Sturbridge Tourist Association

*A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge*

**Regular Meeting**

# October 13, 2020 - 6:30pm

Remote Meeting – Go to Meeting

**Members Present**:   
Brian Amedy, Chair  
Tom Chamberland, Vice-Chair  
Nick Salvador  
Dawn Merriman  
Jeff Ardis

**Staff Present**:

Jeff Bridges, Town Administrator

Terry Masterson, Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator

**Guest:**

Chris Pappas, President, Open the Door Media

Chair Amedy opened the meeting and started by reading the following statement:\*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.

**Meeting Open**

Chair Amedy opened the meeting and introduced the Town’s new economic development and tourism coordinator, Terry Masterson. Terry thanked everyone for the appointment and noted that he looked forward to working together in the months ahead.

**Approval of Minutes from September 2, 2020 meeting**

**Motion:** To approve Sept. 2, 2020 minutes **By:** N.Salvador **Second**: D. Merriman

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

**Abstain:** Chamberland

**Vote:**  Approved 4-0-1

**Treasurer’s Report**

Vice Chair Tom Chamberland reported that he was processing or processed the following bills:

* The second phase work of Chris Pappas ($20,125)
* A bill for $6,600.00 from Old Sturbridge Village regarding their payment to Break the Ice Media
* A bill for $854.00 to Escape the Pike was paid.

Tom also noted that an advertising payment to Yankee Magazine would be credited against the third phase payment to Chris Pappas and Tom ended his report by noting that there were no community support items and very little expenses to handle.

**Approval of Treasurer’s Report:**

**Motion: By:** Chair Amedy **Second:** Dawn Merriman

**Roll Call:** **Yes**: Amedy, Merriman, Salvadore, Ardis & Chamberland

**Vote:**  Approved 5-0

**Report from Chris Pappas of Open the Door Media**

Chris noted that the media campaign is well underway in its 5th week with efforts to monitor and measure visitor “clicks” and viewership. Media outlets include WCVB-TV, boston.com, Yankee Magazine online and additional media buys through MNI to post ads on CBS, NESN and CNN Travel and 15 second spots on Web TV. Ad clicks on WCVB TV were 51% male and 49% women. A majority of clicks were in the age 25 to 44 age group with preferences for sports, food, drink and historic sites. Jeff asked Chris for a breakdown of the quantity and demographics of the Sturbridge ad clicks.

Brian asked Chris to offer any suggestions for the future. Chris responded that with the branding phase completed the next step is to place ads and messaging that builds awareness and generates visits to Sturbridge. Part of the awareness building is to improve the web site. Chris suggested the value of discounted hotel packages to encourage visitors. Brian noted that the owners of hotels in Sturbridge are a combination of locally owned and national chain brands which makes it challenging to elicit unified actions to attract visitors.

**Group Tour Update**

Brian briefed the meeting about the recent visit to Sturbridge by Paula Reynolds of American Tour Guides (ATG) USA. Paula’s reconnaissance trip was designed to assess Sturbridge’s potential to host small van tours and included visits at Table 3, Avelino’s, Cedar Street Café, Bird Store and an overnight at the Publick House. Brian started a conversation about responding to the ATG RFP and suggested that Terry start contacting Sturbridge hotels to encourage their participation. Dawn noted that some hotels may not be able to offer discounted packages and Brian commented that there are not many independent hotels in Sturbridge.

**New and Planned Sturbridge Developments**

Jeff Bridges reported on several town developments such as the newly opened Pine Lake RV Resort with capacity to host 327 RV pads and cabins. It was noted that this new park will host thousands of new visitors to Sturbridge and that the park will pay the hotel tax.

Jeff also noted that the Board of Selectman has asked him to research the use of outdoor heaters for local businesses during the coming cold months.

Dawn Merriman inquired about the proposed race track. Jeff Bridges noted that the racetrack is in the planning stages with the Board of Selectmen (BOS) having voted to sponsor a by-law that will include the track for consideration at the next town meeting. The BOS will also have to approve the track as well and a community host benefits agreement. There was discussion of a community letter recently mailed by the track ownership in which the potential of slot machines was raised but Jeff noted that the owner has ruled that out and that he would speaking more about the track this Spring.

Chair Amedy reported that BT’s Smokehouse will be opening a new outlet in Worcester and that Rapscallion was moving to Spencer but Tom Chamberland noted that this site will be for brewing and that Rapscallion was looking for a retail location locally. Terry Masterson agreed to contact the owner of Rapscallion to offer assistance.

Vice Chair Chamberland and Dawn Merriman exchanged anecdotal observations about the increased patronage at local trails as evidenced by parking capacity and occupancy.

**Upcoming Events**

Chair Amedy noted that Old Sturbridge Village was sponsoring a series of brief skits with period actors based on the writings of Edgar Allan Poe for the Halloween season called “Phantoms and Fire” which will take place on Wednesdays through Saturdays, Oct. 21-31, with three times for arrival at 5:00p.m., 6:00p.m., and 6:30p.m.

Chair Amedy also mentioned that the Town Recreation Department was sponsoring the first annual “Light Up Sturbridge” community decorating contest during the evenings of December 4, 5, 6, 11, 12 and 13 from 5pm to 8pm. This event will offer visitors a map of decoration locations to visit and participants may judge the best decorations as part of a contest.

**Business of the Year Award**

Vice Chair Chamberland raised the idea of resuming sponsorship of the Business of the Year Award as a way of recognizing and publicizing not only the winning businesses but to bring attention to all local businesses in the Town.

**Next Meeting**

Chair Amedy noted that the next meeting will be Thursday, November 12th.

**Adjournment**

Motion: To adjourn at 7:45pm By: Vice Chair Chamberland Second: Dawn Merriman

Roll Call: Yes: Amedy, Chamberland, Merriman, Salvador and Ardis

Vote: 5-0 in favor