

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

October 30, 2019 – 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Yellowstone Jewel Events Center
11421 Valley Dr. East
Miles City, MT 59301

Board Members in Attendance:

Jeff Ewelt, Dale Galland, Beth Epley, Glenn Heitz, Diane Murnion, Chip Watts, Sabre Moore, Randy Schoppe, Mike Tranel, Chris Dantic, Jessica Malone, Kevin Kooistra, Mabelle Curl, Vicki Leesburg, Lyn Ohl, Norma Trent, Doug Miles, John Laney, Alyson Murnion

Staff Present:

John Brewer, Brenda Maas, Michele Flanagan

Guests:

Kristen Sackett (Windfall Studio), Karen Miller (Big Sky Economic Development), William Trent

Welcome and Introductions:

Meeting called to order at 12:55 p.m. Introductions were made previously that morning for Visit Southeast Montana Board of Directors Strategic Board Retreat.

Public Comments:

No public comment

Approval of June 19, 2019 Meeting Minutes:

Chris Dantic noted in "Other Announcements" that he traveled to Washington DC for a MOTBD Marketing project. Sabre Moore motioned to approve the June minutes with noted change; Jeff Ewelt provided second. Motion passed.

Financial Overview:

John Brewer gave financial overview, noting revenue over expenses is \$115,886 due to an increase in lodging tax dollars and private funds raised by Brenda. Following the state lodging tax audit, the uncommitted state marketing funds will be applied to the 2019-2020 budget. Unrestricted funds were not needed to cover administrative expenses over the allowable 20%. The increased lodging tax dollars helped increase the SEMT Admin expenses. Mabelle Curl moved to approve, Beth Epley provided second. Motion passed.

Strategic Discussion:

Marketing Update

Brenda reviewed the quarterly dashboard noting social media numbers are down, most likely due to the end of paid social and touched on the number of travel guides actually being requested and the number of leads received from the call center. An email is still being sent to top market inquires offering guide information if wanted. Top state inquiries stayed consistent: Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, California and Florida. Top areas of interest are scenic driving, history and Little Bighorn Battlefield.

Brenda also notes the FY20 Marketing Plan has been implemented, she hosted a Dutch tour operator, 12 blog posts have been produced and E-blasted, has collaborated with MOTBD's Taste Our Place, Crow Fair aired on Special Cowboy Moments to 55 million households, episode of The Flush aired in September and gives update on TBEX, noting she hosted 5 pre-fams/42 bloggers, 1 post-fam/7 bloggers and had 38 speed networking appointments during the conference. Blogs are starting to be published, which Brenda shows some examples and expects a lot more to come. Brenda announces SEMT now owns EasternMontana.com.

FY 19 Audit Update

John gave an update on FY19 audit, noting \$82,438.26 in uncommitted tax funds on hand.

Revised FY20 Budget

John presented a modified budget for FY20, incorporating funds not yet committed after the FY19 audit. Budget includes adding a .5 marketing specialist position to the existing .5 position to become a fulltime position that is split between administration funds and marketing funds.

Jessica Malone moved to approve the increased position; Mabelle Curl provided second. Motion passed.

Brenda outlined additional FY20 budget additions using funds uncommitted after the FY19 audit. Sabre Moore moved to approve, Diane Murnion provided second. Motion passed.

Strategic Goals:

Produce Quality Marketing Initiatives

Kristen from Windfall recapped the FY19 media performance and updates on the website noting page views and visitors are down, mostly due to media buys ending. Windfall and Brenda have modified media placement for more consistent results. FY20 website goals include focus on SEO, improve copy and information, and identify specific projects to add depth to the website. Kristen presented the FY20 media plan. Glenn Heitz moved to approve; Beth Epley provided second. Motion passed.

Develop Marketing Partnerships...Outside the Region

Nothing new to report

Grow In-Region Partnerships

Letters of Support

Brenda noted the six letters of support from SEMT on pages 13-18 and encouraged all to reach out if letter of support is needed.

Support Tourism Product Development

Brenda provided verbal update on (4) projects funded through the Eastern Montana Initiative.

Committee/Task Force and Board Reports:

Grants Committee

Chip Watts provided update on VIC and cooperative marketing grants, noting that all VIC grants were awarded and (6) cooperative marketing grants were awarded in FY19 for nearly \$8,000. The revised process carries funds over into FY20, requiring recipients to submit completion report and supporting documents in order to receive funds. This process was revised for efficiency.

