Sturbridge Tourist Association

*A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge*

**Regular Monthly Meeting**

Wednesday, April 13,2022 – 6:30 P.M.

**Members Present**:   
Brian Amedy, Chair

Tom Chamberland, Vice Chair  
Dawn Merriman

Sandra Gibson-Quigley

Nick Salvadore

**Guests:**

Chris Tieri, Chief Marketing Officer, Old Sturbridge Village

Rhonda Carges, VP, Break the Ice Media

Chris Pappas, Principal, Open the Door, Inc.

**Staff Present**:

Terry Masterson, Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator

**Meeting Open**

Chair Amedy opened the meeting at 6:33 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes : February 9th and March 9th**

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| **Motion:** | Approve: February 9, 2022 STA Minutes |
|  | BY: S Gibson-Quigley SECOND: D Merriman |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Amedy, Merriman, Gibson-Quigley, Chamberland, Salvadore |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 50 |

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| **Motion:** | Approve: March 9, 2022 STA Minutes |
|  | BY: T Chamberland SECOND: S Gibson Quigley |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Amedy, Gibson-Quigley, Chamberland, Salvadore **Abs**: Merriman |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 4-0 |

**Bus Tour Conversation**

Brian welcomed Chris Tieri (Old Sturbridge Village OSV) and Rhonda Carges (Break the Ice Media BTI) to talk about the overall experience they have had prospecting to generate bus tours to Sturbridge and OSV. Chris offered some history by stating that the effort to recruit bus tours was an initial effort In 2018 to see what result could be gained but when Covid-19 arrived in 2020 it was decided to maintain the cultivation efforts. Rhonda noted that BTI has been very pro-active in working to grow bus tour activity. Specific actions include contacting the Sales Directors who determine tour creation.

Rhonda also detailed the advance work required to work within the American Bus Association (ABA) network of contacts, meetings and their annual conference. This work entails researching which bus tour operators to seek out for interviews and to have a good awareness of what Sturbridge can offer a bus tour participants. As an example Rhonda cited informing Globus Tours about the Brimfield Winery. Rhonda noted that at the last ABA Conference she was able to arrange 42 appointments with 38 actual meetings with bus tour decision makers. This outreach generated 2 follow up meetings. One with Globus Tours and Jack Hall’s Alaska. There was also a visit to OSV by Tour Operator Lina DiCarlo on December 4 & 5, 2021.

Rhonda also announced that BTI would be acquiring Tour Alliance Partners (TAP) which is an organization that leverages contacts, information and data between tour operators and locations. Rhonda noted that although bus tours slowed in 2022 it was still felt that there was value in this form of travel. Tom discussed with Chris and Rhonda how Sturbridge can participate in this new TAP network to cultivate bus tours. Brian inquired about the degree of benefits that bus tours generate for Sturbridge’s local businesses. Chris responded that the Comfort Inn has seen some hotel demand.

A report on Bus Tour Activities for July 2021 to March 2022 detailed that in 2021 there were 49 bus tours with approximately 1553 visitors. And there are 24 bus tours booked as of April, 2022 totaling 1130 visitors. There was a general conversation among all about how to continue attracting bus tours to Sturbridge. Brian, Tom and Chris agreed that discussions should continue. Sandra affirmed the value of knowing the actual quantity of bus tour arrivals and bookings are. Tom made the following motion:

American Bus Association

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| **Motion:** | To continue the cultivation and recruitment of bus tours through the American Bus Association. |
|  | BY: T Chamberland SECOND: D Merriman |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Amedy, Gibson-Quigley, Salvadore, Chamberland, Merriman |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |

**Sturbridge Web Site Messaging**

Chris Pappas, with Open the Door listed out her plans to start administering the digital messaging efforts for the web site. These steps include:

1. Work on business cross promotions
2. Content development
3. Consumer survey after the MOTT marketing campaign
4. Using Google analytics data to gauge web site visits

**Summer Marketing Campaign**

Chris briefed the STA on the Summer campaign which will run from May 15 through August. The ad buys will start off with placement into the Albany Times Union Summer Travel Guide. Other venues will include:

* Boston.com
* Yankee Magazine and Yankee online
* Albany Times Union
* WCVB Stay N Play

Tom inquired about the value of New Jersey as a market. Chris responded that ad markets in New Jersey can be above the current budget. There was also discussion on the value of the Hartford market and the Courant. There was agreement that some members of the STA should review the final ad buys with Chris.

