

**Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting
March 23, 2023**

Attendees: Sarah Bannon, Jocelyn Dodge, Maria Pochervina, Andrea Opitz, Callie Aschim, Linda Brown, Bruce Binkowski, Rachael Brug, Debbie Carlstrom, Lynn Foland, Steve Hill, Mary Johnston, Jeanette Kopf, Katya Peterson, Gay Rossow, Vic Sample, Melanie Sanchez, Chiara Schober, Julie Schroder, Julie Shelton, Mike Strang, Dave Wyrick

NOTE: The April meeting date was changed from April 27 to April 20.

1. **Meeting Minutes** – Callie Aschim made a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting. Andrea Opitz seconded the motion and the motion passed.
2. **Public Comment** – Rachael Brug announced she has been working on organizing a “Book Store Trail” across the state. She already has 16 bookstores on board.
 - a. Maria suggested that Rachael put together a budget for the project.
 - b. Sarah suggested that SWMT work with the other regions to coordinate the project.

Mary Johnston suggested that SWMT explore creating training videos for the tourism business workers. She thought that a series of 10-15 minutes videos would be a great way to ensure our tourism employees are most effective in working with visitors. It was suggested that 2 tiers of videos could be created:

1. Top Tier of covering regional tourism training
2. Second Tier covering local tourism.

Mary will chair a committee of Mary, Andrea Optiz and Maria Pochervina to explore the idea with Tempest.

3. **Financial Report** - There was no financial report this month.
4. **Executive Director Report**
 - a. Sarah Bannon, Jocelyn Dodge, Andrea Opitz, and Maria Pochervina attended the Outdoor Adventure Tourism show in Calgary and thought Calgary was a great host. One of the ideas that Sarah came away with was Southwest Montana Bags with the Southwest Montana Logo printed on them. The bags need to be environmentally friendly (i.e. no plastic). Sarah had a demo plastic bag with the Southwest Montana map.
 - b. Southwest Montana will, of course, be at the Governor’s Conference. We will have a 2-page map of the Southwest Montana region available for attendees at the conference.
5. **Call Center Report - Experian** has resigned as the call center for Southwest Montana. A solicitation for a new call center was sent out and the Butte Chamber of Commerce was selected to replace Experian. The contract with the Butte Chamber of Commerce is for one year with one-year renewals for up 5 years. The requirements were to man the Call Center Monday-Friday. It is up to the Butte Chamber to determine if additional staff will be necessary. Rebecca from Experian will help with the transition.
 - a. Year to date: there have been 5000 inquiries and 6000 guides sent out.
 - b. The top 5 states that inquirers were from YTD: Florida, California, Texas, Montana, and Wisconsin
 - c. The top 5 locations in the regions YTD: Anaconda, Butte, Helena, Virginia City, Deer Lodge

- d. The top 5 interests: History and ghost towns, wildlife watching, area hot springs, regional lodging, Lewis and Clark Trail Sites
 - e. The top 5 sources YTD: SWMT website, Yellowstone Journal, Glacier County partnership, SWMT travel guides, Parents magazine
6. **Lima Rest Area Brochure Racks – Mike** Strang reported that they are working on a new design for the brochure rack – the current rack does not hold enough brochures. Mike also stated that SWMT should look at replacing the old video monitor at the Rest Area.
- a. It was also suggested we should update the presentations and add audio.
 - b. We need to get a list of all existing monitor locations and determine if they are actually being used for SWMT presentations. Katya indicated they could take the list and verify the use of each monitor in the region.
7. **Chocolate Trail:** Gay Rossow reported that the Chocolate Trail start will be the Monday before Memorial Day. She is working on getting a list of all the stops on the Trail.
- a. March 31 is the deadline for enrolling as a Chocolate Trail participant.
 - b. Since federal grant money is being used, we cannot force participants to become SWMT members.
 - c. Philipsburg opted not to participate because they are concerned that the free samples would cause congestion in their already crowded store.
 - d. Gay is hoping to get 25 participants.
 - e. Announcement of the Chocolate Trail will be made in May.
 - f. Posters with maps will be created.
 - g. Paper “passports” will be used. There was discussion of the pros/cons of electronic tracking using geo-tracking.
 - h. We will evaluate using interactive maps with the Chocolate Trail
8. **Legislative Updates – As** of the March 23 meeting there were no particular legislative updates other than there is a fight for bed tax money. Sarah is continuing to follow the legislation. Since the meeting, SB 145 has resurfaced and Sarah is asking for member to help get the bill stopped.
9. **Marketing Update – Lynn** Foland from Windfall gave an update. Windfall is working on the Governor’s Conference and a 2-page map that will be in packets and emails. They are continuing to work on the Travel Guides and are working on the Chocolate Trail marketing.
10. **Website Update - Katya** from Tempest gave an update on the website and showed the “Things To Do In Helena” and “Yule Night In Phillipsburg” videos. Tempest will be filming more videos at Discovery Ski Area, Goose Bay Glass (Townsend) and the Grant-Coors Ranch. Katya also demonstrated interactive itinerary maps.
11. **LOCL Joint Venture with Brand Montana:**
- a. She demonstrated Google Locl (joint venture with Brand Montana) sites with interactive maps.
 - b. Katya can put together presentations for the region featuring interactive maps.
12. **SWMT Co-operative Grants:**
- a. SWMT had \$21,500 available in co-operative grant funds.
 - b. There were total requests of \$18,375.62.
 - c. \$3124.38 were left.
 - d. Sarah suggested that instead of having one grant period, that SWMT have 2 grant periods in March and Sept. Julie Shelton moved that SWMT have 2 grant periods and Julie Schroeder seconded the motion. The motion passed.
13. **Goals For Next Year:** Jocelyn Dodge stated that we need to set goals for next year (SWMT fiscal year runs July through June). She asked everyone to bring ideas to the April meeting.

- a. Jocelyn recommended hiring someone to work on Strategic Plan / being a Facilitator.
 - b. A ZOOM meeting will be scheduled to discuss goals; maybe a small meeting at the Governor's Conference
 - c. Everyone should send ideas to Sarah
14. **Community Updates/Events** – people shared about events and happenings in their areas.
15. **Next Meetings:** April 20 in Deer Lodge; this meeting will be the brochure exchange.