

ALBANY COUNTY TOURISM JOINT POWERS BOARD
210 E. CUSTER ST., LARAMIE, WY
MONDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2019

Present: Kathleen Bertoneclj, Brad Jackson, Brady Hammond, Rebecca Walsh, Terri Jones, Page Malmstrom, Mike McShane (present until 4:30), Pat Gabriel - Laramie City Council Liaison, Scott Larson-Executive Director, Mike Gray-Design & Operations Manager, Sara Haugen-Marketing Manager, Lyndee Johnston-Office Assistant

Absent:

Guests: Josh Boudreau from the Chamber of Commerce and Katie Morgan from the League of Women Voters of Wyoming

1. Regular Board Meeting called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Interim Chair Mr. Brady Hammond

a) Confirmation of a Quorum-YES

2. Additions and/or Corrections to agenda

a) No changes need to be made.

3. Consent Agenda

a) November 2019 Minutes

b) **Profits and Loss Budget vs. Actual** – Mr. Larson reported that over the month of November our total income is currently at 52.8% of the budget while 49.5% is spent on marketing alone so we are pacing ahead. The total expenses for last month were reported at 46.3%. Overall Mr. Larson expects that at the end of the year the remaining amount can be put into the board's reserves.

c) **Advertising and Grants** – Mr. Larson pointed out the large sums of money spent during November. \$5,750 was dedicated to the booking system on our website and mobile app, Jack Rabbit. Over \$2,400 was spent towards Mr. Sam Trautman updating and redesigning the website and mobile app to a cleaner, sharper layout. Compared the previous year, about half as much has been spent on the pay per click/retargeting campaign. Mr. Larson also stated that the Trails, Rails, and Ales promotion was submitted to the Food & Travel magazine, costing \$5,000. Another large sum of slightly over \$24,000 was spent towards the three full-page ads in the yearly Wyoming Travel Journal. Mr. Larson stated that this is a large amount, but the travel journal draws travelers from all over the state. Mr. Larson highlighted the co-op program with the Wyoming Fall Insert stating that there is usually a waiting list, but we were able to get into the program with the weekend winter itinerary that he put together. Mr. Larson pointed out that the board is still giving money to the Pilot Hill Project as it was agreed that \$10,000 would be granted to the project and paid in increments over a year. The last item to note on the transaction report was that during the HS Football Championships only local vendors were used for purchasing swag and catering.

4. Old Business

a) None

5. Financial Reports

a) **CD Maturation at ANB Bank** – Mr. Larson reported that after chatting with Ms. Rebecca Miller at ANB bank that she was able to match or beat any of the local Laramie rates for CD maturation. Mr. Larson's goal was to keep this local. Ms. Miller was able to give the tourism board a 1.1% rate over 1 year and 1.4% rate over 3 years

b) **Lodging Tax Collections 2019-20** – Mr. Larson reported that the entire state of Wyoming is down 1.5% for the month of November. Albany County was down 1.38%, Teton was down 28%, Sweetwater was down 10%, Sheridan was down 20%, and Laramie was down 12% while Park County was up 34%, Carbon County was up 11%, and Natrona County was up a surprising 83%. Mr. Larson explained that Albany was only down 1.38% because the HS Football Championships had more teams traveling this year, the roads were closed at the end of the month causing travelers to stay in town, and UW only had one home football game instead of two like in 2018.

