

**Southwest Montana**  
**General Board Meeting - Townsend**  
**October 27, 2022, Minutes**

Participants: Participants: Shawn Conners, Rebecca Jones, Chiara Schober, Rebecca Schmitz, Andrea Opitz, Jeanette Kopf, Ross Johnson, Gay Rossow, Kay Rossow, Linda Brown, Katya Peterson, Melissa Mjelde, Mary Johnston, Tim Pool, Steve Hill, Vic Sample, Lynne Foland, Bruce Binkowski, Nancy Marks, Steve Hill, Sarah Bannon

Vic Sample welcomed us to Townsend. Edgewater Farms is open for us after the meeting – they have a corn maze, blow up bouncy fun, gift shop, and other things they offer are bon fires, concessions, slide, more fun activities for everyone.

**1. Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Rebecca Jones moved to approve the meeting minutes from the last General Board Meeting, Gay Rossow seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

**2. Public Comment** – Gay Rossow talked about the potential of a Chocolate Trail that we have been discussing the last year. Much discussion ensued on this, and Sarah, Kay, Gay, and Katya will begin discussions on this. Tim Pool had an example from Pennsylvania that will also reviewed for more ideas.

**3. Financial Report – Sarah**

- a. Sarah reported that the balance in the money market is \$831,535 and the general checking account has \$21,780. In the membership account there is \$24,065.82.
- b. We will have the audit in November.
- c. Ross Johnson made a motion to approve the financial report. Vic Sample the motion and it passed unanimously.

**4. Executive Board Report - Sarah**

- a. We are continuing work on the travel guide. Listings, ads, and events are now due.
- b. Ghost Map, Continental Divide Trail Map, and website; Film guide website
- c. Joint Ventures – We have a free Loel joint venture offered with the state. Katya Peterson helped shed light on the project She gave the Quick Basics of the Joint Venture:
  - Available to 12 Destination Organizations in the state through Joint Venture.
    - i. ANY visitor facing business under those organizations can participate in the joint venture.
    - ii. The goal is to improve business listings and therefore improve visitor experience and access to information. The Loel platform also provides a dashboard of analytics that may be a selling point for individual businesses and attractions.
    - iii. To pull this off, we will really need the help of the individual chambers to get in touch with businesses.
  - The State does have plans to integrate the improved google listings into their site. Loel offers an API that integrates with listings, and they are working on that now. This would be the reason Southwest Montana would consider the program.
  - Cousin's Candy, Visit Helena, the Dillon Chamber, and Discover Anaconda offered to test the program with our help.
- d. The Crown of the Continent needs to do another print.
- e. All the regions are working with the state agency, The Coraggio Group to come up with a Resiliency Plan for the next 5, 10 20 years. Our next November 17<sup>th</sup> meeting in Helena will include the Coraggio Group's stakeholders meeting. Please plan to attend and let them know your priorities, concerns, challenges and how we can set up a communication system to keep everyone up to date on potential issues (flooding in Yellowstone, pandemic, weather issues, housing and labor issues, economic issues, gas prices, and anything else you would like to address.) They will also schedule two Zoom calls for us that will cover the same material.

**5. Bylaws and Membership processes will be reviewed and updated over the next several months.**

**6. Website – Tempest Technologies, Katya Peterson**

- Katya presented clicked through stats on the “This is Montana” section on our website from Rick Graetz’s University Community Project and offered that if anyone saw photos on the section of the site that we have full access to share those images with members.

