

Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Boulder Hot Springs
March 22, 2018

Participants: Julie Shelton, Bryhen Herak, Jan Thorne, Julie Schroder, Melanie Sanchez, Paul Marsh, Mary Johnston, Dax Schieffer, Fay Najjar, Leona Rodreick, Mike Strang, Andrea Opitz, Kerri Gagner, Kerri Kumasaka, Elijah Allen, Becky DiGiovanna, Gay Rossow, Jerry Johnson, Sally Buckles, Betty Charlton, Bruce Binkowski, Mike Strang, Corey Kirsch, Jocelyn Dodge, Barb Reiter
Contractors: Windfall – Taylor Robbins, Kyle McGowan, Tempest Technologies – Shawn Peterson, Debbie Carlstrom, Linda Brown, Katya Peterson, Employee – Sarah Bannon

Julie Shelton presided over the meeting since Becky Henne was unable to attend. At 10:35 a.m. Julie called the meeting to order. Julie thanked Kerri Kumasaka and Fay for hosting the meeting. We went around the room and each person did a self-introduction.

Mike Strang moved that the minutes be approved as submitted. Becky DiGiovanna seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Sarah had handouts for the financial report which include all expenses. As of 2/28/18 we have \$63,716 in the checking account and \$296,335 in the money market. We have \$26,971 in the membership account. Mike Mergenthaler moved that the financial report be approved as submitted. Julie Schroder seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout has submitted a call center report. So far this year, 6,662 Southwest Montana travel guides have been sent out in response to 6,578 inquiries. Reader service made up 6,186 of the leads, 318 were orders from the website and emails from other tourism regions. We had 71 calls, two postcards and one letter. Most of the inquiries came from the *Yellowstone Journal Magazine*, *Northwest Travel Magazine*, *Sled the Burn* Co-op Promo, and the Southwest Montana website. Most of the inquiries came from California, Texas, Washington, and Florida. People were interested in regional history and ghost towns, wildlife watching, area hot springs, and the Lewis and Clark Trail.

Mike Strang reported on the Lima Rest Area. Over 450,000 people stopped at the rest area in 2017. The lady who is now running the contract has declared she won't put out the travel information. Mike has created a great relationship with the Department of Transportation and they said that we can put the travel guides in the store room there. We had much discussion on how to get the material put out in the visitor center. Mike Mergenthaler moved that we start with an offer for the worker to restock our shelves for \$20 per week not to exceed \$30 per week. It is estimated that it will take about an hour and a half a week to restock. Mike Strang seconded the motion. Gay Rossow asked if doing an Independent Contractor for this would be legal. More discussion took place and Sarah will ask the Department of Labor on this. Motion passed unanimously.

The Department of Transportation also gave Mike Strang permission to put up the monitor for our Southwest Montana Videos. We had much discussion on this and it was decided that it would cost \$2200 - \$2500 to get the monitor in place which would include setting up electricity and getting a cover for it. Mike Mergenthaler moved that we approve up to \$2500 for getting the monitor set up at the rest area. Jocelyn seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Julie Shelton thanked Mike Strang for developing a positive relationship with the DOT and for working so diligently on the Lima Rest Area projects.

Taylor Robbins from Windfall gave the marketing update. The 2018 travel guide is here and out in the racks. The Hope County website is up and goes live on March 27th. The Field Guide is almost finalized.

Kyle McGowan said they focused on the Far Cry Brand and then the Southwest Montana Brand. Ubisoft has created a Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) sheet for the best way to answer to questions regarding Hope County Montana. There will also be a Do's and a Don'ts list. Ubisoft put on a retargeting pixel for us. You can go to the website on visithopecounty.com

Taylor had the pull up banners for the Calgary Travel Show on display. She also had two maps of the region to use at the show. She is setting up timelines and plans for the Community / Corridor Programs.

Jocelyn Dodge, USDA Forest Service Recreation Coordinator was our speaker and she gave a presentation on the Beaverhead/ Deer Lodge National Forest, the Helena National Forest and the Lewis and Clark National Forest. We also have three Wildernesses making up lots of acreage in the region. Southwest Montana also offers world class fishing in the region. The Forest Service has a Lake Guide we can get at a District Office and online. We also have snowmobile trails and there was a record amount of snow this year. They also have rental cabins, ghost towns, the Continental Divide. She said long distance hikes have increased and that there is a "Helping Hikers" program available; we are encouraged to check it out. Avenza App is available for maps on our mobile phones and we are also encouraged to check into this for trails etc.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies gave the website update. They are working on the ultra-high definition video projects. They have been gathering winter footage due to the late winter weather we have been having. Shawn thanked Jocelyn, Fay Najjar, and Becky Henne for all their help in their areas when they were shooting the video. They have worked at Georgetown Lake, Discovery Basin, Great Divide, Thompson Park, Winter biking, and the Rocky Mountain Front. They also got aerial footage of places including the Anaconda Stack. If anyone has events or attractions they would like to have videotaped, please let us know so we can try and schedule it in with the rest of the planned shooting. They will also get video of Virginia City / Nevada City and the micro-breweries in the region. Windfall gave Tempest a template of Hope County and Tempest coded it. The Hope County website was kept small as they wanted to push people to the Southwest Montana website for further information. The Hope County website was just meant to be a sampling for the region.

Shawn said that they are working on a new event system for the website since the state data feeds aren't complete enough. Anyone who has annual ongoing events should let them know and send the information to updates@southwestmt.com.

We discussed some of the potential projects for the marketing plan and budget for the next fiscal year. According to the Institute of Tourism Research and Recreation (ITRR) 82% of our travelers were repeat visitors and 84% of our travelers plan to return within two years. Also, 38% of our visitors are 55-64 years old, another 38% are 65-74 years old, and 17% are 45-54 years old. Our travel groups are made up of: 57% -2 travelers, 25% - 1 traveler, and 9% are 3 travelers. We talked about some emerging markets including outfitters and guides and continuing with the "ghost" theme and potential wedding destinations. Leona Rodreick said that they are getting many requests for guides for day hikers and for horseback riding. People are also interested in marketing to the hunting and fishing widows.

We talked about the Cowboy Hall of Fame. It is now up in the air again since the last place didn't work out. Jefferson County is hoping to acquire this and has two potential places for it.

Our next meeting in Deer Lodge is changed to Wednesday, April 25th. It is our annual brochure exchange.

The meeting was adjourned, and Kerri Kumasaka offered a tour of Boulder Hot Springs for everyone.