Sturbridge Tourist Association

*A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge*

**Regular Meeting**

 January 13,2021 - 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

**Meeting Open**

Chair Amedy opened the meeting at 6:36 p.m. by reading the disclaimer and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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.

**Approval of Minutes from December 9, 2020 meeting**

Acceptance of the December 9th 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,

 **Abstain:** Chamberland

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

**Stageloft Theater Briefing**

Chair Brian Amedy (BA) adjusted the sequence of the meeting agenda in order to welcome Christine Taylor (CT), the Director of the Stageloft Theater. CT thanked the committee for the invitation and briefed everyone on the current status and future plans for Stageloft. Christine stated that she viewed the future positively with opportunities ahead. Their current location was not that large and lacked the AV IT infrastructure to operate optimally. 2020 was a tough year with a March closing due to Covid and their lease ended in December. The search for new space will be for indoor but also outdoor space for the warmer summer months. BA asked if CT had approached Old Sturbridge Village. Christine said there were no current contacts but there had been in the past which were not fruitful. BA reaffirmed that the STA was eager to help with any issues going forward. Tom Chamberland (TC) raised the potential that there might be federal assistance for Covid impacted theaters. CT affirmed this and noted that she was on a waiting list for a webinar session on the program. Jeff Ardis (JA) inquired whether Stageloft had a lease, own or shared space preference. CT responded that ownership was a preference long term with lease or shared space short term.

**Note:** A memo on the value and economic impacts of the Stageloft is attached to these minutes.

**Treasurer’s Report**

TM opened his report by reviewing the Excel STA budget. This table offers not only the current balances but the net balances minus allocated expenses.

|  |
| --- |
| **STA Budget Balances at December 31, 2020**  |
| **Account** | **Balance Dec. ‘20** | **Unexpended** |  **Avail 12/31/20** |
| Community Support | 46,226.00 | 1,800.00 | 44,426.00 |
| Marketing/Advertising | 51,003.00 | 21,900.00 | 29,103.00 |
| Benefits | 15,837.00 | (-$1,228.00 per quarter) | 15,837.00 |
| Salaries/Wages | 23,649.31 | (-$1,159.68 bi-weekly) | 23,649.31 |
| **Totals:** | **136,715.31** | **23,700** | **113,015.31** |
|  **Footnotes**The figures in Unexpended for Benefits and Salaries/Wages are quarterly or bi-weekly draw downs. |

TM reported the status of the following financial items:

* Paid in Full: Open The Door paid in 3 installments: $45,000
* Paid: $6,600.00 from OSV regarding their payment to Break the Ice Media
* Bill Due: $5,900 from OSV for final payment to Break the Ice Media.
* Bill Paid: $854.00 to Escape the Pike. Per TC.
* Pending: $1,000 BOY Award to New England Seafood
* Future Expense: $1800 for STR annual subscription

All of these financial items are factored into the STA Budget Balances Table above.

**Treasurer’s Report** cont’d

BA inquired as to the additional funds that were shown on the financial report, $16,471.00 in community support and $7,702.00 for Marketing.  Jeff Bridges (JB) stated that these were the remaining funds from FY 2020 and the Finance Department held them over in case there were unrecorded obligations.  They are not in the budget for spending.  However, Mr. Bridges went onto say given the potential revenue reduction for FY 22, we should look at seeing if these can be dedicated to FY 22.

TC commented that it was commendable for the Town’s accounting department to retain these funds and that more can be learned about this in the coming weeks. TC then offered the following suggestion for addressing the Treasurer’s report.

Treasurer’s Report

TC suggested that the Treasurer’s Report be reviewed for approval at the February STA meeting when more information on the revenue transfers will be known.

