



# Sturbridge Tourist Association

*A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge*

## Meeting Minutes

9 October 2019, 6:00pm

Center Office Building, 301 Main Street, Second Floor Meeting Room

**Members Present:** Brian Amedy, Chair (BA); Thomas Chamberland, Vice-Chair (TC); Jeff Ardis (JA); Dawn Merriman (DM)

**Members Absent:** Nick Salvador (NS)

**Staff Present:** Kevin Filchak, Economic Development and Tourism Coordinator (EDTC), (KF); Jeff Bridges, Town Administrator, (JB)

**Guests:** Maxine Carter-Lome, Weathervane Enterprises (MCL); Jeff Lome, Weathervane Enterprises (JL); Christina Pappas, Open the Door (CP); Stephanie Ramey, Discover Central MA (SR)

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1. **Call to Order** – BA called the meeting to order at 6:03pm with a quorum being present.
2. **Review of Previous Minutes – 11 September 2019** – *TC MOVED to approve the minutes. DM seconded. APPROVED (4 – 0).*
3. **Treasurer's Report** – KF provided update, noting that the Town was now evenly splitting the EDTC salary between the STA and Town budgets. *BA MOVED to approve the treasurer's report as written. TC seconded. APPROVED (4 – 0).*
4. **New Business**
  - a. **Funding Application – Weathervane Enterprises** – MCL spoke for the application. She noted that the event is working to have sixty antique dealers from the New England region fill seventy spaces at the Host Hotel for this event. MCL said that she is hearing from vendors that they remember the previous iteration of the show fondly and are excited to have it come back. MCL noted that they have managed to recruit approximately eighty percent of the previous show's vendors to come back. Their goal is to have 750 to 1,000 participants at the event and to reach that number they are conducting digital and print campaigns. MCL said they are working with Discover Central MA for said promotion. BA noted that MCL had come before the STA in the spring and it had shown enthusiasm for the event. MCL noted that the request is to cover the cost of the contract fees at the Host Hotel. TC asked that MCL provide a copy of the agreement with the Host, leading to a general discussion on the hotel. JA asked about exhibit fees, MCL explained the vendor fees as well as the entry fees for patrons (\$8 advanced, \$10 day of). MCL noted that she had a food commitment with the Host Hotel. JA asked about previous attendance levels and MCL said that their 750 – 1,000 person goal was in line

with previous attendance levels. General discussion amongst members on overnight stays. TC asked about STA recognition in advertisements, MCL said that with updated branding it would be in print and digital adverts. TC asked that a budget be provided in the post event evaluation for this event. General discussion on data collected from the event and where the adverts are being posted. JL asked if the STA would like information on the dealers as well and the members agreed that would be helpful. General discussion on the value of the show and its long term value. *TC MOVED to allocate \$4,000 from the Community Support line item to support Weathervane Enterprises' 2020 Antique Show at the Host Hotel. JA seconded. APPROVED (4 – 0).*

