

**Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Fairmont Hot Springs
1/24/18 Minutes**

Participants: Becky Henne, Bill Henne, Elise Wilbanks, Mike Strang, Crystal Thorpe, Gay Rossow, Becky DigoVanna, Anna Strange, Kerri Kumasaka, Keri Gagner, Kelly Sullivan, Bruce Binkowski, Jocelyn Dodge, Mary Johnson, Richard Krott, Melanie Sanchez, Julie Shelton, Ellen Baumler, Fay Najjar, Marlene Holayter, Maria Pochervina, Cooper Fisher, Sheila Cornwell, Paul Marsh, Julie Schroder, Mike Mergenthaler, and employee Sarah Bannon

Contractors: Windfall - Erika McGowan, Jim McGowan, Taylar Robbins, Tempest Technologies – Shawn Peterson, Katya Peterson, Linda Brown, Debbie Carlstrom, MARS Stout – Rebecca Schmitz, Felina Almanza, And speaker Dax Shieffer from Voices of Montana Tourism

At 10:30 a.m. President Becky Henne called the meeting to order. We went around the room and each person did a self-introduction and announced local events. Becky thanked Julie Shelton and Fairmont Hot Springs for hosting the meeting.

Jocelyn Dodge moved to approve the minutes. Mike seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Sarah had handouts for the financial report. We have \$8146.25 in the state checking account and \$326,310.61 in the money market account. We have \$18,172.20 in our membership account. We have \$72,000 put in joint venture for potential projects such as Hope County and with potential projects with Yellowstone and Glacier Country to be discussed in a few weeks. Mike Mergenthaler moved that the financial report be approved as submitted. Maria Pochervina seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

For the executive director report Sarah talked about the research projects being submitted for fiscal year 18/19 from ITRR (University Travel Research Program.) Sarah reported that Southwest Montana got a grant for our video project with large screens to put around the region for \$30,450. Several other grants were awarded in the region as well including Philipsburg who received \$104,511 for improving their ice arena for more consistency in the ice. Sarah reported on several other projects that are going on in the region and outside of the region.

Rebecca Schmitz gave the MARS Stout call center report. In 2017, there were 9,693 inquiries answered and 15,608 guides mailed. Most inquiries came in for history and ghost towns, wildlife watching, Lewis & Clark Trail, and regional hot springs. The inquiries came from California, Texas, Florida, and Washington. Most inquiries came from *Yellowstone Journal*, Southwest Montana website, *Sunset Magazine* and MOTBD in-house referrals.

Sarah said that the “Sled the Burn” campaign is in full swing. We are working with Lincoln to get things smoothed out on this campaign.

The applications for the Community / Corridor Project are due February 9th. So are the Cooperative Marketing Applications. They will be awarded at the February 22, Southwest Montana meeting in Butte.

Taylor Robbins from Windfall Inc. handed out two drafts of the travel guide to be passed around for review. She talked a bit about some of the changes. She gave us an overview of our marketing and ads on the overhead screen. She also had an overview of the potential for Southwest Montana on the FAR Cry 5 video game that takes place in fictional Hope County, Montana. The game is somewhat based out of a property near Anaconda. The game itself is violent but the intent of the marketing proposal is to send people to the activities like fly fishing and ATVing in the area. There was much discussion around this project. Many people don't like the game or what it represents but it was discussed that doing

nothing could be a potential problem and loss of an opportunity. Far Cry 4 sold over 45 million copies. A very conservative estimate of the number of people (.001%) coming based on statistics provided by Jan Stoddard of the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development would be 43,000 people. Jocelyn Dodge said doing some kind of marketing would help people be prepared and let people know these people are coming. Jim McGowan talked about three different proposals. The Montana Office of Tourism is giving us \$6000 to help with the promotion. After more discussion a motion and a second was made to approve the \$18,000 proposal which would include \$6000 from the state and \$12,000 from our consumer marketing budget. The budget was broken out as \$2000 for project management, \$3000 for Visit Hope County.com Micro-site that integrates with Southwest mt.com, \$3000 for search engine marketing campaign, \$3500 for copywriting and designing a Visit Hope County Field Guide., \$1000 for paid social media advertising, and \$5500 for digital retargeting. Motion passed with one person dissenting.

Dax Schieffer, Director of Voices of Montana Tourism, gave us a presentation on the value of tourism to the state of Montana. He had research and statistics from the state and the region that were of great interest to us. Preliminary data for 2017, showed that Montana had 12.2 million visitors who spent \$3.3 billion in Montana. This supported 53,240 jobs statewide, generated \$204 million in state and local taxes and lowered taxes on each Montana household by over \$480. Most of the expenditures went to gas stations, restaurants, retail stores, hotels, state parks, outfitters and other businesses. Dax sent the presentation to Sarah to email out to the members. Anyone interested in having Dax for their chambers, Rotary Clubs, or such is welcome to connect with Dax or Sarah.

Becky Henne and several board members announced that it was Sarah's 20-year anniversary at being with Southwest Montana. Sarah received many amazing baskets for the celebration. Special cupcakes were also made for the celebration.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies gave us an update on our social media and newsletter report. He gave us a handout. We have 53,626 followers of Facebook, 2660 followers on Twitter, and 2,459 followers on Instagram. Our focus for 2018 will include twitter chats, Instagram stories, growing all social channels, encouraging user generated content, and social monitoring to engage with users who are already talking about Montana, businesses, and travel. We will be posting 3-4 blogs monthly, featuring them on social channels, and providing links to businesses, attractions, and listing in SWMT.

Southwest Montana also got a grant from the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development for the Ultra High Definition Traveler Information Display Project. We will place twelve 65-inch 4 k monitors around the region with our partners who pledged money toward the project. We will feature general regional footage and itinerary specific footage corresponding to the display location. We will also have animated maps of the region and itinerary. Shawn had a large TV monitor with video rolling to give us an idea of the video and the presence it will have out in the region. If you have specific topics or contacts for filming, please let Sarah or Shawn know.

We had our election of officers for the year. Mike Mergenthaler presented the slate of officers and opened the floor for more nominations. The slate was: Becky Henne for President, Maria Pochervina for Vice President, Paul Marsh for Secretary, and Julie Schroder for Treasurer. Since there were no other nominations there was a vote and a second for the slate of officers as presented. Motion passed unanimously.

We discussed our meeting schedule. Our next meeting will be February 22, in Butte, then we will be in Boulder Hot Springs on March 22, and after that April 26th in Deer Lodge. We also talked about a potential meeting in May with Carol Crockett, if she is available, to help with knowing what is important for the grant writing process.