Sturbridge Tourist Association

*A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge*

**Regular Meeting**

 December 9, 2 2020 - 6:30pm

 Remote Meeting – Go to Meeting

**Members Present**:
Brian Amedy, Chair
Nick Salvador
Dawn Merriman
Jeff Ardis

**Members Absent**

Thomas Chamberland, Vice Chair

**Staff Present**:

Jeff Bridges, Town Administrator

Terry Masterson, Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator

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 by reading the disclaimer and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Approval of Minutes from November 12, 2020 meeting**

Addition to the November 12th MInutes

Before moving to accept the Minutes, Chair Amedy noted that the November minutes should include the Committee’s approval to authorize the Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator to approve and sign for budgeted STA expenses. The motion for this at the November 12th meeting was offered by Chair Amedy and seconded by Vice Chair Chamberland with the approval of the committee. Terry said this motion would be placed into the November 12th minutes and the form for establishing this will be filed with the Town Accountant.

Acceptance of the November 12th Minutes

**Motion:** To approve Nov. 12, 2020 minutes **By:** B.Amedy **Second**: D. Merriman

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

 **Absent:** Chamberland

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

**Treasurer’s Report**

Terry reported that he was processing or had processed the following bills:

* The second phase work of Chris Pappas ($20,125)
* The third phase of work for Chris Pappas ($8,575.00)
* 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.

Chair Amedy noted that discussions about the STA budget and its day to day balances have to be factored/debited against unexpended budgeted commitments such as:

1. $1800 for an annual subscription to STR, the hotel industry database
2. $15,000 budgeted for a new stand alone tourism web site
3. $5,900 for an unprocessed expense from OSV.
4. $1,000 for Sturbridge Seafood

Approval of Treasurer’s Report:

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

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

**Vote:**  Approved 5-0

 **Business of the Year Award**

Chair Amedy offered several thoughts and suggestions relative to the plans for a 2021 Business of the Year award program. He noted that Spring 2021 would be a good time to start the program with efforts focused on communicating with town residents to participate. Brian also suggested that Terry speak with Town Recreation Director Annie Roscioli for assistance with her department’s practices in contacting residents through traditional and social media outlets. Brian raised the possibility that limited budget funds may impact the traditional $1,000 marketing awards.

**EDTC Activity Report**

Terry briefed the members on development and tourism activity for the periods of November and early December. A memo detailing these activities is attached as an addendum to these minutes.

**Next Steps in Marketing for 2021**

Chair Amedy raised the question of what marketing initiatives can be undertaken for 2021. Terry responded that some, not all of the next steps would include the following:

1. Begin work on a new tourism web site by soliciting offers from web firms.
2. Work to select a consultant and develop a new site for this Spring 2021.
3. Review and analyze the proposals offered by Chris Pappas from Open the Door, Inc.
4. Establish some conservative revenue estimates for a marketing budget for FY 2022.
5. Work to forge a plan that matches revenues with marketing efforts.

Jeff Bridges (JB) expressed the view that in the short term construction on the web site should start now, that existing marketing dollars be saved for spending later in the new year. JB also suggested that some discussion should be raised to analyze what marketing services can be done more affordably in-house or by staff. Nick Salvadore supported Jeff’s comments by noting that he and his wife have provided Instagram messaging services to a local organization and can assist with local tourism messaging.

Jeff Ardis (JA) expressed his support for Chris’s memo with its sliding scale of services based on each task or function. JA also suggested that the marketing efforts be divided and analyzed by the categories of what is (a.) content (b.) graphics and (c.) mechanical and from there determine what needs to be done and by whom. JA also raised the potential that Chris Pappas could serve as an intermediary on some levels in steering and guiding future marketing plans and implementation and also submit potential web site firms to Terry for consideration.

**Next Meeting**

Chair Amedy noted that the next meeting will be Wednesday, January 13th at 6:30pm.

