



Sturbridge Tourist Association

A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge

Meeting Minutes

12 June 2019 – 6pm – Center Office Building

Members Present: Brian Amedy (BA); Tom Chamberland (TC); Jeff Ardis (JA)

Members Absent: Nick Salvador (NS)

Staff Present: Kevin Filchak (KF); Jeff Bridges (JB)

Guest Present: Alix McNitt (AM)

1. **Call to Order** – BA called the meeting to order at 6:05. A quorum was present.
2. **Review of Previous Minutes – 22 May 2019** – TC MOVED to approve the minutes as printed. BA seconded. APPROVED (3-0).
3. **Treasurers Report** – KF provided update and noted that there was an issue in the Community Support line item, a \$45 discrepancy that had been detailed in the reconciliation to the Town Accountant. TC asked if there were any concerns with overspending, KF said no as the Visitor guide came in under budget so the previous months concerns were mitigated. BA asked if KF had had the opportunity to follow up with the Town Planner regarding the Tourism Line Item; KF said he did not but that he would. This led to a brief discussion on the possible costs under the Tourism Line Item. AM asked about the new wayfinding signage and if the old street signs would be removed, KF said no as those were either state/safety signs. **TC MOVED to approve the financial report subject to the resolution of the \$45 difference. BA seconded. APPROVED (3-0).**
4. **New Business**
 - a. **Chamber of Commerce – Funding Applications – Second Review**
 - i. **GeoFest** – BA began by noting that the application is for an event that will take place in FY2020. AM started her presentation by addressing a point made at the previous STA meeting that the STA was not acknowledged in the Chamber's Annual Report, AM noted that they were in fact recognized. TC stated that his comment from the previous meeting related to the Chamber's financial report not general recognition. AM provided an overview of the event as well as its history. She explained that with the closure of a similar event in the Berkshires, Sturbridge was getting those patrons; stated that currently ~250 have expressed

an interest in coming to GeoFest. AM concluded by detailing the various partners that GeoFest works with. TC explained that the STA is asking more questions now of applicants, specifically data requests, and that it's the goal of the STA to help events become sustainable. AM noted that the reason that GeoFest does not collect data is resource related. General discussion amongst members and AM regarding how participants register and third party role of Geocaching website and the rules that it mandates geocaching events must follow. BA asked for a detailed breakdown of Chamber's request, AM detailed and explained the following: \$290 for Geocoins, \$900 for t-shirts, \$400 for website, \$400 for path tags, \$50 cache cards and \$1,600 for swag. BA asked if event is operating at a loss; AM responded that if labor is factored in yes, but that it was known by the Chamber that this event would not be a revenue generator. BA discussed the challenges with having this event between fiscal years and asked why some events are taking place outside of Sturbridge. AM explained event has always taken place in multiple communities and that the Chamber is trying to keep event fresh. BA explained that the STA goal is to support Sturbridge businesses and the event currently is not a large overnight tourism draw. BA stated that he'd like to wait to see how the 2019 event goes before supporting the 2020 event. The members had a lengthy discussion about soliciting information and data with hoteliers. AM detailed potential ways in which they could solicit data leading to a general discussion on solicitation of data and challenges therein. AM explained that the reason for the early request is to begin promotion for 2020 as early as possible. JB asked how many geocachers are expected to participation, AM said ~500, JB asked how many caches are in the vicinity of Sturbridge, AM said ~200. JB asked if it would be possible to solicit hoteliers now so that data could be collected for 2020. Lengthy discussion on how such a collection could occur, concluding with KF suggesting that he and AM coordinate on such an endeavor. JA asked if delaying approval would put event in jeopardy, AM noted there would be some exposure and that the Chamber would not promote the event until funding was approved. General discussion amongst members of whether the STA should fund event as benefactors or as start up funders. **TC MOVED to approve from FY2020 \$800 from marketing and \$500 from Community Support for the initial funding for the GeoFest in 2021.** TC noted that this would be initial seed money for the event. JA asked if this event would be used to gather information leading to general discussion. **BA seconded. APPROVED (3-0).**

- ii. **Harvest Festival** – JA asked AM if it could be agreed that the Harvest Festival brings fewer overnight stays. AM acknowledged that many will be from the initial area, but stated that some do stay overnight. AM explained that not every patron comes to the Chamber's booth at the event which would be the best way to collect data. General discussion on overnight stays. TC discussed vendor overnight stays, AM noted she has anecdotal evidence to that effect but can ask for more detailed information. TC asked about annual vendor counts, AM noted that it varies year to year for a variety of reasons. TC asked about marketing to

potential vendors, AM noted that vendors usually find the Chamber and explained how they select vendors. General discussion amongst members regarding the request. JA asked KF to provide breakdown of STA funds over previous years which KF provided. JA asked what the profit margin has been for the Chamber, AM explained that profits have been consistent and past costs. General conversation about the former "Tastes of Sturbridge" event and the institution of food trucks. JA asked if there was any difference in attendance with the food trucks and AM said there was not. BA noted that the advertising is on the local market and AM noted that the Chamber advertised in other markets when funding available. **TC MOVED to approve from FY2020 the amount of \$4460 from Community Support and \$3300 from Marketing for the Harvest Festival for 2019.** Brief discussion in which BA noted that he was comfortable with supporting Community Support allocation not Marketing. **TC WITHDREW his original motion and TC MOVED to allocate \$4460 from Community Support for the Harvest Festival in 2019. JA seconded. APPROVED (3-0).** BA explained that he believed as the Chamber is making a profit is should be responsible for marketing the event and because it's a community event. TC questioned the need to market in the immediate area, but was concerned about cutting funding entirely. **TC MOVED to allocate \$1,200 for marketing to support the event. No second was made, MOTION FAILED.** JA said that since there was a lengthy discussion for GeoFest and that the members had supported the idea of approving funding based on true need. General discussion on parliamentary orders. With no motion, discussion was closed by BA.

AM asked members about the RFP proposals that were before the board, KF provided overview of the RFPs. General discussion on proposals. AM asked if with the RFP the Chamber should be conducting promotional efforts for the town. KF explained that the STA was coordinating with Discover Central MA for a yearlong campaign, leading to a general discussion. TC encouraged AM to stay connected with KF to be up to date on the campaign. AM explained the capabilities of Mass Live. AM left meeting.

5. Old Business

- a. **RFP Discussion** – KF explained the current status of the RFP and explained the timeline. JA questioned the rapid timeline, leading to a lengthy general discussion on timeline. Members agreed to make the due date for the RFP 15 August to allow for more applicant responses during the summer.
 - b. **Business Recognition Program – Update** – KF had no update for the committee at this time.
6. **EDTC Update** – KF provided update. Regarding Route 15, TC asked about max building size, general discussion on that.

7. **Correspondence** – BA noted the email from Connie Pion at the Publick House regarding potential IAATO visit. Members did not support funding group, but BA noted CP should get credit for working to fund the event but no support at this time.
8. **Next Meeting** – 10 July next meeting. Brief discussion on that evening's approvals to Chamber of Commerce. Members discussed how to ween folks off of funding. TC said unlikely group would ever stop funding, but JA said that it difficult to imagine that they cannot find another sponsor. TC noted that the Publick House which runs the scarecrows has not sought funding previously. BA provided history of STA's funding Harvest Festival. Members discussed local Chambers Commerce.
9. **Adjourn** – BA MOVED and JA seconded to adjourn the meeting at 8:17pm.