



Sturbridge Tourist Association

A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge

Meeting Minutes

14 August 2019 – 6pm

Center Office Building – 2nd Floor Meeting Room

Members: Brian Amedy (BA); Tom Chamberland (TC); Dawn Merriman (DM); Jeff Ardis (JA); Nick Salvador (NS).

Staff: Kevin Filchak (KF), Economic Development & Tourism Coordinator; Jeff Bridges (JB), Town Administrator.

Guests: Nathan Hardt (NH), OSV; Sarah Blackwell (SB), Break the Ice Media (BTI); Rhonda Vaccaio (RV), BTI; Chris Tieri (CT), OSV; Gary Zima (GZ), Hamilton Rod and Gun Club (HRGC); Kevin Soucie (KS), HRGC; Diane Galipeau (DG), Gatehouse Media.

1. Call to Order – BA called the meeting to order at 6pm and welcomed Dawn Merriman as the newest member to the Sturbridge Tourist Association.
2. Approval of Previous Minutes – 10 July 2019 – **BA MOVED to accept the minutes as written, NS seconded. APPROVED (3-0-2).**
3. Selection of Chair / Vice Chair for FY2020 – BA explained the goal of filling the position of Chair and Vice Chair. **TC MOVED to reappointed BA as chair. NS seconded APPROVED (5-0). BA MOVED to reappointed TC as Vice-Chair. NS seconded. APPROVED 5-0.**
4. Treasurers Report – KF noted purchases. TC asked about encumbered. **TC MOVED to accept the Treasurers Report. BA seconded. APPROVED (5-0).**
5. New Business
 - a. Funding Request – Old Sturbridge Village – Second Review – [Discussed third] BA welcomed the presenters and noted that due to his close contact with OSV he would yield his chair to TC for the discussion. CT explained BTI's history and why they were chosen as the destination marketer for OSV; an audit showed that OSV was lacking in digital marketing, but also in connecting with tour bus companies. CT noted that it was not in the budget this year to undertake such an initiative, hence their request to the STA. CT explained the benefit of this project to the town as a whole. CT said the goal is to build relationships with businesses, and explained that their request has been altered

from their original proposal. CT detailed the staff position that would be started at OSV for this project and BTI's role specifically about its sales reps. RV explained how their business to business process worked, stating that Sturbridge would benefit by talking about professional development. RV shared an example of Cayuga County, a client of theirs. RV explained their proposed positioning and messaging strategy. RV said they would create a one page itinerary sheet and an e-newsletter for those tour operators who are within a ten hour drive time of Sturbridge. CT explained that the village had done an attitudinal segmentation that showed the Village audience consisted of history buffs, family focusers, hands on learners, and guide groupies. RV talked about lead generation process for getting to these groups. JA asked why traffic had been dropped over the years. CT asked BA who gave background of bus tours in Sturbridge, noting that people stopped putting the effort into the process. CT talked about Discover Central MA and noted their interest to participate. RV said that the Publick House is brining families tours to town. RV said there's a lot of similar communities to Sturbridge at these trade shows and if one does not have contacts with vendors then it makes bringing tours difficult. RV explained more of the lead generation and specifically the trade and travel show referenced in the bid. CT explained that the next steps, inviting community partners to the Village to have community bonding/brainstorming sessions for building relationships. RV said she'd be a resource for businesses. JA asked if this would be the Community / Tour Readiness and CT and RV said yes. General discussion on tour readiness. CT said she spoke with OSV and looked at an 18 month commitment to the program, reducing their ask this fiscal year to \$12,500 and the same amount requested in FY 2021. OSV would invest \$25,000 of their own in the project during this period. DM asked about average age of the visitors; RV said the average age was seniors/baby boomers but that millennials are bringing their parents on the tours more. DM noted that elderly tours are decreasing using town as stopover vs. destination. General discussion. TC noted previous campaigns in norther New England were not strong and asked about international travel. RV said international travel is very lucreative and competitive, said that will be something to look at eventually. TC brought up trails as another area to sell Sturbridge, he also brought up need to bring student groups; RV agreed and said that it is another lucreative market. NS asked about how allocations would work with fiscal years and TC explained. General discussion on budget. TC noted he appreciated the decrease but until the amount for the RFP is known, he is hesitant to commit funds. KF asked if delay would be problem for OSV, CT said no. JA said he was pleased with the presentation and plans, and would like to connect the chosen RFP vendor to this project. CT said they can position themselves with whomever is selected. RV said group is based on collaboration. **TC MOVED to defer a decision to August 28th meeting. NS seconded. APPROVED (4-0-1).** BA noted that all positions at the Village must work together and be on the same page for this to be a success. [NH, SB, RV, CT left the meeting].

