tracking as well. Paul Marsh moved that we approve \$129,419 for the media plan. Mike seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Our guest speaker, Jan Stoddard, Bureau Chief of Industry Services and Outreach from the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development talked with us on how things are working at the state level. She said the marketing group at the state is working in an inspirational level. Jan's group works more on the community and regional levels with us. She has the Made in Montana program which helps small businesses become bigger. They have several projects coming up in a few different areas in the state. The Governor's Conference will be April 15-17th at the Big Sky Resort. Scholarships will be available. In January a call will go out for awards. Jan reminded us how Jocelyn Dodge won last year's Tourism Person of the year. Jan also said that the Tourism Infrastructure Grants will be open for nonprofit businesses in June. They send out an E-Blast every Friday. If you are interested, please get on the list to receive it.

We broke for lunch.

Windfall talked about Influencers and Public Relations. They talked about using Andy Austin, the photographer, as an Influencer for Southwest Montana. He will be making rounds in several of the regions. The cost is \$1500 per day. Much discussion ensued regarding this. Mike Mergenthaler moved that we approve the \$3000 for the Andy Austin Influencer. Paul seconded the motion. Motion passed with one person dissenting based on desire for further information. More discussion took place regarding public relations and influencers. Karena Bemis moved that we approve \$10,000 for Windfall to be divided as \$5000 for reactive public relations, \$3000 for a Dallas influencer and \$2000 for another influencer. Mike seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Southwest Montana got a \$5000 Disaster Relief Grant to help Lincoln with the devastation from the fire and smoke that hit their area the end of summer. Windfall and Tempest and several Southwest Montana members discussed possibilities prior to the meeting. Racene Friedi from Glacier Country also has grants for Seely Lake and Ovando. She has been in contact with Jim McGowan from Windfall regarding an idea to pool the money to do a big splash for all three places. They are looking at "Sled the Burn" as a catch phrase that would apply for snowmobiling and some other winter activities. Jocelyn said the Sled Dog Race would also fit right in with this. We will get more information from Racene on this.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies gave some updates on the website and video projects. They have been pushing Lincoln already on the website and in social media to help them get a boost right off. They have been to Lincoln to obtain more video and photos. He talked about how they are willing to also work with Windfall on "Sled the Burn" and the dog sledding. We have put in for a grant to obtain more video of Southwest Montana to push out spectacular images on large tv monitors placed around the region. The video will be ultra high definition and will include itineraries and will show on a map where the images take place. We currently have 12 partners that are buying into the project. The video will be scenes from around the region and then images specific to the local area where the monitor is. The E-Newsletters have been reformatted which has already increased click-through rates. The previous formation was heavy in text. Things are more simplified now for the reader.

Richard Krott from Tizer Botanic Gardens and Arboretum asked if we were doing anything with Geocaching. He has had traffic to his place from people who are excited to be geo-cachers. Jennifer Davis from the Helena Tourism Business Infrastructure Development talked about how well it works for Helena. Jennifer also talked about the walking tour around the historic buildings and a walking app that you can use that shows you a historic photo of the building when you point your phone at it. We will do this after our next meeting.

With the celebratory National Capital Tree transport coming from the Kootenai Forest in Northwest Montana to Washington D.C. our next meeting on Thursday, November 16 has been moved from Deer Lodge to Helena. Everyone is welcome to come up to the Montana Capitol where the tree will be from 11:00 – 1:00. There will be hot chocolate and cookies and Governor Steve Bullock, Helena Mayor Jim Smith, and Montana Attorney General Tim Fox will speak. The event will also serve as a Thanksgiving-themed food drive for the Helena Food Share.

Our meeting will start at 12:30 at the Helena Chamber Office. It is a brown bag lunch so bring something to eat and join in the meeting. After the meeting we will do a tour of the historic buildings within walking distance of the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:00.