



Sturbridge Tourist Association

Regular Meeting - MINUTES

12 September 2018 – 6pm | Center Office Building | 2nd Floor

Members Present

Brian Amedy (BA), Chair; Tom Chamberland (TC), Vice-Chair; Nick Salvador (NS)

Members Absent

Jeff Ardis (JA) – excused.

Staff Present

Kevin Filchak, (KF) Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator

Guests Present

Sara Gallant (SG), General Manager of Baba Sushi; Stephanie Ramey (SR), President of Discover Central Massachusetts

1. **Call to Order** | BA called the meeting to order at 6:00pm with a quorum being present.
2. **Review of Previous Minutes – 15 August 2018** | TC noted that in the future, motions made by the Committee should be more specific and clearly indicate what money was allocated to. *TC MOVED to approve the minutes as presented. NS seconded. APPROVED 3-0.*
3. **Treasurers Report** | KF provided update and noted that the Town Accountant report was slightly different from the budget presented, but that he was working to correct any irregularities with the Town Accountant. *BA MOVED to accept the treasurer's report. TC seconded. APPROVED 3-0.*
4. **New Business** |
 - a. **Discover Central MA Presentation – Stephanie Ramey, President DCM** | SR representing. SR went over offerings of DCM that are zero cost on the DCM website. She highlighted articles on the website that are written by local businesses to help promote the area. SR explained that these articles will go out to the groups approximately 19,000 subscribers with an 18% open rate. She went on to state that their website has approximately 40,000 page views per month. She explained that the website has a special offers page and how the goal of DCM is to create itineraries for visitors. She discussed the event calendar, and BA

commented on the Event Calendar on the Town's website. TC asked about how to post on the website and SR explained how to use the page, citing the staffing challenges DCM has to identify events in the region and asking for Town/business assistance to support it. SR went into an extensive description and demonstration of the Visit Widget program that DCM is investing in for the region. SR concluded by discussing the funding challenges and benefits for DCM from the Commonwealth. General discussion on funding. SR described social media approach of DCM.

- b. ***Baba Sushi – Funding Request*** | SB representing. SB discussed the goal of Baba Sushi to bring more night life and entertainment to the Sturbridge area, explaining that they have brought live music to their establishment. She explained that for their last event they were able to bring to Town approximately 165 persons. SB detailed the challenges with hosting such an event with the need to hire extra staff, ordering extra food, etc. and that these events usually don't bring a profit for the business and their employees. Concluded by saying that they booked a lot of music and street side entertainment for this event. BA asked how many persons came to the first Fire and Ice event. SB said that they had sold over 100 tickets for the event. BA asked how the event was advertised. SB said that they utilize a third party vendor to help with their marketing and promotion, as well as word of mouth. BA asked if they had outreached to hotels, SB said no but again referenced their 11,000 followers on social media. General discussion on promotion with the local hotels. SB talked about the various demographics of their patrons stated that visitors come from several of the surrounding states to eat at Baba Sushi. TC asked if this event was promoted on the Town Event Calendar, KF confirmed it was along with other events at the beginning of the month. TC expressed concerns that the event would not draw tourists and that they would not assist the hotel/motel tax revenues. He also stated that this type of request had never before been heard by the STA. NS asked what the ticket bought. SB said that a lot of free food and drinks are handed out which is where the costs are complicated. She said that Baba Sushi wants to make an event that is financially beneficial, citing the restaurant's new goal to donate to a local charity daily: more sales equal more donations she explained. SB explained how they are coordinating with other local businesses on promotion. NS said that the goal of the town is to broaden the recognition of the restaurant and the Town beyond their current group. NS asked if this event is not profitable why continue it. SB said that they do this to help support the Town. BA said the main purpose of the committee is to bring revenues to the hotel/motel tax, but that the committee also supports local businesses and expressed the challenge with supporting this event. General discussion on supporting this event. *TC MOVED to allocate \$500 out of Community Support to help support Baba Sushi's Fire and Ice event.*

NS seconded. APPROVED (3-0). General discussion about the event, KF explained funding procedures.

5. **Old Business** |

- a. **STA Policy Update** | KF provided update on the changes that had been made to the policy as per the notes from the 15 August meeting of the STA. *TC MOVED to accept the STA Funding Policies and adopt them as of 11 September 2018. NS seconded. APPROVED 3-0.*
 - b. **STA Application Review Worksheet** | KF provided overview of the new STA summary worksheet and the STA Evaluation Worksheet. *TC MOVED to approve the STA evaluation worksheet as last edited 11 September 2018. BA seconded. APPROVED 3-0.*
6. **Farmers Market Update** | KF provided brief update on the Farmers Market. He noted that it had become known recently that the Committee could not be listed as a Sub-Committee of the STA as had been the motion at the May meeting. However the committee could be listed as an Ad Hoc committee. KF provided a brief that the Farmers Market Committee was looking to become a formally recognized sub-committee under the Recreation Committee in the near term. KF would provide updates as they become available.

7. **Economic Development & Tourism Coordinator Report** |

- a. **Business Breakfast** | KF provided update and plans for the 25 September business breakfast as well as the challenges with getting businesses to participate in said breakfasts. General discussion on the lack of attendance and members discussed potential ways in which they can encourage participation.
- b. **Community Bonfire** | KF provides general overview of the event.
- c. **Sturbridge Express** | KF provides overview of the *Sturbridge Express* and talked about slowly increasing ridership. He also stated that the Business Advocacy Group was coming in under budget and thus considered extending the program by another six weeks, so long as (A) there are no objections by the STA and (B) that the BAG can get more support from local businesses. There was general discussion on the costs, the return on investment week to week, and the shuttle brochures. No members expressed a desire to remove funding from the group but to let the BAG continue for the time being. TC

suggested that the STA's annual report should reflect the challenges with getting businesses to participate in these types of programs.

- d. **Discover Central MA** | KF stated that he was working with DCM, potentially taking the former Town Administrator's position on the Board of Directors.
 - e. **First Impressions** | KF stated that the program was now underway and visits are now occurring.
 - f. **Marketing Efforts** | KF provided copies of the marketing campaigns that the STA are running in Yankee Magazine and Worcester Magazine.
 - i. *Yankee Magazine*
 - ii. *Worcester Magazine*
 - g. **Winter Fest** | KF provided brief overview of the potential Winter Fest event in Sturbridge he is working on coordinating with Recreation Department.
 - h. **Newsletters** | KF provided links to the newsletters.
8. **Next Meeting** | KF noted that the STA had requested a joint meeting with the Special Events Committee and he would arrange that for their October meeting. Members decided to meet on 24 October.
9. **Adjourn** | BA MOVED to adjourn the meeting. TC seconded. APPROVED 3-0. Meeting concluded at approximately 7:30pm.