Nominating Committee

New Board Applicants

Recommended to accept the following Board applicants: Amber Malenovsky (Sleep Inn & Suites/Custer County). Sabre Moore moved to approve and Beth Epley provided second. Motion passed.

Ex-Officio

Recommended to accept Brian Smith (BLM). Sabre Moore moved to approve and Beth Epley provided second. Motion passed.

Chip also noted that Christa VanDyke resigned from her position as Executive Director of Glendive Chamber of Commerce.

Marketing Project Committee Update

Nothing new to report.

Other Announcements

- Jeff Ewelt: ZooMontana received Accreditation from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Only the top 10% of animal facilities in the U.S have this noble distinction. Due to bad weather 1,500 people attended Boo at the Zoo vs. the normal 5,000, but a win, nonetheless.
- Randy Schoppe: The Big Horn County Museum has a new exhibit that is showcasing artist from Big Horn County. Currently there are works from 22 artists who have lived or currently live in the county. We have seen a recent uptick in interest in the artist J.H. Sharp. We opened a new exhibit last year with 13 original works of Sharp. Three authors have since contacted us who are writing books about Sharp. One of those books is finished and in print. Written by Peter Hassrick and published by the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, WY, entitled *The Life & Art of Joseph Henry Sharp*. Sharp lived and painted on the Crow Reservation for a number of years in the early 20th century. The Big Horn County Museum has entered into talks to acquire a collection of restored WWII vehicles and armament (approx. 24 pieces), as well as build a new facility to house them.
- Chris Dantic: Three of my largest projects are moving along very well. The Makoshika Visitor Center elevator will be repaired in December. The sprinkler fire suppression system in the visitor center basement received a consultant and the project has already been mapped out and soon will go to bid. The campground waterline project also received a consultant. Currently looking at installing the waterline on the right side of the main road. A pumphouse will have to be added. It still needs to go out to bid so no timetable when this project will start. Other future projects include contracting to have commercial horse rides in the park for summer 2020, installing a yurt for camping and designating a hammock campsite. We are also considering installing an ice rink for this winter. Makoshika State Park peak season visitation received an all-time high with over 45,000 visitors. Medicine Rocks State Park also received a record number of peak season visitors with over 9,600 visitors.
- Diane Murnion: There have been a significant number of Antelope and Deer hunters around the area. The geese have arrived so I anticipate a bump in those numbers soon, as well. November 29 is the Chamber of Commerce Parade of Lights. Also held in conjunction with that event is the Festival of Trees sponsored by Rosebud County Health Center. It is the second year for this event, of which the proceeds go towards the needs of the Health Center and Nursing Home.
- Kevin Kooistra: These programs are all sponsored and free:

Thursday, November 21: 12-1

Program: Hazel Hunkins Hallinan: Montana Suffragist. Speaker Kevin Kooistra.
Sponsored by NorthWestern Energy

Friday, December 6: 5-8

Event: Open House Reception for the Montana Arts Council, 5-6 PM
Event: Artwalk, downtown Billings, 5-8

Saturday, December 14: 10-3

Event: Holiday Playapalooza: Family fun, old time games, music, story-telling, and Santa Claus.

Thursday, December 19: 12-1

Program: *Ethel Hays, Montana's famous cartoonist of the 1920s*. Speaker Lauren Hunley.
Sponsored by Boothill Inn & Suites

Billings's annual Holiday Parade: Friday, November 29, 2019, 7PM - The Holiday Parade is a long-time tradition for the Billings community to usher in the holiday season on the Friday after Thanksgiving. With families gathered for the weekend to eat and shop, the Holiday Parade is a great way to celebrate the season by joining the community to see over 100 floats decorated for the holiday theme with Santa riding as the parade finale.

- Norma Trent: The annual Christmas Stroll sponsored by the Roundup Chamber of Commerce and the Optimist Club will be Saturday, December 7th. It will begin with a lighted parade on Main Street at 5 PM with a fire truck and the Sheriff's department to bring Santa Claus to the Masonic Hall. The theme for this year is "Frosty the Snowman". Businesses are encouraged to be open, and "Shop Small" bags will be distributed to those businesses that desire them. Musselshell Valley Equipment will be open to vendors, as will the Masonic Hall. In the Masonic Hall, Santa will entertain children and there will be decorated trees to purchase, the basement of the Catholic Church will also be open for this venue.

Meeting adjourned 2:35 p.m.

Board Meeting Schedule

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

- Jan. 15 (Terry)
- April 15 (Billings)
- June 17 (Colstrip)