

ALBANY COUNTY TOURISM JOINT POWERS BOARD
210 E. CUSTER ST., LARAMIE, WY
MONDAY, APRIL 20, 2020

Present via Zoom: Kathleen Bertoncelj, Brad Jackson, Kaley Holyfield, Rebecca Walsh, Mike McShane, Pat Gabriel - Laramie City Council Liaison, Scott Larson-Executive Director, Mike Gray-Design & Operations Manager, Sara Haugen-Marketing Manager, Lyndee Johnston-Office Assistant
Absent: Page Malmstrom
Guests: Peg Connor-Wyoming Tennis Association

1. Regular Board Meeting called to order at 4:07 p.m. by Interim Chair Mr. Mike McShane

a) Confirmation of a Quorum-YES

b) Introduction of Guests – Mr. Larson gave a brief introduction to Mrs. Connor who will be reporting on the Wyoming Tennis Association event.

2. Additions and/or Corrections to agenda

a) Mr. Larson stated that Ms. Bertoncelj and Mrs. Malmstrom had a couple of corrections on the March minutes which will be changed.

3. Consent Agenda

a) March Minutes

b) Profits and Loss Budget vs. Actual – Mr. Larson stated that the Total Income to date is about 95%, Marketing Expense is at 73%, and Total Expense is at 73% as well. This is great to see under the circumstances. Mr. Larson stated that the Fiscal Year Budget is currently in good standing, but this next month may change that.

c) Advertising and Grants – Mr. Larson pointed out the Certified Folder Displays expense which was paid for when the contract was signed. Mr. Larson will check in with them to see what the current status is or if there is any flexibility. Mr. Larson does not anticipate many brochures flying off of the shelves this spring. He also pointed out the other publications and contracts that were signed prior to COVID-19: AAA Living, Miles, Elevation Outdoors, Midwest Living, RoadRUNNER, and True West. Mr. Larson was told by the RoadRUNNER representative that most subscribers hold on to this magazine and use it for inspiration later in the year. We also received a free city scape ad in this magazine which will be great for travel planners. Mr. Larson pointed out the Wyoming Spring Insert which is usually sent out this time of year has been delayed until June. This decision was made by the partners in the co-op program, Madden Media and the WOT. Lastly, Mr. Larson showed the board that the staff is boosting Facebook posts that are beneficial to the community to aid them during this time. He plans to continue this.

Motion by Ms. Bertoncelj, seconded by Mrs. Walsh that the Consent Agenda be approved and that each specific action on the Consent Agenda be approved as indicated. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Old Business

a) Tennis Grant Recap (<http://bit.ly/3cWYedL>) – Mrs. Connor reported that this was the first time that USTA/Wyoming Tennis Association was able to host an adult tournament in the Wyoming district. The grant money helped them host a great event. There was a total of 120 players at the event from six states: Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, and Montana. Mrs. Connor stated that she urged attendees to shop and eat locally and received coupons from the local businesses. The event was a success and Mrs. Connor included a PowerPoint for the board to review. They also sent out a survey after the tournament which reported great, most people were concerned about the weather and traveling to Laramie. Mrs. Connor also stated that the post cards that were put in the gift bags were a big hit and most people mailed them to their families. Mrs. Connor reported to the board that based on the performance of this year's event, Laramie will be the host for 2021 also. The board was happy with the outcome of the event. Mr. Larson asked Mrs. Connor to send him suggestions on how the event could be better next year. Mrs. Connor thought that working with the local businesses to get them engaged and prepared would be a big help.

5. Financial Reports

a) Lodging Tax Collections 2019-2020 – Mr. Larson reported that we are one month away from the end of the Fiscal Year. The month of March was surprisingly up 13.5% YOY. Mr. Larson stated that the only explanation for this would be that businesses have 90 days to report lodging taxes so they may have submitted those numbers in March rather than February. There was some overflow traffic from Colorado at the beginning of March which may have contributed to this high lodging tax number. This has put us over the total budgeted amount for the 2019 Fiscal Year. Mr. Larson stated that if April is a poor month, then we should be in the green.

