**Meeting Minutes for**

**Visit Southeast Montana Board of Directors**

The **MISSION** of Visit Southeast Montana is to increase visitors to Southeast Montana by increasing awareness of our region, showcasing our cultural heritage, developing memorable experiences and educating our residents about the economic benefits of tourism. [www.SoutheastMontana.com](http://www.SoutheastMontana.com)

**January 16, 2019 – 10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.**

**Sleep Inn & Suites**

**Miles City, MT 59301**

**Board Members in Attendance:**

Jeff Ewelt, Lyn Ohl, Dennis Kopitzke, Dale Galland, Beth Epley, Glenn Heitz, Jessica Malone, Diane Murnion, Kevin Kooistra, Leslie Janshen, Machelle Curl, Peggy Iba, Sabre Moore, Shyla Hadley, John Laney

**Staff Present:**

John Brewer, Brenda Maas, Michele Flanagan

**Guests:**

Kristin Sackett (Windfall Studio), Alex Wardwell (Windfall Studio), Chris Dantic (MT State Parks), Tory Kalkhorst (Rep. Senator Steve Daines Office), Alyson Murnion (Visit Billings), Katy Easton (Downtown Billings Alliance), Steve Wahrlich (Best Western Clock Tower Inn), Melissa Rost (O’Fallon Museum), Casey Jones (Miles City Star), Marla Prell (Miles City Star)

**Welcome and Introductions:**

Meeting called to order at 10:02 a.m. Attendance and introductions made. John Laney welcomed the group and gave a short overview of Miles City.

**Public Comments:**

No public comments

**Approval of November 14, 2018 Meeting Minutes:**

Sabre Moore moved to approve, Jeff Ewelt seconds. No Discussion. Motion passed.

**Financial Overview:**

Brenda Maas gives financial overview, noting revenue over expenses is $8,026 over budget, with several larger media buys being paid out and the estimated budget ahead by a little over $2,000. Beth Epley moved to approve, Jessica Malone seconds. No discussion. Motion passed.

**Strategic Discussion:**

**Presentation on One Big Sky District**

Katy Easton of Downtown Billings Alliance presents and updates on One Big Sky District explaining the evolution of this now district wide project. The mission, vision and plan, and financial plan was shared, noting $650 million in private funds would ultimately have a $500 million fiscal impact on Montana. John Brewer shares the need of 10k planners who can’t come to MT due to lack of facilities and assures there is no risk. John Laney comments One Big Sky District will not only impact Billings, but rural MT as well.

**Marketing Update:**

Brenda reviewed the quarterly dashboard. Call center inquiries are still slightly below last year most likely due to web site challenges. Top state inquiries are Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, California and Florida. Social media has been flat with lower than usual numbers most likely due to alga rhythms and a now pay to play market. Travel guides have an April 1 ship date. Updates on advertising, creative, and marketing workshops shared.

**Strategic Goals:**

**Produce Quality Marketing Initiatives**

Alex and Kristin from Windfall update on media buys, travel guides, website and partner website. Kristin encourages co-op travel guide advertising sales and shows examples of website updates and partner website, noting the progress that’s been made, but also requesting board input. Board stated they would like to see grants, events and tourism information very accessible on the Partner site. Team Windfall also presented the SEMT video emphasizing the color will be richer on different screens. Overall the video was very well received, Windfall to get link to partners to imbed on their websites.

**Develop Marketing Partnerships…Outside the Region**

**Eastern Montana Tourism Partner Initiative**

Brenda and Jeff update on Eastern Montana Tourism Partner Initiative stating this will be a collaborative effort to develop sustainable solutions to declining bed tax collections with a commitment of MOTBD resources and $1.3 million allocated over the next two years. Dax Schieffer to facilitate a series of partner meetings that will be held in five different locations beginning in February 2019.

BREAK FOR LUNCH

**Grow In-Region Partnerships…to Connect to Constituents**

**Marketing Workshops**

Dates to be determined as Brenda is researching social media presenters.

**Letters of Support**

Brenda notes the three letters of support from SEMT on pages 14-16, and encouraged board to reach out if in need of letter of support.

**Governor’s Conference**

Brenda encouraged all to attend the Governor’s Conference stating the 2019 Tourism Awards categories for nominations opened Jan 15.

**State Parks**

Chris Dantic, park manager for Montana State Parks, spoke about Makoshika State Park and the many new programs/events it now has. State Parks partnered with Glendive promoting astronomy programs with a new brochure and worked with Windfall Studio to promote Medicine Rocks State Park.

**Support Tourism Product Development**

**One Big Sky District**

Presented earlier for timing, was part of Strategic Discussion.