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| **Motion:** | To review and concur with the Summer Marketing Campaign ad purchases. |
|  | BY: T Chamberland SECOND: S Gibson Quigley |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Amedy, Gibson-Quigley, Salvadore, Chamberland |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |

**STA Membership**

There was a discussion on the efforts to fill the two vacancies on the STA Board. Sandra noted that it would be important to recruit a new member with hotel experience. Terry noted that the vacancies would be publicized through the Town Clerk’s web page for Boards and Committees and the Town Administrator would post the opening on the Town’s web site and Facebook page.

**Web Site Change**

Brian suggested that with the new tourism web site up and live that the Tourism section on the Town Web Site be archived.

**STA Budget FY 2023**

There was a general conversation about the FY 2023 STA funding amounts based on hotel tax revenues and the division of those funds within the STA budget. The current division of these funds as relayed by Finance Director Barbara Barry are listed below:

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| **Total:** | **$181,749.00** |
| Marketing & Advertising | $112,978.00 |
| Community Support | $29,000.00 |
| Salary | $31,471.00 |
| Benefits | $8,300.00 |
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There was general discussion about whether these amounts were fixed or could be adjusted or transferred. Brian affirmed that they could be. There was also conversation about the actual permitted uses for the Community Support. The definition below is taken from the STA Budget Report:

*This line item shall be for the sponsorship of events, the procurement of goods and services for an event, payment or installation of equipment and/or any other purchase, unrelated to marketing, that supports tourism in the town of Sturbridge. The purpose of this fund is to support the local tourism industry though, in certain circumstances, the STA may allocate these dollars to support community events if they believe there is an inherent benefit to tourism and/or tourist related businesses in town through the funding of said activity. This line item shall also go toward the funding of reports and studies necessary for the advancement of tourism in the community. However this does not apply to reports that focus on marketing as those are funded by the Marketing line item.*

Acceptance of FY2023 STA Budget Amounts and Categories

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| **Motion:** | To accept the FY 2023 Revenue and Budget Categories as offered. |
|  | BY: S Gibson Quigley SECOND: D Merriman |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Amedy, Gibson-Quigley, Salvadore, Chamberland, Merriman |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |

**Update on State Legislature’s “Earmark” for Marketing Sturbridge**

Tom briefed the STA on a conversation he had with Rep. Smola about the potential of obtaining up to $50,000 through the Commonwealth’s Massachusetts Marketing Partnership Fund. Tom indicated that Rep. Smola noted that the full process for securing these funds is one with many steps and approvals. Any proposed earmark will have to be a part of the entire budget approval process ending with the Governor’s signature.

**Trails Brochure Request**

Tom briefed the STA on the goal of printing additional trail brochures. Tom noted that the brochure inventory for Heins Farm and Leadmine were good. But there was a need for Plimpton Forest, River Lands and Long Pond Parcel. Tom noted that a request for funding with a print estimate would be forthcoming.

**Business of the Year Award**

Tom and Brian discussed the potential of encumbering the $4,000 allocated for the Business of the Year Award into the FY2023 STA Budget. There was discussion about advertising and promoting the BOYA program. Tom suggested that an ad be purchased on the Chamber’s Bulletin Board on Route 20.

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| **Motion:** | To purchase an ad placard on the Chamber’s Route 20 bulletin board at a cost of $75. |
|  | BY: T Chamberland SECOND: S Gibson Quigley |
| **Vote Record:** | Yes: Amedy, Gibson Quigley, Salvadore, Chamberland |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |

**Next Meeting**

BA noted that the next meeting will be Wednesday, May 11, 2022 at 6:30pm

**Adjournment**

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| **Motion:** | Adjourn Meeting |
|  | BY: T Chamberland SECOND: D Merriman |
| **Vote Record:** | Yes: Amedy, Gibson Quigley, Salvadore, Chamberland |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |