Sturbridge Tourist Association

*A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge*

**Regular Meeting**

 March 10, 2021 - 6:30pm

 Remote Meeting – Go to Meeting

**Members Present**:
Brian Amedy, Chair
Tom Chamberland, Vice Chair

Nick Salvadore

Dawn Merriman
Jeff Ardis

**Staff Present**:

Jeff Bridges, Town Administrator

Terry Masterson, Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator

**Meeting Open**

Chair Amedy opened the meeting at 6:31 p.m. by reading the disclaimer and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

\*Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting law, G.L. c. 30A Section 18, and the Governor’s March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number people that may gather in one place, this meeting of the Sturbridge Tourist Association will be conducted via remote participation to the greatest extent possible.  Specific information and the general guidelines for remote participation can be found on the Town’s website at <https://www.sturbridge.gov/town-administrator/pages/how-access-virtual-meeting>.  For this meeting, members of the public who wish to listen and or watch the meeting either online via the Town’s on demand video broadcast, on cable television on channel 191, or dial into the meeting at 774-304-1455, enter 1428# for the meeting number and 12345 for the access code.  (This phone number is only active for the public during public meetings).  No in-person attendance of members of the public will be permitted, but every effort will be made to ensure that the public can adequately access the proceedings in real time, via technological means.  In the event that we are unable to do so, despite best efforts, we will post of the Town’s website an audio or video recording, transcript, or other comprehensive record of the proceedings as soon as possible after the meeting.

**Approval of Minutes from February 10, 2021 Meeting**

BA asked that the February minutes reflect his suggestion that a sentence be updated with the new “Experience Sturbridge Like A Local” tagline. TC asked that the minutes reflect that there are 4 counters on the Trails and not every trail.

**Motion:** To approve Feb. 10, 2021 Minutes

 **By:** T. Chamberland **Second**: D. Merriman

**Call Vote: Yes:** Brian Amedy, Dawn Merriman, Jeff Ardis

**Vote:**  Approved 5-0-1

**Treasurer’s Report**

TM opened his report by reviewing the Excel STA Report.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Account** | **Avail 03/08/21** |
| Community Support | 30,000.00 |
| Marketing/Advertising | 45,494.00 |
| Benefits | 15,837.00 |
| Salaries/Wages | 23,649.31 |
| **Totals:** | **114,981.01** |
| **FY20 Encumbered** | **1,146.00** |

TM reported the status of the following financial items:

* Payment Processed: $5,900 from OSV for final payment to Break the Ice Media.
* Pending: $1,000 BOY Award to New England Seafood
* Future Expense: $1650 ($1800 Budgeted) for STR subscription & $250 annual membership to DCM.

There was some conversation about the $1,000 marketing award to Escape the Pike which has remained on the STA budget reports with an unexpended grant balance of $142.50. TM and TC discussed this. TM noted that he had reached out to the owner of Escape the Pike who said payments have been made in full. TM will be contacting the owner again.

TM contacted the owner of New England Seafood to resolve their unredeemed $1,000 marketing grant. They are most appreciative and will be working to spend their award with the guidelines for the grant.

**Treasurer’s Report Approval**

TC moved that the February 2021 Treasurer’s Report be approved.

**Motion By:**  Vice Chair Chamberland **Second:** Nick Salvadore

**Call Vote: Yes**: Amedy, Merriman, Ardis, Chamberland, Salvadore

**Vote:** Approved 5-0

 **Approval Annual Membership to Discover Central Massachusetts (DCM)**

 **Motion By:** TC moved to expend $250 from Community Support to DCM **Second:** Dawn Merriman

 **Call Vote:**  Yes: Amedy, Chamberland, Merriman, Salvadore and Ardis

 **Vote:** Approved 5-0

TM noted that a payment of $1650 would be processed to STR for their quarterly hotel occupancy reports.

**Discussion of STA Assistance Grants**

BA opened the conversation by noting that there would be 3 to 4 more applications arriving and that there should be an awareness that there are less dollars to grant these events. BA also noted that there should be a broader game plan that balances the funds available with the expenses for the web site, a potential purchase of the Visit Widget app, general advertising proposals and concerts on the Common. TC affirmed this message and noted the value of advance discussion. NS also agreed and suggested the value of assigning budgetary percentages to each spending category. DM also agreed noting that there could be unanticipated costs with the web site construction, yearly maintenance and hosting fees. TC mentioned the importance of selecting events to support that are generating hotel stays which offer more consumer spending than a day tripper would.