- b. **Introductory Meeting – Open the Door, Inc.** – CP represented. BA provided introduction and notes that he and KF had recently met with CP to go over the project. Members had a general discussion on stakeholders for CP to contact for project. Members made general introductions. CP noted that her first step is to meet with key stakeholders with the goal of identifying common threads amongst them of what is working/is not working in town. General discussion on Open the Door's (OTD) process for the project, with CP noting some of her company's work with other Commonwealth communities. JA asked about OTD's work with the Publick House and CP explained that project. CP explained her background and her interest in the central Massachusetts region. JA noted that he was interested in having OTD build a consumer database, CP said that it could be done, then using that database for year on year growth and planning. JA asked for an overview of the next sixty days. CP said that she will begin conducting research and will start scheduling calls with stakeholders. She is getting a timeline from her consumer researcher for the project and finally will begin secondary research. She explained that after the next sixty days, the design and planning phase begins. CP noted that her team is meant to be an extension of town staff. Members had a general discussion on the coordination of efforts and on the list of stakeholders. TC asked if the list of stakeholders should be limited to Sturbridge businesses, or businesses that services Sturbridge. Members felt that the current stakeholder list was good for the time being. KF asked if CP had any questions for the committee, CP had none.
- c. **Marketing Campaign Update – Discover Central Massachusetts (DCM)** – SR represented. SR reviewed their efforts with Sturbridge sponsored content on their website and in *Yankee Magazine*. SR went over the page views for the content, and said that between the two sponsored content pieces the campaign has seen 55,000 views with 1,500 clicks. SR noted that the STA is included in the 40,000 visitor guides published in the fall. SR said that Sturbridge does really well in the Yankee publication and another campaign is forthcoming, which will require discussion. SR noted that a photographer is coming out over the Columbus Day weekend to document the fall foliage and to visit some businesses. SR reminded members that, as per the contract, they are able to give away a few memberships to DCM. KF reminded the committee of its previous work to tie a business of the year award to the free membership and suggested putting that as an agenda item next month. SR explained that she will be hosting a Small Business Saturday program in the near term and asked that the STA help with promotion of it. TC asked for a list of businesses that would not be able to qualify for DCM membership

leading to a general discussion. SR suggested to the STA that it develop an editorial calendar for promotion, and reviewed the DCM event calendar. She continued by explaining that DCM is going to be working with Break The Ice Media (BTI) to help improve DCM's public relation efforts; she detailed the goals of BTI in this process. SR explained that DCM's widget has approximately 25,000 users and has been helping planners. She is encouraging towns to build their profiles on the widget. She explained that DCM has been working to develop itineraries for groups and branding them. SR noted that website traffic for DCM is hitting 100,000 page views, up seventy-three percent with new users comprising over 80% of that increase. SR continued with an overview on online articles noting that Sturbridge is well represented. SR provided overview of DCM's social media. She explained that they will be doing a push for meeting planners in the near term. BA raised 508 International leading to a general discussion on that business. General discussion on the Town's hotel occupancy rates. SR explained the new organizational chart for DCM. BA noted to CP that the Town is not only trying to get people to visit Worcester, but to have Worcester people come to Sturbridge. General discussion on the regional approach to tourism. SR asked that the STA survey where there are gaps in their photo library.

d. **Funding Request – Trails Committee**

- i. **Trail Guide** – TC provided a brief overview of the project, and noted that not enough money had been encumbered the previous year to cover the costs of the project. *BA MOVED to allocate \$40 from the marketing line item to cover the difference for the purchase of the new Trail Guides. JA seconded. APPROVED (3 – 0 – 1 [TC abstained]).*
- ii. **MassCor** – TC said that the trail committee is participating in more events and would like to purchase shirts they can wear to help promote the town as said events. *BA MOVED to allocate \$220 from Community Support to fund the Trail Committee's purchase of polo shirts. DM seconded. APPROVED (3 – 0 – 1 [TC abstained]).*

KF noted that with DM being a new member of the STA, she had not received an STA polo and that the committee should consider allocating funds to make that purchase. *BA MOVED to approve \$15 from Community Support for an STA shirt. TC seconded. APPROVED (4 – 0).*

5. **Old Business** – BA noted that there will be a meeting with Break the Ice (OSV's media consultant) on November 14<sup>th</sup> to discuss the Village's bus tours project previously approved by the STA. BA said members are invited to participate in said discussion.
6. **EDTC Report** – KF provided members with a brief update on his work since the previous STA meeting.

7. **Next Meeting – November 13<sup>th</sup>** – Members asked that the next meeting feature a discussion of a 'Business of the Year' award. General discussion on said award.
8. **Adjourn** – *BA MOVED to adjourn the meeting at approximately 7:40pm. TC seconded. APPROVED (4 – 0).*

*Respectfully Submitted:*  
*Kevin Filchak, M.P.A.*