Information includes: This Is Montana section (<https://southwestmt.com/specialfeatures/this-is-montana/>) –This main page and each of the articles, has seen the following:

Total Website Views Jan 2022 - Oct 15, 2022, **14,748** Top 10 Pages Jan 2022 - Oct 15, 2022:

- The Continental Divide in Southwest Montana -2148 views 04:59 minutes
- Silver Star: World Class Service from the Middle of Nowhere- 1172 views 03:38 minutes
- This Is Montana (Home Page) 1143 views 0:52 minutes
- The Tobacco Roots - 565 views 3:37 minutes
- Helena the Capital Town - 503 views - 03:18 minutes
- The Richest Hill on Earth - 426 views 05:02 minutes

- Sheridan: Heart of the Ruby Valley - 417 views 03:53 minutes
- Big Hole: Montana's Big Hole Country - 385 views 05:10 minutes
- Missouri River from its Headwaters to Craig: This is Montana's Greatest River - 294 views, 04:47 minutes
- Blacktail Range: Southwest Montana's Blacktail Range - 221 views 04:42 minutes

Katya also did the following:

- Walked through the Film subdomain - [film.southwestmt.com](http://film.southwestmt.com). From this page she also played the homepage video. The missing piece was community contacts which was discussed.
- Recent Filming: Townsend Fall Fest, Edgewater Farms Corn Maze, and Canyon Ferry Brewing (3 videos that are in the works)
- Quick touch on the CDT, they have been working with the Continental Divide Trail Coalition and are re-routing that project to focus on the day/weekend users instead of solely thru-hikers.
- Ghosts - Blogs, highlighted haunted history in the last newsletter, and [Instagram Reel](#) featuring Dorothy Dunn at Hotel Meade in Bannack.

**7. Resiliency Plan – the state’s agency Coraggio Group will present to all of us stakeholders at our next meeting in Helena on November 17<sup>th</sup>.**

**8. Marketing updated – Lynne Foland, Windfall Studios**

Lynne showed the creative we use for our advertising. We are adding QR code for this. Sarah thought that the audience for the birding brochure wouldn't use this, but Jeanette Kopf enlightened us on how this group is using the QR code at the World Mining Museum and we decided to include it. We also voted to keep the QR code on the full-page ads in the middle of the ad for balance. People again loved the creative and Chiara asked if they could use the artwork as well. We will discuss this again and check on the potential for something like this.

Lynne presented the draft copy of the Ghost Tear-off map and we had much discussion on this. We have 23 locations and several ghost tours. Discussion took place on using paranormal of ghost for the tours. Rebecca Jones will collaborate with Milo Root from Bannack State Park on some more information on the ghosts there. Steve Hill will see if he can get more information on Red Gate.

Sarah will send out the draft Ghost Map for more people to get a closer look and offer updates.

**9. Call Center Report – Rebecca Schmitz, Experian**

Becky DiGiovanna from the Heritage Commission in Virginia City / Nevada City had sponsored a trip for Rebecca from the call center to the Brothel Days there. Rebecca had a great time and shared comical photos and encouraged everyone to go to Virginia City / Nevada City and enjoy the events and the Living History in Nevada City.

From January to September inquiry numbers for 2020 – 2022 were:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Inquiries</u>	<u>Travel Guides</u>
2020	2621	4233
2021	4762	8684
2022	9615	11121

- A. The top states the inquiries came from were: Texas, Florida, California, Wisconsin, Illinois, Washington, Ohio, Minnesota, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.
- B. Top interests were: History and Ghost Towns, Wildlife Watching, Lewis and Clark Trail, Area Hot Springs, Regional Lodging, General Family Activities, Hiking/Biking, Rock Hounding, Camping and Fishing.
- C. Top Sources: Yellowstone Journal, SW MT Website, Glacier Park, Parents Magazine, Previous SW MT guides, True West magazine, In-house EES Referrals, Brand MT publications, MDOT highway map, and Bird Watcher's Digest

Rebecca also presented fun questions from callers asking about attractions, events, directions, and such.

We are sad to say that Experian is getting out of the tourism industry. The state is out for RFP for a new call center. for a new call center.

**10. We broke for lunch prepared by the American Legion**

**11. Introductions and Announcements – Attendees introduced themselves and announced various activities in their area.**

**12. Andrea Opitz handed out the Southwest Montana maps of the mountains and rivers that were given to us by Rick Graetz. These maps are available to us at larger sizes as well. Sarah will send out a mailchimp with the map url next week.**