

**Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting
November 1, 2023
Boulder, MT**

Attendees: Sarah Bannon, Callie Ashim, Bruce Binkowski, Rachael Brug, Linda Brown, Becky DiGiovanna, Jocelyn Dodge, Lynn Foland, Mary Johnston, Kerri Kumasaka, Tia Metzger, Andrea Opitz, Brendan Pendergast, Maria Pochervina, Gay Rossow, Vic Sample, Elaine Schnell, Chiara Schober, Kathleen Torkelson

1. **Meeting Minutes Sept 23, 2023** – Gay Rossow moved to accept the minutes; Callie Ashim Seconded. Minutes were approved.
2. **Public Comment** – the Book Store Trail was not on the Agenda. Sarah asked Rachael Brug to give an update on the Book Store Trail as a Public Comment:
 - a. There was a great response from bookstores to an invitation to join next years Trail
 - b. There was a \$20.00 suggested donation; some stores donated more
 - c. Right now the event is a Seasonal Summer event due to tourism. Might look at extending to other seasons.
3. **Financial Report** - Executive Director Sarah Bannon presented the financial report.
 - a. Checkbook as of 10/31/23: \$39,464.56
 - b. Money Market as of 10/31/23: \$529,335.68
 - c. Membership Funds as of 10/31/23: \$30,097.07Callie Ashim moved to accept the Financial Report; Becky DiGiovanna seconded. Motion Passed
4. There was a discussion as to investing the Money Market funds. Gay Rossow moved; Callie Ashim seconded to:

Allow Executive Director Sarah Bannon to research short term bank cd rates and money market rates to determine if we should move money to another cd or money market based on interest rate and ability to access funds when necessary.

Motion Passed.
5. **Executive Director Report**
 - a. Sarah Bannon, Jocelyn Dodge and Maria Pochervina attended the Outdoor Summit. They reported it was an excellent event with very high attendance.
 - b. Sarah and Maria will attend the Travel Writer’s Group in Butte
 - c. Brand Montana has a strategic plan for Rural Tourism Development with a goal of getting people out of the most populated areas for visitation and relocation. Film grants, Agritourism and Rural tourism ready projects are the focus areas.
6. **Call Center Report** - Elaine Schnell, Maria Pochervina and Sara Bannon reported that there are still major problems with the phone system at the new Butte Call Center.
 - a. Inquiries to the Call Center: 8759 YTD
 - b. The September top 10 states that inquirers were from: California, Florida, Texas, Washington, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Idaho, Illinois, Ohio and North Carolina. Montana had the highest number of inquiries
 - c. The top 10 interests: Rock Hounding, History/Ghost Towns, wildlife viewing, Hot Springs, lodging, Lewis and Clark Trail sites, general family activities, hiking/biking, camping and fishing.
 - d. The top 3 sources: Glacier Country partnership, Yellow Stone Journal, Southwest Travel Guide

7. **Travel Guide Update** – Sarah is looking for photographs. She would like to feature pictures of Anaconda at Christmas. Sarah reported that we might have enough Travel Guides to get through February.
8. **Chocolate Trail:**
 - Over 20 tshirts/hats were given out to passport holders
 - Great response from the event. People that participated in the Chocolate Trail loved it but we need to get more people on the Trail
 - It was suggested that we look at a mix of paper and electronic passports in the future
9. **Strategic Plan:** Sarah talked about the importance of creating a long term SWMT Strategic Plan
10. **Website Update** – Linda Brown of Tempest Technologies gave the Website Update
 - There have been over 45,000 visits in 15 months.
 - The average session time was over 2:00 minutes – which is very good
 - There have been over 575,000 FB posts
 - They have been working on
 - You Tube Shorts
 - Local Stories
 - Goosebay Glass Video
 - Astrotourism and Star gazing
11. **Windfall** – Tia Metzger:
 - Gave the Performance Report
 - Presented the 2024 Media Plan
 - Asked for approval of the \$131,000 budget. Mary Johnstone moved to approve the budget; Becky DiGiovanna seconded. Motion passed.
12. **Customer Training Committee:** Mary Johnston reported that the “Tourism Academy” is on the Glacier Country website and has many of the modules we have discussed. The committee is looking into getting Southwest Montana on the Tourism Academy with additional modules for SWMT.
13. **New SWMT Position:** – The Executive Board met to review a proposal from Sarah for a hiring committee and approved hiring a Public Relations Manager to assist the Executive Director with increased job duties and a need to work more closely with southwest Montana communities and businesses. Jocelyn explained all of the tasks ahead of SWMT emphasizing the need for the new employee. The Executive Board discussed the Job description and job duties. Sarah received approval from the state TAC group to hire a new position. The draft job description was discussed on a zoom with several executive board members for comment prior to the November meeting. A comment received suggested matching the proposed position with the performance review of the executive director (Sarah Bannon). Comments to the suggestion included a concern with mixing a personal staff performance review with a new position justification. It was decided the need for the position should be based on current and future workload. A performance review will be completed for Sarah. Other discussion items included sustainability of the position should current approved future funding levels change. Sarah feels the position would be viable. A motion to move forward with the hiring was made by Callie Ashim; seconded by Gay Rossow. Motion Passed.

The meeting was adjourned.