6. New Business

a) Marketing & Advertising Reports – Mr. Larson reported that the large spike in 2019 around March 13th was to our web cams when the tornado came through town and is an anomaly. The spike in 2020 around March 26th was a marketing email centered around visiting virtually which has been the most successful email this year. Mr. Larson quickly explained the other details from the dashboard and highlighted the Instagram Stories Reach as the staff has been focused on creating entertainment for people while they sit at home. Mr. Larson stated that the staff has been organizing giveaways, bingo cards, screensavers, scavenger hunts, etc. and posting them on social media.

b) 2020 Visitors' Guide Update – Mr. Gray reported that he has been busy with ads and new promotional materials. The highlight was the new visitors' guide which features five new pages with two itineraries and three pages dedicated to the Laramie Brew Tour, the Laramie Foodie Tour, and the Pet Friendly Town. Mr. Gray stated that he is also reprinting the Snowy Range Scenic Byway and the tear off maps of Laramie. Ms. Bertoncelj and Ms. Holyfield said the tear off maps are

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great and work well at hotels. and is finishing up the three travel conference banners. Mr. Gray thanked the staff for helping proof and update the information.

c) Building Update – Mr. Larson reported to the board that he is moving forward with the LCBA location and has been working with Mr. Brad Enzi and Mr. Chet Lockard, a local architect. So far, they have reviewed the list of needs and Mr. Lockard and Mr. Enzi have met to discuss the fees and the scope of the project. The current facility will be expanded and be updated. They believe the project will be completed by the summer or fall of 2021. Mr. Larson stated that he will keep the board and staff in the loop. Mr. McShane reported that he has been in contact with Mr. Enzi as well and has been told that we would not have to worry about pre-paying rent to help cover construction costs. LCBA has enough in their reserves to finance the project so the tourism board reserves will not have to be touched.

d) 401k Plan Update – Mr. Larson stated that he has been working with Vanguard to establish a plan which will potentially be in place by May 15th. Mr. Larson explained that the plan is up to a 4% match with a five-year vesting schedule and the board can alter the percentage in the future if needed. Mr. McShane asked since the Fiscal Year is about to end, does the board have to commit to the first year match now or can it be changed for the next Fiscal Year. Mr. Larson stated that he has a meeting every week with Vanguard and can ask them if this is possible. Mr. McShane stated that if the board has to commit now, then the match should be lowered. If it can be changed after the Fiscal Year, then it can be left at 4%. Mr. Jackson also asked if the percentage is taken from gross salary and how much the tourism board must pay. He also asked that he run the numbers before a decision is made because he thinks the match should be a percentage of what the employee put towards the plan. Mr. Larson explained that currently if an employee commits 2%, the tourism board matches that 2%. The employees can put in a greater or lesser amount, but the tourism board matches up to 4%. Mr. Jackson stated instead of launching the plan on May 15th, it should line up with the Fiscal Year on July 1st. Mr. McShane agreed with Mr. Jackson and stated that it would make it easier to budget if it lines up with the boards anniversary date. Mr. Larson said he would ask Vanguard more questions this week. Mr. McShane asked Mr. Larson to tell the board about an idea they had. Mr. Larson reported to the board that the staff has been discussing a co-op advertising program for businesses in the Albany county for ads outside of the county where the tourism board will reimburse the businesses a certain amount (depending on the amount spent on an ad). The ad will feature the Visit Laramie logo or mention us in some way – similarly to how we manage grants. This is meant to help the community through the next couple months. Mr. Larson stated that he does not think this should be pushed out just yet because he believes this is not the optimal time to send out ads. Mr. McShane stated that he believes it should be an ongoing program so the companies can use it now or in the future as it could eventually help our county rebound. Ms. Holyfield agreed with Mr. Larson that it is wise to be cautious but asked if sending out marketing material would cause any harm. She stated that right now we have a very captive audience and they would see the marketing material, so it could be a great time to launch this program. Mr. McShane stated that he is currently posting pictures of Centennial and his hotel to remind viewers that they will be waiting for them when they can make it to the area.

e) Coronavirus Marketing Updates – Mr. Larson reported that the staff is doing a great job staying ahead of the curve and reminding viewers to think about traveling to Laramie when the time is right. One concept is “plan now, travel later” and the staff has been thinking creatively and outside of the box to keep the viewers engaged. Mr. Larson believes we are in a good place from the perspective of a “drive” market as people will want to get out soon and will most likely take a road trip. Mr. Larson is more concerned right now with “how do we get the people here” rather than “will they stay in our hotels”.