6. New Business

a) **Marketing Report – Dashboard** – Mr. Larson pointed out to the board that the web stats remain in the green with webcam visits to the site being the majority of the traffic. According to the SEO reports around the state, Albany County is one of the only ones in the green. The only webpage on Visit Laramie that is in the red for the month of November is the Where to Stay page. Mr. Larson stated that the numbers are artificially inflated from last year's numbers meaning that the numbers are reported quality over quantity. Mr. Larson also stated that the time spent on the page is up and the bounce rate is 25% better than last year. The web pages that do not show up on the top 10 list but follow close behind are the Visitor Guide requests (up 50% YOY), Ski & Snowboard (up 110% YOY), and Shopping (up 75% YOY). Throughout November, only two blog posts were put out, but Mr. Brian Harrington and Mrs. Leah Veinbergs are producing great blogs. As far as email marketing goes, Mr. Larson and Mrs. Haugen sent out a re-engagement email because approximately 75K of the 129K audience Visit Laramie had hasn't responded to a single email. Since the email was sent out, the audience has decreased to just over 75K but the click through rate and open rate has increased. Mr. Larson reported on the social media accounts stating that Facebook stays consistent while money is only spent on boosting posts. Instagram has been the main focus because people are investing more of their time on this platform. Mrs. Haugen did a great job of posting during the HS Football Championships. The Twitter account is also reporting consistent numbers while the competitors of Visit Laramie are flat or declining, Mr. Larson stated. Media hits that highlighted Laramie and Albany County include CBS news – A Taste of India on the Interstate, Matador Network – The 25 coolest towns in America: 2019, Freeskier Magazine: Resort Guide – Wyoming's small ski areas reveal skiing in its purest form (Snowy Range Ski Area), Pop Sugar – 20 College Towns You Need to Visit During Football Season, Planetware: Wyoming in Pictures – Beautiful Places to Photograph, Only in Your State – 6 Inspiring Ways That Wyoming Women Made History. Mrs. Walsh asked the staff if the Youtube stats were reported. Mr. Larson said he can get more information to the board. Mr. McShane encouraged the staff to produce and post

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more videos on all social media platforms. According to various sources, video advertising is up and coming and we need to jump on the boat. Mr. Larson stated that he does want to work with Mr. Trautman on a better plan for utilizing Youtube for 2020. Video production, no matter the length of video, will be more expensive than producing photography. Mr. McShane asked if the staff could hire an intern from the university and purchase a quality camera. Mr. Hammond explained that even if a 10 second video is produced, it may take a couple of hours to get the footage. Mr. Hammond also stated that if the staff decides to produce video ads they should be modular. For example, a 5 minute video can be broken down into 10 sec, 20 sec, 30 sec, etc. so they can be used for different purposes.

b) Advertising Report – Mr. Gray reported on the winter ads he has been organizing with Mrs. Haugen. The ads are featured in local and international magazines like the Discover Laramie winter edition put out by the Boomerang, the 5280 magazine distributed around Colorado, Snowest’s Snowmobiling Guide, the AAA Living & Guide Book which reaches NE, IA, TX, KS, OK, and SD, and The Great American West which has been translated into French, Italian, and German. The editors of True West Magazine received the previous ad and named Laramie as the “Best Town for Historic Entertainment”. They will be posting another ad in the February/March issue which will reach approximately 972,000 people. Mr. Gray also reported on ads he created for the spring issue of Adventure Outdoors and four issues of the Road Runner motorcycle magazine. Brand USA included Laramie in the Global Inspiration Program for 2020 and the Historic Trails Program will feature the Overland Trail and Laramie in their 2020 issue. Mr. Gray has also been redesigning the Vedauwoo brochure for next year and has sent it out to Modern Printing.

c) Groups and Conferences Update – National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, Association of Wyoming Insurance Agents, Wyoming State Softball Championships – Mr. Larson reported that he was contacted about the NASDA conference a couple of weeks ago and put in a bid for the conference to be hosted in Laramie in either 2023. Mr. Larson gave them lodging information and that is all the information he knows so far. Mr. Larson told the board about the AWIA and Mr. Jackson stated that Little America double booked the conference center so the association is looking for another location. Mr. Jackson told the director that if he reaches out the association would book a location in Laramie for 2021. The Wyoming State Softball Association would really like to Laramie to host the championships in 2020, but Mr. Larson was told that the 3-4 day event is planned during Jubilee Days. Mr. Larson asked the board what options are out there. Mr. Jackson expressed his concerns stating that it would be a mistake to host the event during Jubilee Days because there will be no rooms available. Mr. Larson stated that the association estimated needing 450 rooms (including families) for the weekend. Ms. Bertoneclj stated that the university has housed people in the dorms during the summer, but this wouldn’t bring back any lodging tax to the county. Mrs. Malmstrom asked if Mr. Larson could get a tournament schedule and said that at the Hilton (on a year without Robert Fuller/Laramie TV Show) there are usually rooms available. Mrs. Malmstrom also asked if the staff would contact the hotels in town to get their feedback on if we should host the event during Jubilee Days.

