

Southwest Montana
General Board and Membership Meeting
Minutes September 18, 2019

Participants: Kerri Kumasaka, Mike Strang, Bruce Binkowski, Linda Brown, Kari Gagner, Katya Peterson, Debbie Carlstrom, Andrea Opitz, Gay Rossow, Erinn Donnell, Becky DiGiovanna, Tia Metzger, Crystal Glueckert, Melanie Sanchez, Richard Krott, Jan Thorne, Anna Strange, Jocelyn Dodge, Maria Pochervina, Dax Schieffer, Sarah Bannon

Vice President Maria called the meeting to order and we went around the room and did a self-introduction.

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

Public Comment – several activities were discussed during public comment. We talked to Fay Najjar about the Jack Nicklaus Old Works Golf Course. The board was looking at changing the management company and it is a concern that the course maintains high quality maintenance of the world class course. A field hearing was to take place next week and Sarah will attend.

Dax Schieffer from Voices of Tourism thanked us for our support and gave us a quick update. He has been to several places around the region. We will add him to the agenda in one of the upcoming meetings.

Financial Report – Sarah had handouts for the report. From July 1 through September 17 we had a total of \$94,640.96 in expenses. Most of the expensed were for advertising. As of August 31, 2019, we have \$26,924 in our checking account and \$186,745 in our money market account. From membership we have \$25,979. Kerri Kumasaka moved to approve the financial report. Becky DiGiovanna seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Executive Director Report – Sarah reported that she is going to meet up with Rick Graetz to discuss the region and potential marketing ideas. She reported that there was a memorial and handed out the memorial program for Mike Steele who was instrumental in getting Gold West Country established. He also served as President for two years.

We are in the process of working on updating and getting ads for the travel guide. Sarah attended Senator Daines's Field Hearing for bringing people to the lesser known National Parks. We are working on TBEX and have two tours set up and have the swag for the symposium in Billings.

Inquiry Report – Rebecca Schmitz from Corporate Cost Control (MARS Stout) submitted a report. From Memorial Day to Labor Day in Southwest Montana we had 4,823 inquiries and sent out 6,596 travel guides. Travelers found us through the Glacier Country warm season co-op, Yellowstone Journal, southwestmet.com, Midwest Living. Inquiries came from Texas, California, Florida, and Illinois. People come to Southwest Montana for area history and ghost towns, wildlife watching, Lewis and Clark Trail and regional lodging. Becky said that the numbers are less than last year. Sarah explained that due to the large number of leads we are now qualifying them by sending a newsletter first to make sure they are interested in receiving a travel guide. When recipients open the email newsletter, we then send them a travel guide. We send a second email later to those that didn't respond to give them a second chance to receive the travel guide.

Lima Rest Area – Mike Strang reported that 323,000 travelers came through from January – August of 2019. Through extrapolation we can expect 450,000. Shawn Peterson has been supporting the video project to keep in cycling through the videos. It used to stop on Bannack but is now corrected. Katya explained that the display is different at Lima due to the space and placement available.

TBEX- the blogger symposium was a big success. We had four engaged bloggers on a trip from Whitehall – Boulder – Helena- Gates of the Mountains – Deer Lodge – Anaconda-Philipsburg-Butte. Another trip that the state did included Butte – Virginia City -Bannack. Information is coming in from the trips and posted on social media.

Photo Rights on Public Lands – Jocelyn Dodge from the Forest Service has been working on a rights agreement plan that Southwest Montana and our chamber can use for photos on forest service land. Leona Roderick and Jocelyn have shared wonderful new photos from the Forest Service that we can use. The big news for Leona is that she be retiring in December. She has been a great partner for Southwest Montana and will be greatly missed.

Travel Guide – we are in the process of updating, getting advertisements and listings for the travel guide. Mike Strang asked about the process of getting itineraries on the travel guide. He had a suggested route. Crystal is going to send out separate parts for the travel guide for people to review. (This will have to be for next year as we are too far into the process for this year. We will send this out in May of 2020.) The comment was made that more people in photos would be more inviting of visitors to the area. Next year we are to obtain more of these photos. Gay Rossow said that they have been trying to get the state to designate the Vigilante Trail as a scenic byway.

Media Plan – Tia Metzger from Windfall Studios gave us a media performance recap. Our geographic targets were Washington, Idaho, Alberta, California, Colorado, Oregon, Utah, Minnesota and regional drive markets. The target markets were repeat travelers to Montana, active mature/boomers; heritage and cultural enthusiasts, Glacier and Yellowstone national park travelers, and the niche markets of ghost towns, hiking, biking, and motorcycling. Tia had a recap of the current fiscal year performance.

Trip Advisor is a high value avenue for us. She would like us to do the joint venture with the state and drop the destination partnership. There is no more reporting on this, and Trip Advisor is doing a complete overhaul. We talked about a training for profiles for Trip Advisor at a meeting in January.

Media plan presentation – Joint Ventures included Sojern and Trip Advisor. Regional placements included Glacier Country travel guide partnership – two pages; banners and leads. Destination Missoula included a half page, Visit Southeast Montana Guide – two pages; True West Magazine included a two-page spread for February/March and for April. Consumer placements included The World Series Program, Yellowstone Journal, Oh Ranger, and Bird Watcher's Digest. Discussion took place and it was decided that we only wanted one page in the Glacier Guide and in the Visit Southeast Guide. Gay Rossow moved to approve the media plan with the changes. Jocelyn Dodge seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Marketing updates – Crystal Glueckert from Windfall gave some updates. They will present cover options for the travel guide at the October meeting. She reported that Garret Smith gave us all 185 images and they are on Barberstock. The Townsend Community Grant did a rebranding. They chose to update their current logo. They are creating a marketing plan to utilize for future usage. Mike Strang asked about the Corridor Project with Townsend. Crystal said that there has been some resistance on some things from Townsend. They want a strong foundation and want to focus on social media.

A question was asked about Far Cry. Sarah will call Allison from the film office at the state to get some more information

Website updates – Katya Peterson from Tempest Technologies - Our member intranet site has been updated and put in a responsive mode. The event form has been added to it. You can link to an event site on our website. They have worked on the prequalification leads which included sending out a fun interesting newsletter. If the letter was opened, we followed up with sending them a travel guide. They have been filming in Ennis for the Corridor Grant. They are also filming and taking photos in Virginia City over the Labor Day Weekend. The Lively Times is no longer submitting the events to the state. IT will be up to each person to submit their events and photos. Photos are strongly encouraged as they capture the viewers interest.

Fall Cooperative Marketing – The Butte Center for the Performing Arts submitted a cooperative marketing grant for the Mother Lode Theatre Series Marketing Campaign. The total budget is for \$14,000 and they are requesting a \$2000 match for the radio broadcasting. Discussion ensued on this and Mike Strang moved that the cooperative marketing grant be approved. Melanie Sanchez seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Other Business - Continental Divide Trail – Mike Strang reported that he has been working with hikers and cyclers since 2004. From what they can tell they had about 400 through the area this summer and next year the number is expected to climb to 1000. It would be nice to get the different areas involved for a meeting including Lincoln, Anaconda, and others. Adventure Cycling is willing to come to a meeting. Discussions would include information for major trailheads, facilities, solitude monitoring, wilderness registration. Sarah is to add the Continental Divide Trail to the agenda for the next meeting.

For the next meeting we will determine committees for the website updates and the map redesign.

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, October 22nd. (meeting will be in Dillon)

Meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.