**Adjournment**

Motion: To adjourn at 7:45pm By: Dawn Merriman Second: Nick Salvadore

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

Vote: 4-0 in favor

December 8, 2020

**To:** Sturbridge Tourist Association

**Fr:** Terry Masterson

**Re: Monthly Review – November & December 2020**

This memo is comprised of the following topics:

* Business visits and outreach
* Business development assistance
* Regional Tourism
* Pan Mass Update
* Grant Application for Consulting Services
* Business License Renewals
* Sturbridge Tourism Web Site

**Outreach Meetings**

Outreach meetings and/or virtual calls continue on an ongoing basis. The following people, businesses and organizations have been contacted and/or spoken with:

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| --- | --- |
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| Chris Tieri, OSV | Conference Call with Chris, Dan Arndt, Mike McCabe  |
| Alex McNitt, Chamber Central South MA | Phone calls and emails. |
| Michael Harrington | Met in November at Publick House  |
| Maxine Carter Lome | Will meet on 12/11 |
| Cedric Daniels | E Mailed to meet |
| Dan Gonya | E mailed to meet |
| John Argitis G&F | Phone conversation on 12/8 |
| Dennis Leonard OFS | Zoom Call  |
| Courtney Grimes – Stur Metalurg | Called |
| Philip Moreau | Pine Lake RV Resort  |
| Kevin Kuros | Mass HOED |
| Kelly Arvidson | Mass Development |
| Courtney Grimes | Sturbridge Metallurgical |
| Oreste Varela | SBA Springfield |

**Business Development Assistance**

Sturbridge Host Hotel and Conference Center

The Host, as many know, is under new ownership and management. The Host has until Covid, remained a positive generator of visitorship, consumer spending, lodging occupancy along with meals and hotel tax revenues. An introductory meeting was held with the owner Yogi Patel and GM Russ Prentiss. Since that time two letters have been sent to Yogi detailing free assistance for financing and business planning. Another letter is being prepared identifying local and regional resources for marketing and advertising. The letters are designed to identify tangible resources and also convey our interest in strongly supporting the renovation and revitalization of the Host.

Complete Cold Storage

Complete Cold is working to construct an 80,000 square foot facility. They are engaged in discussions with our planning department and exploring local town tax incentives.

 Noble Energy

 Noble Energy is a Connecticut based company that constructs and operates full service truck service facilities.

Noble is also working with our Planning Department for site review and approvals. I recently sponsored a virtual call with Michael Frisbie, the CEO of Noble and the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center to explore possible incentives or subsidies for Noble’s planned EV charging stations for cars. On that note, Noble hopes to not only be a truck service facility but to showcase new and emerging electric cars as a form of clean energy usage.

**Regional Tourism**

There are a number of issues relative to regional tourism which are detailed below.

 Monique Messier, Director, Discover Central Massachusetts (DCM)

An outreach to Monique resulted in a very positive conversation in which Sturbridge was identified as an important tourism asset for the Central Massachusetts region. Sturbridge retains a seat on the DCM Board with the next meeting in January.

Regional Tourism Roundtable

A proposal was made to Monique for our town to arrange a Go to Meeting with Monique and Sturbridge tourism and hospitality stakeholders. This meeting would have value and would:

1. Introduce Monique to everyone and vice versa
2. Allow Monique to discuss what DCM is and will be doing into 2021
3. Permit us to brief Monique on what is going on in Sturbridge and also explain our marketing efforts.

DCM and Sturbridge Host and Conference Center

The conversation with Monique included discussion on the positive regional role that the Host plays as a conference and exhibit center alongside the Worcester DCU Center. Monique noted that the Host has been a strong parallel site for events that do not fit into the DCU Center’s larger size or if the DCU Center is full. This is important information for us to know.

**Pan Mass Update**

Susan Brogan of the Pan Mass Challenge had a very positive phone conversation with me last week. At this time, Susan has been contacting hotels and town officials to start planning a 2021 event. I sent you a Hampshire Gazette news article detailing their plans for a traditional but reduced ridership run in August.

**Grant Application for Consulting Services: “Local Recovery Planning”**

The Commonwealth has just announced a grant opportunity to offer towns help in stabilizing their business districts due to the current Covid impacts. Grant winners will receive the services of a consultants team. This program can offer Sturbridge a chance to engage their business community in a conversation about the future 12 to 18 months in identifying issues, tasks and projects that deserve attention and resolution.

While this grant program will not offer any direct grants to businesses, it may have some value in:

1. Bringing all stakeholders together for a common conversation
2. Identifying ways to help hotels, inns and conference centers as they seek to recover
3. Also working with small retailers and food service establishments on their recovery needs.

The timeline for applying is December 18th with consultant reports to be completed by June 2021.

**Business License Renewals**

Working with the Building and Health Departments on contacting 35 Sturbridge businesses for their license renewals.

**Sturbridge Tourism Website**

Work will begin on recruiting interested media firms to be interviewed for the creation of a stand alone web site similar to other tourism centered destinations. Chris has forwarded some potential candidates and Terry will explore additional firms as well. Terry and Jeremy Jalbert will conduct interviews.