**Selection of Web Site Firm**

There was general conversation about selecting a firm to construct a Sturbridge tourism web site. TM briefed the Committee on the interviews with the firms of InThink, Sperling Interactive, Shields Design, Civic Plus and Connecticut Magazine. TM noted that the interviews were informative. The team of interviewers included Dawn Merriman with the STA, Alex McConnon with the Town Administrator’s Office, Recreation Director Annie Roscioli, IT Director Jeremy Jalbert and TM. TM commented that the committee had a strong consensus to select Sperling Interactive based on their positive interview, previous experience with several tourist towns in the Commonwealth and their cost of services which are in line with the STA budget.

Members of the STA reviewed the proposals from the bidding firms and also watched videos of their presentations. JA expressed his support for Sperling and noted that one firm was costly to retain. NS also felt that Sperling was a good choice. DM also voiced support for Sperling and concerns for the costs above the construction cost of $17,500 such as the $960 annual hosting fee. DM liked that Sperling would address the needs of a site to be mobile friendly, ADA compliant, and easy to update. BA also voiced his support for Sperling. He said that Shields Design made a good presentation but their costs were well above other bidders. TC commented that it appeared that everyone was interested in Sperling.

**Approval to Retain Sperling Interactive**

 **Motion By:** TC moved to retain Sperling Interactive **Second:** Dawn Merriman

 **Call Vote:**  Yes: Amedy, Chamberland, Merriman, Salvadore and Ardis

 **Vote:** Approved 5-0

**Additional Funding for the Web Site Construction**

TC commented that since the STA had previously allocated $15,000 for the web site he would like to propose that an additional $5,000 be allocated with $2500 dedicated to raising the $15,000 figure to $17,500 to equal the Sperling proposal. The remaining $2500 would set aside in a reserve to address any stranded costs with the web site development or operation.

**Approval to Increase Funding $5,000 for Web Site Construction**

**Motion By:** TC moved to allocate $5,000 from Marketing with $2500 to the Sperling Contract and $2500 to be set aside for stranded web site costs. **Second:** Dawn Merriman

 **Call Vote:**  Yes: Amedy, Chamberland, Merriman, Salvadore and Ardis

 **Vote:** Approved 5-0

**Retaining Open the Door, Inc for Assistance With Web Site and Itineraries: $4600**

There was general discussion about strengthening the social media messaging for Sturbridge. BA expressed his view that Chris Pappas with Open the Door can offer some good guidance. DM concurred. BA suggested that Chris be recruited to work on two new seasonal itineraries.

**Motion By:** Tom Chamberland to allocate $4600 in funding from Marketing and Advertising to Open the Door, Inc. which will include $1600 for web site development assistance and $3000 to author (2) seasonal itineraries

**Second:** Vice Chair Chamberland

**Call Vote: Yes**: Amedy, Merriman, Ardis, Chamberland ,Salvadore

**Vote:** Approved 5-0

**STA Funding Applications:**

The STA reviewed the following applications for assistance with comments noted below:

Herb Fest – October 2,2021

BA commented that Herbfest should calendar expenses to each fiscal year and explain whether ads have been spent already. Another question was to determine which expenses should be funded. NS commented that current times are financially challenging with less revenues for grants so applicants should be informed of these constraints.

Bear and Doll Show – June 27, 2021

BA and TC commented on an interest in seeing more details on revenues. It also appeared that hotel room generation was low.

American Artisans Craft Show – October 30, 31, 2021

There was general discussion about income and revenues for this event. NS commented that STA funding should be generative to help events become established and not sustaining revenues.

The meeting moved on to general conversation about the JC Penney space, an opening for Rapscallion, the Cinemagic closing and the Treehouse Brewery in Charlton.

**Next Meeting**

BA noted that the next meeting of the STA would be Wednesday, April 14, 2021 at 6:30pm.

**Adjournment**

**Motion By:**  Tom Chamberland  **Second:** Dawn Merriman

**Call Vote: Yes**: Amedy, Merriman, Chamberland Salvadore. Jeff Ardis

**Vote:** Approved 5-0