7. Grant and Sponsorship Requests

a) None

8. Review of the Board/Staff Activities

a) March Office Stats – Ms. Johnston reported that over the month of March the total leads were lower than the previous years, but we have received online leads and visitor guide requests. There have been no conference packet requests. Ms. Johnston stated that April numbers will be much lower, but visitor guide requests and online leads are still coming in, so we won't have nothing to report.

b) Working from Home – Mr. Larson stated that we have currently been working at home for four weeks. The staff checks in every morning at 8 am to discuss what is needed from each other and what each of their plans are for the day. Mr. Larson also keeps the staff updated on the current COVID-19 status.

c) Johnston

i) Pillow Count – Ms. Johnston has been contacting all the hotels in the county to get a better idea of how many people we can fit in the county. Mr. Larson stated that some hotels are hesitant to share their information, so if any board member has connections please share them. Ms. Holyfield asked which hotels are giving us trouble. Ms. Johnston stated that some hotels just do not understand what she is asking. Some think that she's asking how many rooms/people do you have now, during COVID-19. Other hotels are shut down and are only taking messages. At the moment, Ms. Johnston only has an estimated pillow count of 6,000 in the entire county. Mr. McShane stated that we could talk to the hotels in person when we deliver brochures to them and get an exact answer. Ms. Holyfield asked how many people are hotels reporting can fit in each room. Are they reporting cots or pull-outs? Ms. Johnston stated double queen rooms can hold four people, single kings are either two or three or a strict two, and only some hotels are reporting their cots and pull-outs. Mr. Larson stated that Ms. Johnston is doing a great job putting this together and it will be great to know what our true capacity is in the county and in Laramie.

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ii) Vendor Listings – Ms. Johnston has been updating the vendor listings on our website, so travelers have a better list of things to do, places to eat, places to stay, etc. This also gives the businesses better exposure and gives Visit Laramie a better website and SEO rating.

iii) WOT Business Listings – Ms. Johnston worked with the state office to update our county listings on their website.

iv) Social Media Graphics – Ms. Johnston has been designing the Instagram stories when she goes into the office on Fridays.

d) Gray

i) BRE Committee Meeting – Mr. Larson reported that Mr. Gray attended the Business Retention and Expansion committee meeting at the beginning of the month.

ii) Visitors' Guide, Graphics – Mr. Larson reported that Mr. Gray has been doing a great job with the visitors' guide, the conference banners, and all the other brochures he has been updating.

e) Haugen

i) Marketing, Website RFP – Mr. Larson reported that Mrs. Haugen has had a full plate taking care of the social media accounts, blog posts, and everything else marketing related. She has also been assisting with the website RFP.

f) Larson

i) Partners Call (statewide) – Mr. Larson reported that he has a call every Monday with colleagues around the state including WOT, the superintendents from the national parks, state parks representatives, and more to check in.

ii) Partners Call (local) – Mr. Larson stated he also has a call with local including Mrs. Trey Sherwood, Mr. Brad Enzi, city employees, and representatives from the Small Business Council to unify the three entities across town. Mr. Larson stated that they have been collaborating on projects which will hopefully bring the community closer together.

iii) Boomerang/This is Laramie – Mr. Larson explained that “This is Laramie” is a Facebook group created by Mr. Nid Collins and Mr. Shawn Faxon where the focus is on only positive news. Mr. Collins is doing some video work for small businesses for free, as well.

iv) Rudloff Solutions – Mr. Larson stated that Mr. Darren Rudloff, previously the CEO at Visit Cheyenne, and him have been communicating about creating a community jobs board to aid displaced workers find temporary work. Mr. Larson directed him towards LCBA.

v) Vendor Calls – Mr. Larson reported that normally this time of year he would be finishing up next year's budget. He is working on this when he can, but he has been working with advertisers to clear up contracts and commitments as COVID-19 has derailed everything. Many of the companies we work with are calling in to check in.

vi) COVID Colorado Check-ins – Mr. Larson stated that he has been checking in with his colleagues from Basalt, CO and Steamboat Springs, CO to find out what is happening in their state and how they are helping their communities.

vii) Rebrand 2021 – Mr. Larson has also set a goal to rebrand Visit Laramie over the next year. He has shared this with the staff, they are all ironing out the specifics on the RFP. Mr. Larson would like unified branding and messaging across the community which was one of the goals set by the Thrive development plan. Mr. Gray is working on a new logo. Mr. Larson hopes to tie in the wayfinding signs' theme with our brand. Mr. Larson stated that the final stage of this would be our new building location and making that tie in, as well. If the yearly traffic remains slow this could be a good time to work on a new website. Mr. Larson would like to see the RFP posted by May 1st and by the end of May have a candidate chosen so a down payment can be made within this Fiscal Year's budget.

9. Public Comments

a) None

10. Adjournment

MOTION BY Mr. Jackson seconded by Ms. Bertoneclj to adjourn into an executive session for employee personnel matters. The motion was passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 5:15 pm.

The next ACTB board meeting will be at the ACTB Office at 4 p.m. on Monday, May 18, 2019

Minutes respectfully submitted by Director Larson and Lyndee Johnston, Office Assistant