Sturbridge Tourist Association

*A Committee of the Town of Sturbridge*

**Regular Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, November 12th, 2020 6:30pm

Remote Meeting – Go to Meeting

**Members Present:**Brian Amedy (BA), Chair
Tom Chamberland (TC), Vice-Chair
Nick Salvador (NS)
Dawn Merriman (DM)
Jeff Ardis (JA)

**Staff Present:**

Jeff Bridges (JB), Town Administrator

Terry Masterson (TM), Economic Development/Tourism Coordinator

**Guests:**

Christine Pappas (CP), Principal, Open The Door, Inc.

**Call to Order:**

BA called the meeting to order at 6:31pm and read the statement below regarding virtual public meetings.

\*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**

**Motion:** To approve the minutes from October 13, 2020 By: Chair Amedy Second: Jeff Ardis
**Vote**: 5-0 Approved

**Roll Call: Yes:** Brian Amedy, Dawn Merriman, Nick Salvadore, Tom Chamberland, Jeff Ardis (Arrived 6:34pm)

**Treasurers Report**

TM noted that there were two financial items to report:

1. Processing a $6,600 payment to Old Sturbridge Village for services rendered by Break the Ice Media
2. Filing a $20,125.00 payment to Open the Door Media for their Phase II marketing services

**Motion:** To approve the Treasurer’s Report for November, 2020. By: BA Second: TC
**Vote**: 5-0 Approved

**Roll Call: Yes:** Brian Amedy, Dawn Merriman, Nick Salvadore, Jeff Ardis, Tom Chamberland

**Report from Chris Pappas, President of Open the Door Inc.**

Chris commented that a final report was in the closing draft stages and should be ready in the next few weeks.

Chris presented a power point that summarized her actions which are:

1. Create a strategy to promote Sturbridge through a mix of digital advertising, email and television.
2. Create a series of ads and emails to use in this campaign.
3. Develop a landing page on the Town web site.
4. Create (3) itineraries focused on the outdoors, Autumn visits, brew pubs and restaurants.
5. Develop and implement social media pages

Chris’s presentation included figures detailing the response rates to the media campaign. Chris noted as follows:

 Boston.com Run of Travel Banner Ad

 267,806 impressions

 306 clicks = .14% CTR

 Run of Travel Side Square Ad

 401,702 impressions

 603 clicks = .15% CTR

 Dedicated Enewsletter

 42,601 Delivered

 6,908 opened

 380 clicks = 5.2% CTR

Chris’s presentation included a page for next steps:

1. Develop a visitor web site
2. Continue with social media
3. Develop communications efforts
4. Establish measurement benchmarks
5. Spring 2021 advertising campaign

**Chris Pappas Report –** cont’d

During the presentation there was general conversation about how to implement some of the social media messaging needs. Brian noted that sustaining a consistent social media program requires effort. Jeff Bridges asked how often does the messaging need to happen? Is it every day, week or month? Brian and Dawn discussed a suggestion raised earlier that perhaps a local college intern could be recruited to handle the messaging. Tom Chamberland commented that promoting local businesses should be a priority but this task is dependent upon those businesses submitting content, events and invitations or packages.

Nick Salvadore raised a question about the length of service with Open the Door and whether that should be continued. Brian noted that the current STA budget allots $15,000 to create a new web site and that Sturbridge should model their new site after peer tourism communities such as Concord, Salem and Plymouth. Tom Chamberland also suggested that peer web sites for Mystic, Shelburne and Old Sturbridge Village be audited.

Jeff asked if it was possible to learn what media firms under wrote these sites.

**EDTC Report**

Terry Masterson reported on his beginning efforts to learn the administrative duties of the position, start to contact businesses and employers, assume service efforts for some specific business development projects, start to reach out to regional peers and organizations and begin to compile economic, financial and commerce data for present and future analysis. With regards to visits Terry noted that he had met with several businesses including Michael Harrington, GM of the Publick House , Philip Moreau, the owner of the new Pine Lake RV Resort and with Yogi Patel, the new owner of the Sturbridge Host Hotel and Conference Center. Business assistance projects include helping Noble Energy obtain state assistance for electric vehicle charging on their planned truck service facility on Route 20. And working with a proposed cold storage facility. Terry also commented that he had numerous email and phone contacts with Commonwealth Regional Director Kevin Kuros and a productive phone call with Monique Messier, the Worcester Regional Tourism Director. Additional contacts and visits are planned to as many businesses as practical in the weeks and months ahead.

In terms of economic data, Terry presented the board with a power point itemizing and analyzing hotel and meals spending, hotel occupancy, hotel/meals data from regional cities and future estimates of tax revenues. Some of the main points and findings were:

1. Sturbridge hotel revenues consistently rose from $11.7M in 2013 to $18M in 2019 and $15M in 2020.
2. Seasonal hotel peaks/off peaks exist. $5.8M for Summer/Fall 2018/2019. $2.6M for Winter Spring.
3. Hotel revenues plummeted 77% to $770K for Spring 2020 but rebounded to $3.2M for Summer 2020
4. But the rebound is still 47% below the Summer 2018/2019 average of $5.8M.
5. Hotel occupancy averaged 55% for 2018/2019 but fell to 36% for 2020 (less Oct.,Nov.,Dec. 2020)
6. Annual meals spending has averaged $60M since FY 2016. $60M for FY 2020 (through May 2020).
7. But meal spending plummeted 44% for the Summer of 2020 and 50% for Spring 2020.
8. Meals and hotel data will be reported next by the Commonwealth in Jan. 2021.

**Business of the Year Awards**

Tom Chamberland raised the issue of continuing the Business of the Year Award as a way to not only recognize popular venues but to encourage patronage of these establishments. Tom noted that in the past Kevin Filchek administered the contest starting in October with voting in November and selections in December. The winninng categories would be the best places to shop, eat and play. Terry asked when would the best time for the contest since we were currently into the Autumn. Brian suggested perhaps this Spring when people would be out of the Winter doldrums and back out shopping. Jeff Bridges offered to review the contest administration and timing and work with Terry.

**Next Meeting Date**

The committee agreed to hold their next meeting on Wednesday December 9th at 6:30pm.

 **Adjournment**

**Motion:** To adjourn the meeting. By: TC Second: DM
**Vote**: 5-0 Approved

**Roll Call: Yes:** Brian Amedy, Dawn Merriman, Nick Salvadore, Jeff Ardis, Tom Chamberland

Minutes Prepared By: Terry Masterson

Clerk of the Board: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**\_**