JA brought up KF cautions in Cover Memo. BA said that his theory is that they went to the Board and got some buy in from the Board of Director who will help to fund this proposal. General discussion on funding of this program and the staffing of the OSV question. JA asked if KF has any lingering concerns, KF said staffing for event. BA said that STA should also be at the table during any discussion. General discussion on

collecting data and sharing data with the RFP vendor. BA also raised the point of OSV being closed and having a bus group. JB noted that Monday's may be a slow day and that it may be something that could be opened for these bus groups. General discussion on the hotel rooms at the village and overflow to other hotels. General discussion on bus group size. BA suggested asking JA's question, "Do they really have someone on staff now, or are they willing to bring someone on from outside?" "What do they do when the Village is closed?" General discussion on tours.

- b. Funding Request – Gatehouse Media – Frist Review – [Discussed first]. DG present to speak on behalf. Explained that the campaign would be \$500/month with 50k views and would run September – December. DG went over the campaign results from the STA's spring campaign, noting that the campaign went very well. NS asked about the industry average and DG explain averages. TC asked about the recent purchase by Gatehouse media of Gannet, DG said that there won't be any significant changes in Central MA but new opportunities may open. TC asked if this gives new opportunities, DC said no decisions made yet. General discussion on the merger and the opportunities they could yield. TC noted that there has been a good relationship with Gatehouse but that with the RFP this year it makes the decision challenging. TC would prefer to make a motion to table this for now, BA echoed that same sentiment. JA asked if a digital program could be put together quickly, DG said yes. JA asked about targeting in previous campaign, KF said that cities in New England were targeted. JA asked for more targeted data to see if the STA needs to tweak the zip codes, DG said yes that it possible. **TC MOVED to postpone a decision to the Sept. meeting. BA seconded. APPROVED (5-0).** [DG left the meeting].
- c. Funding Request – The Big MOE – First Review [Discussed second] – GZ and KS representing. KS explained the request. KF explained the purchase from previous years. JA asked why the cost of insurance went up. KS and GZ noted that there have been incidents at other clubs, but not at the Hamilton Rod and Gun Club. GZ explained the activities at the event and why people are cautious with these events. BA raised the question of whether the STA should cover the insurance cost of the event, noting he would be more comfortable covering another cost for the event, noting that the insurance was removed from the Herbfest. TC recalled the debate, and he noted he had used the STA's scoring sheet and there was some missing information, saying the application lacked detail. TC asked if the HRGC could better track information about people staying at the Big MOE for more detailed data point. General discussion on data from the Big MOE and discussion on hotels. DM talked about how the Comfort Inn tracks the event. TC noted he is in favor of supporting the request this year but next year would be interested in covering something else at the event. General discussion on other events at the HRGC, KS talked about the Reinheart Archery event in recent months. BA talked about getting event to KF for increased promotions. KS talked about the recent car shows. **TC MOVED to allocate \$5,467 from the Community Support line item to support the purchase of insurance for the Big MOE subject to the Town of Sturbridge being listed as an additionally insured party on the policy. DM seconded. APPROVED 5-0.** [GZ and KS left the meeting].

- d. Request for Proposal – Opening of Technical Proposals – [Sturbridge Procurement Officer JB was present for opening of RFPs]. KF explained the RFP process, noting 20 had applied. TC noted for proposed methodology, members think about how many questions are left after reading each proposal, for social media, think do they have it or not. JA suggest that points should be justified for each proposal, TC explained that this will come into play once price is considered. KF said all things must be justified. TC asked about those not being justified, KF said read everything and score. NS said that he has scheduling conflict; group suggested moving date to 8/27 so that he could be present for the vote.

BA opened the technical packages for the RFP in full view of the STA and the Chief Procurement Officer, JB. The following were recorded as submitting their proposals on time and correctly.

- i. Blue Seed Solutions
- ii. Strategic and Creative Marketing
- iii. Avant Marketing
- iv. Sperling Interactive
- v. Open the Door
- vi. Mass Live Media / Advance Travel and Tourism
- vii. Field Goals US
- viii. Direggio
- ix. Hub Collective LTD
- x. Artyfact
- xi. Innovative Planning
- xii. Contrast and Company
- xiii. Guide
- xiv. Stebbings Partners
- xv. Paul Fahey
- xvi. DCI
- xvii. O'Neill and Associates
- xviii. Engage Strategies
- xix. Chandlerthinks
- xx. Hemsworth Communications

Members received a copy of each bid for personal review over the following two weeks.

6. Old Business – None.

7. EDTC Report – KF encouraged members to review on own time and to ask questions if any via email or phone.

8. Correspondence – KF noted that the TLGV had send a thank you letter to the STA for their donation to their upcoming annual event at the Publick House.
9. Next Meeting – 28 August 2019 at 6pm – moved to 27 August at 6pm.
10. Adjourn – **BA MOVED to adjourn at 20:35. TC seconded. APPROVED (5-0).**