**Request for Letter of Support for SB 24**

Christine Whitlatch requests board to consider a letter of support for bill SB 24. Currently a $6.00 State Parks tax is imposed, this would increase to $9.00 with an option to opt-out. Brenda encourages board to approve letter of support. Peggy Iba motioned to approve letter of support, Sabre Moore provided second. Motion passed. John Brewer suggests implementing a process for future letters of support, anticipating an increase. John Laney suggests executive committee to canvas which ones to bring before the board.

**Montana Night Skies Trail**

Brenda provided brief update that she is in conversation with (3) other regions (Central, Yellowstone and Missouri River Country) regarding the concept of a Night Skies Trail. She explained that Astrotourism (concept in which consumers travel to an area specifically to view night skies, participate in night skies events and the like) is considered a “Destination Development” program. She is working closely with Jan Stoddard.

**Committee/Task Force and Board Reports:**

**Ex Officios Recommendations**

Recommended to accept Mike Tranel of NPS, Chris Dantic of MT FWP, and Aly Murnion of Visit Billings. Leslie Janshen moved to approve and Glenn Heitz provided second. No discussions other than introductions. Motion passed.

Dale shared Nicole Borner resigned from the board and encouraged all to promote the vacancy.

**Legislative Update**

John Laney updates and expresses concern over two initiatives. One involving a bed tax increase, the now 7% increasing to either 8% or 10%, while leaving the 4% alone. Fears securing a hotel room will become too expensive. Second initiative of concern is airlines that fuel up in MT are given a 2 cent per gallon rebate. This rebate would no longer be available to airlines, with monies being allocated to small airports for enhancements and repairs. John Laney encourages board to really flush out any initiatives of interest due to lack of transparency.

**Grants Committee**

Brenda updates grant application for Roundup Independence Day Extravaganza (RIDE) has been approved for $2,000. Next deadline is March 1, with $8,000 remaining funds.

**Marketing Committee**

Sabre Moore shared update on the Marketing Committee, noting revised itineraries for the Travel Guide. She also shared information on fossil rights legislation.

**Other Announcements**

* Tory Kolkhorst: gave recap of Senator Steve Daines bipartisan bill to expand broadband to rural Montanans.
* Leslie Janshen: Miles City Chamber of Commerce’s Annual Banquet and Citizens of the year awards is Jan 17.
* John Laney: Miles City is still working on a new event center and Miles City to host the Museum Association of Montana Conference March 7-9.
* Kevin Kooistra: Updates on Western Heritage Center, noting the historic walking tours, programs and exhibits.
* Diane Murnion: Rosebud County has had more geese this season than normal.
* Peggy Iba: The GATE exposition will be held Feb 8-9 and the annual fair and Miss MT contest will be in June 2019.
* Aly Murnion: Gave a quick overview of TBEX stating it will bring in roughly 450 bloggers and encouraged board to reach out if interested in pre/post FAM opportunities.
* Chris Dantic: Busy wrapping up grants.
* Machelle Curl: Got married.
* Dennis Kopitzke: Forsyth has been working on an update on the historical brochure is planning to include some information on Silver Jackets High Water Sign Project.
* Shyla Hadley: Fallon County now has murder mystery/escape rooms and the Montana High School Rodeo Finals will be in June 3-8. Annual fair will be held Aug 15-18.
* Beth Epley: Repairs to Baker Lake are complete, encourages all to come and enjoy this summer.
* Jessica Malone: Powder River County Centennial and All School Celebration will be July 4-7.
* Glenn Heitz: Prairie County Museum and Evelyn Cameron Gallery are closed for the season. FWP predicts exceptional paddle fishing this coming season.
* Sabre: Tourism numbers were up in 2018, Reynolds Market burned down in December, Dino Shindig will be July 27-28, Feek’s Vision debuted in Las Vegas.
* Jeff Ewelt: ZooMontana attendance was up 36% in December, will participate again with another upcoming tour with San Diego Zoo. Sloth exhibit coming soon to ZooMontana.
* John Brewer: Encourages SEMT chambers to attend MACE (Montana Association of Chamber Executives), hosted in Billings on June 3-4. Grants could possibly offset registration fees, but if not, Billings Chamber of Commerce could possibly assist.
* Dale Galland: Amazon recently release a book, *The Kemptons: Adventures of a Montana Ranch Family, 1880-1964*. Prairie Unique will also be selling copies.

Meeting adjourned 2:30.

**Board Meeting Schedule**

All meetings 10 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted. All times subject to change.

April 17 (Roundup)

June 19 (Ekalaka)

Group was invited to visit Tongue River Winery.