

**Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Via Zoom
February 23, 2023**

Attendees: Sarah Bannon, Bruce Binkowski, Linda Brown, Jocelyn Dodge, Rachael Elliott-Brug, Rebecca from Dillon, Lynne Foland, Kari Gagner, Lisa Garcia, Steve Hill, Jeanette Kopf, Andrea Opitz, Katya Peterson, Maria Porchervina, Erin S. Vic Sample, Melanie Sanchez, Rebecca Schmidt, Chiara Schober, Julie Schroeder, Dale Siegford, Dave Wyrick, and Kerri Kumasaka

1. **Meeting Minutes** – Maria Porchervina made a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting. Andrea seconded the motion and the motion passed.
2. **Public Comment** – None.
3. **Financial Report** - Sarah reported that as of January 31, 2023, there was \$120,710 in the checking account and \$481,826 in the money market account. So far we have spent only 21.23% (\$259,661) of what is budgeted. Also as of January 31, 2023, the membership checking account had \$23,442.07. Dale made a motion to approve the financial report. Bruce seconded the motion and the motion passed.
4. **Executive Director Report**
 - a. The Cooperative Marketing Grants are due March 15, 2023. Andrea asked if we might also have a September deadline for these grants. Looks like we can do this.
 - b. Sarah got a subpoena from the State regarding a legal case against Google.
 - c. The Call Center – Experian is pulling out of the tourism business so they will no longer be serving as our call center. This also means that Rebecca will no longer be working with the call center. The SWMT contract with them ends on February 25, 2023. A limited solicitation to the Chambers went out. If anyone knows of someone who would be willing to do the call center, let Sarah know. The deadline is March 25, 2023. A shout out to Rebecca was given for all her work.
 - d. The Governor’s Conference on Tourism will be held on April 23 to 25, 2023.
 - e. Calgary Travel Show is also coming up.
 - f. Rick Graetz continues to work on maps and community vitality program.
 - g. There are more changes at the Department of Commerce. Jan Stoddard is in a satellite office and Mitch Staley is the new communications/PR person.
 - h. Super Host Training. Phillipsburg is looking at doing a Super Host Training.
 - i. Anaconda becomes a CVB (Chamber/Visitors Bureau) in January 2024.
 - j. The Bed Tax numbers are looking good.
 - k. The State has a number of grants out there. Sarah sent information out about some of these.
5. **Call Center Report** - Rebecca said the ending date of the contract with the call center is actually February 28. She is available to help after she returns from vacation on March 6. Southeast Montana is going with Windfall as their call center.
 - a. Inquiries to the Call Center were: 21,560 in 2019. These dropped down to 2,621 in 2020. In 2021 there were 4,762 inquiries and 10,590 in 2022. The number of guides sent out were 25,954 in 2019, 4233 in 2020, 8684 in 2021 and 12,367 in 2022.
 - b. The top 10 states that inquirers were from: Florida, Texas, California, Wisconsin, Illinois, Washington, Ohio, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Montana

- c. The top 10 interests: History and ghost towns, wildlife watching, area hot springs, Lewis and Clark Trail, regional lodging, general family activities, rock hounding, hiking/biking, camping and fishing. (Rebecca commented that “Hot Springs” as an interest rose to #3 from #5 or 6. She commented that our area is one of the best for Hot Springs.
 - d. The top 10 sources: Yellowstone Journal, SWMT website, Glacier County partnership, Parents magazine, previous SWMT guides, EES in-house referrals, True West magazine, Brand MT publications, MDOT highway map and Bird Watcher’s Digest.
6. **Lima Rest Area Brochure Racks** – The racks don’t hold much. Even with the enlargement, they can only hold about 90 travel guides. Would like to have them hold up to 150 magazines. Someone is refilling them three times per day.
 7. **Cooperative Grants** – Deadline is March 15. We will be looking at them at the March 23 meeting at Pintler’s Portals in Anaconda.
 8. **Mission Statement and Vision Statement** – Jocelyn shared the Vision and Mission Statements:

Vision:

SWMT fosters the region as a premier destination supporting local economies through the promotion of distinctive experiences.

Mission:

Create collaborative marketing and development strategies to connect visitors to the richness of Southwest Montana’s natural beauty, recreational opportunities, culture and historical attractions.
 9. **Resiliency Plan** – Corragio Group is still working on this. They may call some of us to ask about our areas.
 10. **Fam Tours and Itineraries** – After the Rocky Mountain International Conference, 22 international tour operators will be touring the area. They will be coming from Missoula and staying at the Doubletree Inn. They have a choice of a Breweries and Brothel Tour in Helena, a tour of Boulder Hot Springs, going to Hidden Hollow Ranch or to the Buffalo Jump. They will also be having dinner at the New Confluence (with former governor, Steve Bullock).
 11. **Chocolate Trail** – Lynn Foland reported on the Chocolate Trail project. There will be a form going out to businesses. It is free to sign up. The businesses just need to provide little samples. There will be a map and people will get passports that locations will sign off on. This is not limited to chocolate candy. Rachel Elliott-Brug said she is trying to do a similar thing with a Montana Bookstore Tour. She stated that Montana has the most bookstores per capita. There are currently 18 independent book sellers.
 12. **Marketing Update** – Lynn Foland from Windfall gave an update. Windfall is working on the Ghost Map, Glaciers to Geysers project and a map for the Governor’s Conference. The travel guides will be coming out next month.
 13. **Website Update** - Katya from Tempest gave an update on the website and showed some videos that were made for the Holidays and for Valentine’s Day.
 14. **Locl Joint Venture with Brand Montana** – Katya said this is specific to Google business listings. Locl is a tool where it is easier to manage your listing. She encouraged people to update their businesses on Google. The Locl ap allows you to pull information more easily than Google My Business. It is free for us to sign up with them.

15. **Community Vitality Program** – This is the project Rick Graetz is working on. The Executive Board voted to continue to fund this project.
16. **Legislative Updates** – Some bills to be aware of: HB 430 – regarding short term rentals; HB 375 – to pave the road by Lost Creek. They want to take money out of the Dept. of Commerce budget; HB 766: On human trafficking; a Senate bill - taking money from Department of Commerce and putting it into a revolving loan fund for businesses; HB 586 – Fossils on State land; SB 349 – to develop an economic office in India; HB 591 – Regarding travel insurance; HB 425 – which would take bed tax money to reduce property taxes; HB 359 restricting businesses from doing drag shows.
17. **Elections** – Maria presented a slate of officers: President: Jocelyn Dodge; Vice President: Andrea Opitz; Treasurer – Julie Schroeder. Kerri made a motion to approve the slate of officers. Andrea seconded the motion and the motion passed. Maria asked if anyone is interested in the Secretary position. No one volunteered. She suggested that perhaps it be a shared position. Some other ideas were that maybe the person could get a free membership, free lunches at the SWMT meetings or a weekend getaway. The Executive Board will consider these options.
18. **Community Updates/Events** – people shared about events and happenings in their areas.
19. **Next Meetings:** March 23 at Pintler’s Portal Hostel in Anaconda. April 27 will be the brochure exchange. In May, there will be a Frontline Tour.