

Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Whitehall
Minutes for September 21, 2017

The meeting was held at the Borden Hotel in Whitehall.

Participants: Becky Henne, Rebecca Schmitz, Maria Pochervina, Copper Fisher, Julie Schroder, Dale Carlson, Crystal Thorpe, Anna Provost, Paul Marsh, Gay Rossow, Becky DiGiovanna, Jocelyn Dodge, Anna Strange, Debbie Carlstrom, Katya Peterson, Shawn Peterson, Arcylle Shaw, Janice Carmody, Rhea Armstrong, Sherry Cargill, Erika McGowan, Megan Richter, Kyle McGowan, Taylar Robbins, Erin Greenside, Bruce Binkowski, Jan Thorne, and Sarah Bannon

President Becky Henne called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. We went around the room and everyone did a self-introduction.

Minutes – Jocelyn Dodge moved to approve and Maria Pochervina seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Public Comment – none

Financial Reports – Sarah had handouts with all the expenses for both accounts. As of August 31, 2017, the state account had \$6,365.57 in the checking account and \$66,251.87 in the money market account. The membership account had \$18,125.20 in the checking account. We had uncommitted rollover funds from the state of \$83,760. The money was apportioned on a handout to administration, marketing, video project, event program and new additions to the website. We also talked about other areas of interest. Jocelyn brought up a protocol for fires and what we can do to inform people of where to go. Sarah and Jocelyn will work on a draft process for this. We also talked about adding wedding information to our website and tours for ATV and snowmobiling. Maria moved that the rollover report be approved and adjusted as needed. Crystal Thorpe seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Crystal moved that the financial report be accepted and Maria seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Executive Director Report - Sarah said that information was sent out on the travel guide. A form for the calendar of events for the guide will go out and be due by the end of October. We had business to business meeting on international travel in Butte and Helena. Marlee Iverson from the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development and Chris Pillely, talked about how to work with receptive operators and tour operators. Maria expanded upon this. The next RMI is in April and in Kalispell. Registration opens on Monday, September 25th and is expected to fill up soon. Maria suggested that Sarah go this year. After some discussion Sarah will register for the Roundup and will take someone with her. Sarah said that tourism grants are due at the state on September 30th. She will give letters of recommendation where needed.

Call Center Report - Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout had a handout for the inquiry report. We had a 60% increase in inquiries over 2016 and an 88% increase over 2015. For June through August we had 4,963 inquiries. Yellowstone Journal Road Trip Sweepstakes brought in the most inquiries followed by Sunset Magazine and our Southwest Montana website. Most inquiries came from California, Texas and Washington. People were interested mostly in regional history and ghost town, wildlife watching and the Lewis and Clark Trail. Rebecca had also included several of the amusing questions callers had asked over the summer.

We discussed Tourism Matters, who are a group of various businesses, chambers, and tourism advocates, who educates and works with our lobbying group to help with our bed tax issues at the legislature. We have a developed work plan and it includes many stakeholders. The group is asking for a commitment of two years for funding. We have in the past put \$1000 of private money toward this every year. Dale Carlson moved that we

commit \$1000 for each of the next two years to Tourism Matters. Becky DiGiovanna seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. The motion passed unanimously.

Southwest Montana partnered with Dillon on a bicycling influencer. The project went well and Crystal had taken the lead on this. We acquired great video and blog information from the couple. The Adventure Cycling guide felt that Dillon could do well with an annual event for bicycling for 100-200 bicyclers. Becky DiGiovanna also welcomed the bikers to Virginia City and was on some of the video. Becky said that towns might want to consider offering places for people to lock up their bikes and gear so that they can visit attractions and restaurants without having to designate someone to stay back and keep an eye on their belongings.

Sarah gave a report on the spring and summer marketing campaign that Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative had sent over. All our digital performed above industry standards. Yellowstone Journal Sweepstakes brought in the most inquiries. Our biking segment performed less than our other niche markets. True West did well again for us.

Windfall made their debut with us. We had Erica McGowan, Taylor Robbins, Erin Greenside, Kyle McGowan and Megan Richter make their introductions. They discussed how they work together and apply their knowledge to their clients. They are working on a "Dig Deeper" campaign for us and will have a media plan to discuss at our next meeting. They gave examples of some of different forms of media that have really worked well for them.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies talked about our website and video. They are looking at the front page of our website and doing some AB Testing to track analytics to see what would be work well for this page. They have redesigned and simplified the newsletter. Mike will be out getting fall video and if anyone has a great place for fall colors please let us know. The last two weeks of October will have a lot of ghost walks and tours. We are in the works on a grant proposal to have high quality video on 65" screens around the region. We have partners all over that are willing to put money toward this and have the video set up in high traffic areas. We hope to know more at our November meeting. We only have a couple more partnerships available on this.

We had a draft outline for the community or corridor to work with us and Windfall. This will be discussed more at another meeting.

The National Park Service is working on a Lewis and Clark National Geotourism Map. They are looking for nominations for points of interest to be submitted. Sarah had a handout for everyone. Please submit your requests as this is a great opportunity to get free exposure for attractions, motels, restaurants, etc. Go to www.lewisandclark.travel to do a nomination on line.

We are looking for people to be on committees. Crystal and Anna volunteered to be on the membership committee. We are open for members to be added to our website committee.

For anyone wanting to do a letter of support for the Ultra High Definition System please let Debbie know: debbie@tempesttech.com

Our next meeting will be on October 25th at the Helena Comfort Suites. On November 16th, the meeting will be in Deer Lodge and on February 22 in Butte.

The meeting adjourned at 1:58 p.m.