**Motion By:**  Vice Chair Chamberland **Second:** Chair Amedy

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

**Vote:**  Approved 5-0

**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. Some of the major issues are detailed below.

**Consumer Activity: Meals and Hotel Spending**

TM briefly summarized a Power Point analyzing the most current statistics on meals and hotel spending through the end of November, 2020. Some of the key points are:

* Meals spending declined 60% in Spring 2020 to $7M
* Summer meals spending rebounded 40% up to $10M
* Fall spending also rose 22% to $12M
* Meals spending for December onward may be lower until the Spring/Summer
* Hotel tax revenues for CY 2020 were down 50% from averages of 2016 to 2019
* Hotel room revenues for CY 2020 were down 49% to $8.7M from $17M in 2019.
* Room occupancy averaged 50% for 2020 but fell to 24% for the Fall of 2020

**Sturbridge Host Hotel and Conference Center**

BA briefed the committee on his recent visit to the Host. BA praised the renovation of the main lobby and the conversion of the sales office into an attractive conference room. A walking tour of the hotel revealed that hotel guest rooms were being refreshed. BA noted that Russ Prentiss, the GM had indicated that some conferences had been booked for the Fall of 2021. And there were hopes that smaller conferences would be returning in the year ahead. Alternatively, BA noted that the emergence of virtual meetings and conferences would potentially lower the quantity of traditional human events. TC supported this view by citing that his park trails association held its annual conference virtually. BA also noted that the Host may only be receiving requests for smaller events in 2021 and beyond. BA concluded by saying that the current renovations at the Host were not a major rebuild, that their efforts were a low scale renovation and that there was major work still to be done in the months ahead.

**Tourism Web Site**

TM briefed the committee on plans to construct a new tourism web site. See table below. TM noted that the interview committee to meet with bidding web firms would be TM, IT Director Jeremy Jalbert and Recreation Director Annie Roscioli. BA inquired if any members of the STA would like to participate in this process and Dawn Merriman (DN) agreed. Dawn cited her experience with hotels, lodging, tourism and pervious work on web sites.

TM reviewed a proposed time line for this project as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Task** | **Time Line** |
| Issue RFQ | Week of Jan 18th  |
| Interviews | Week of February 1st  |
| Review Bidders | Discuss with STA Committee on Feb. 10 |
| Award Bid | Week of Feb. 10 |
| Site Construction | February to March |
| Sea Trials | April |

TM noted that this timeline is a schedule and there may be disconnects to alter the process but this timeline should be workable and a web site should be operational by May or sooner. There may be value to test marketing the completed site in April to some focus groups and/or peers in the region. TC suggested that there were photographs available of Sturbridge to share for this web site. TM supported that by noting he has been taking photographs of Sturbridge and archiving them on the town web site so anyone can use them.

**Social Media (SM)**

BA noted that the Experience Sturbridge page deserves updating and that informational updates and other tourism information should be posted on town SM platforms. DM expressed an observation that perhaps managing social media is a part time to full time job. BA expanded on that to suggest that local academic institutions could be a source of student interns willing to help. TC suggested that the high school honor society could also be a source for talent. TM noted that outreach efforts to academic institutions would be worthwhile and that event information for the OSV Winter Walks were posted on the town web site when OSV informed the Town. TC noted that the 2019 -2020 Sturbridge Visitor Guide was still on the web site and that the 2020 -2021 guide be posted. This posting transfer was completed on Jan. 14th, the day after this STA meeting.

**Sturbridge Tourism Guidebook**

TM briefed the STA on communication from Global Design (GD) seeking to publish a new 2021-2022 Sturbridge Tourism Guidebook. TM noted that he would be having a conference call with GD on Jan. 14th. BA opened a conversation among STA members about whether a new guidebook should be published. DM and TC expressed value as did NS who noted that the guide could not be harmful. JA offered a mixed view. BA also asked for feedback about how many copies to order and what that cost would be. TM said he would proceed with communicating with GD, obtain information on pricing and content and report back to the STA.

**Next Meeting**

BA noted that the next meeting of the STA would be Wednesday, February 10th at 6:30pm.

**Adjournment**

Motion: To adjourn. By: TC Second: DM

Roll Call: Yes- Amedy, Chamberland, Salvadore, Ardis and Merriman

Vote: 5-0 approved