Sturbridge Tourist Association

*A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge*

**Regular Monthly Meeting**

Thursday, September 15, 2022 – 6:30 P.M.

**Members Present**:
Nick Salvadore

Sandra Gibson-Quigley

Jasmine Bell

Peter Champagne

Chris Tieri

**Guests:**

Tom Chamberland, Sturbridge Trails

Fran Kefalas, Assistant Director, The Last Green Valley

Chris Pappas, Open the Door

Wendy Davis, Doll and Bear Show

**Staff Present**:

Terry Masterson, Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator

**Meeting Open**

Nick Salvadore opened the meeting at 6:35 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

**Conversation with Tom Chamberland**

Tom Chamberland, the former STA Vice Chair joined the meeting to review various issues pertaining to his current work on the Sturbridge Trails and tourism. Tom reviewed that 6103 people were counted by the trails markers for August 2022 which was less than last August. Tom also reviewed the Trail Guide which he said was running low and a new re-printed trails brochure. Tom suggested that the Trail Guide will be a candidate for re-printing next year. Sandra and Tom discussed posting these materials in the Library.

Tom reviewed the value of the $50,000 tourism grant from Rep. Smola and noted that he had briefed the new Town Administrator (TA) Robin Grimm about the 501 Main Street Project which will connect Main Street to the Grand Trunk Trail. Tom noted that the TA was supportive. Overall, Tom noted that Sturbridge possessed 30 miles of trails with a goal of 50 miles.

**Route 20 Parking Lot and Connection to the Grand Trunk Trail**

Tom and Sandra discussed the 501 Main Street potential project which would connect a town owned parcel on Route 20 with an planned extension of the Grand Trunk Trail. The vacant parcel would, if realized, become a parking lot so that visitor could park in a retail corridor to enjoy the trails and shop. Sandy asked what was approved at the June 2022 Town Meeting and Tom replied that it was to approve this vision.

**Conversation with Fran Kefalas, Last Green Valley**

Fran Kefalas, the Assistant Director or Last Green Valley (LGV) joined the STA meeting to review their operations and goals. Fran distributed LGV tote bags with inserted materials and noted that LGV stewards thousands of acres of open space from Connecticut into Massachusetts. 84% of their acreage is forest, farmland and working forests. Fran conveyed that these open acres are large tourism and economic development assets. The overall message is to “Come visit and spend local”.

Fran also reviewed LGV’s use of CTM, the brochure rack business. LGV has brochures distributed through the CTM network into MA, CT, RI and Boston. The cost is $4500 per quarter or $18,000 per year. Fran noted that the costs also included printing 25,000 Explorer Guides and 15,000 Walktober brochures. Sandra inquired about how STA can partner with LGV.

Fran noted that the “Taste of the Valley” fundraiser is an important event for LGV.

Sandra asked if STA could contribute a one time fee and Fran replied that this was possible with an October of December time to pay for this.

**STA Tourism Grant Request: Wendy Collins Doll and Bear Show**

Wendy Collins appeared to request funding support for her October 2nd Doll and Bear Show. Sandra inquired about how the Sturbridge promotional message is presented in her advertising. Wendy distributed mail in cards with the Sturbridge logo on them. Sandra also asked if a Sturbridge tourism sign could be installed at the show and Wendy agreed. Nick offered the view that the tourism grants were valuable for helping businesses start up or recover from a downturn but should not just be automatic annual renewals. Wendy pointed out that the costs of having her event at the Host had risen 50%.

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|  **Motion:** | To grant $2,000 to the Wendy Collins Doll and Bear Show..  |
|  | BY: N Salvadore SECOND: C Tieri |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Gibson-Quigley, Salvadore, Bell, Tieri, Champagne |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |

**Marketing and Web Site Conversation with Chris Pappas**

Chris reported that she was working on the consumer survey and encouraged everyone to submit content for social media postings and also suggest events. Chris also noted that itineraries had been updated as well. The results from the MOTT Grant showed that traffic had been driven to the web site. August was a quiet month but that September may be different. But much of the increased tourism spending was due to pent up demand as a result of consumer not spending during the Covid months.

 Discussion of Consumer Survey

Chris Pappas (CP) and Chris Tieri (CT) discussed the consumer survey. CT encourage a larger audience for a survey above 200. Chris agreed and said that the current participation levels were a start for continued growth

Web Site Visitors.

Jasmine noted that the tourism web site is not appearing at any high levels on Google searches. CP replied that Google measures activity in different ways but continued and increased cross promoting along with other efforts will generate healthy participation rates Chris also noted that the efforts to establish Sturbridge in the destination marketing arena has just begun. CT asked about the potential of Google Ads and asked about costs. CP said costs could be $500 per month.

Experience Sturbridge Link on Town Web Site

Jasmine inquired about the transfer of the link to the tourism web site from the top menu bar of the Town web site. Terry noted that he had relayed this question to the IT Director since Terry had arranged for the site to be positioned in this top position. The response was that another topic had been placed in the top menu bar but that this would be looked at again.

Business of Month

Jasmine suggested that a business of the month effort be undertaken which would be communicated through the web site and social media.

 30 Second TV Ads

CT asked about 30 second TV ads CP said it would be possible to order small ad buys with WCVB. CT also noted the new OSV “Asset Page” offering of photographs for public and business usage as an outcome from an OSV grant from MOTT.

New Photographs

CP suggested that an effort be undertaken to professionally photograph Sturbridge businesses, landmarks and attractions for the web site and other PR purposes. CT suggested a photo contest. Peter suggested a local landscape photographer named Jim Hennessey.

Newsletter

Sandra raised the topic of a newsletter. CP said that the strength, content and frequency of a newsletter was up to the STA to decide. CT expressed her view that more discussion would be worthwhile.

Workshop

CT suggested that the STA conduct a global conversation on marketing and the web site at the October meeting. Nick concurred and noted that with the opening of the web site complete there was value in identifying the next steps.

**General Discussion**

CT noted that after the Workshop there would be value in discussing the implementation of the goals for marketing and the web site. CT expressed her view that the Summer 2022 MOTT campaign merited some review of the campaigns viewership figures to see how effective it was. Pete asked how everyone viewed what Sturbridge’s “core businesses” were. Hotels? Restaurants? Specialty Shops?

**Budgetary Motions**

Payment to Open the Door for Web Site Services

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|  **Motion:** | To direct $11,250 to Open the Door for web site services for the months of July, August and September as originally allocated by STA in FY22.  |
|  | BY: S Gibson Quigley SECOND: P Champagne |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Salvadore, Gibson Quigley, Champagne, Bell, Tieri  |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |

Payment to New York Times

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|  **Motion:** | To expend $7540.00 to the New York Times representing the STA commitment to match 20% of the Summer 2022 $48,000 MOTT grant.  |
|  | BY: N Salvadore SECOND: S Gibson-Quigley |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Salvadore, Gibson Quigley, Champagne, Bell, Tieri |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |

 **Funding for Outdoor Banner Signs**

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|  **Motion:** | To allocate up to $500.00 to fund the purchase of two outdoor banners promoting the Town and the Experience Stubridge web site for use at the upcoming Harvest Festival and other future events.  |
|  | BY S Gibson-Quigley SECOND: P Champagne |
| **Vote Record:** | **Yes:** Salvadore, Gibson Quigley, Champagne, Bell, Tieri |
| **Outcome:** | Approved 5-0 |

**Next Meeting**

Nick Salvadore noted that the next meeting will be Wednesday, October 12, 2022.at 6:00pm