d) Building & Letter of Intent Update – Mr. Larson reported that he talked the landlord, Mr. Dieter Sturm, into writing up a new yearly lease with an option to renew for one year and it has been signed. The letter of intent to move to the tourism board’s location to the Wyoming Territorial Prison is public and everyone has been very supportive of the transition. Mr. Larson communicated with the Chamber of Commerce, the city mayor, and the City of Laramie and would like to move forward with getting the letter of intent submitted in time for the legislative session. Mrs. Jones encouraged Mr. Larson to get the letter signed and turned in ASAP. Mr. Larson stated that he is planning on attending the city council meeting on the 17th. Mr. Gabriel told Mr. Larson that the letter is on the consent agenda for the council to approve it so he does not think Mr. Larson will need to be present at the meeting.

e) Board Seat Update – Mr. Larson explained that the search for a new city board member has been slow going. Mr. Hammond has been acting as the Interim Chair of the board since Mr. Mark Pearce resigned in November. After two weeks, there have been zero applicants. Mr. Larson said that he has been chatting around town, encouraging people to apply. Mr. Larson also asked the board to send him any suggestions they might have.

d) Governor’s Tourism Conference – On February 23rd-25th the Wyoming Governor will be hosting this conference in Cheyenne. Mr. Larson explained that any of the board members are welcome to attend as well as the staff members. Mr. Gray and Mrs. Haugen are going to attend. Mrs. Malmstrom will be attending, as well.

7. Grant Requests

a) None

8. Review of the Board/Staff Activities

a) November Office Stats – Ms. Johnston reported that the leads picked back up over November. Most of the leads are coming through the WOT, Madden, and Midwest partnerships. Ms. Johnston also stated that the foot traffic has been very slow compared to previous years which could be caused by travelers visiting our website for information rather than coming into the center.

b) Gray

i) Women’s Suffrage events – Mr. Gray explained to the board that the money made during Laramie’s 150th Celebration and the 150th Celebration of the Railroad is being used for the Wyoming Women’s 150th Suffrage Celebration. So far Mr. Gray has worked with the Women’s History House and the Laramie Plains Museum to organize and print materials for upcoming events in 2020. Mr. Gray attended a couple of events on December 10th in Cheyenne and in Laramie to celebrate the signing of the 19th amendment and toast Wyoming women. Mr. Gray made “Votes for Women” buttons, post cards of historic women, a booklet on the influential women of Laramie,

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poster hung in Laramie and at the state capital, and pull-up banners which will be traveling to the 2020 events. Mr. Gray also reported to the board that Mr. Weldon Tuck is putting together the information for the grant request. In 2020 a few events have been announced, but Mr. Gray would like to organize a couple more events in Laramie to draw bigger crowds.

c) Larson

i) 4th Economy – Mr. Larson and Mr. Hammond attended the 4th Economy meeting. Mr. Larson stated that he thinks the 10 year plan is continuing in the right direction, but with the Governor’s statewide tax increase proposal the group looked into repurposing the tourism board’s funds. Mr. Larson discussed with the board the bylaws which say that using the board’s money for other purposes other than promoting travel and tourism is no viable or legally possible. Mr. Larson explained that the bylaws would have to be changed through a legislative process in order for the money to be used throughout the town. Mr. Larson stated that if we did give money to the city, the projects would have to accommodate the county, not just the city of Laramie.

ii) Employee Manual Update – Mr. Larson reported that the staff’s manual hasn’t been updated since 1999. Mr. Larson believes that writing up a new employee manual would be beneficial to the team as well as the company, making this a more desirable place to work. Mr. Larson has been working with Mr. Hammond on the new manual and Ms. Bertoncej volunteered to proof the manual.

iii) Summit Debrief (Johnston, Larson) – Mr. Larson and Ms. Johnston met with Mr. Les Levi and Mr. Bob Nelson to discuss what worked well in the 2019 and what could be improved for 2020. Mr. Levi and Mr. Nelson took the initiative to travel to Cheyenne to compare the brochures and the facilities to Laramie’s and they gave great feedback.

iv) Haub School Tourism Careers Panel – Mr. Larson reported that he sat on this panel with Mr. Chris Brown and Ms. Kaley Holyfield (Holiday Inn). This was a great opportunity to partnership with the university and work with the students.

9. Public Comments

- a) Mr. Larson announced that there will be no meeting in January so the monthly reports will be sent out in an email.
- b) Mr. Larson also announced that the February meeting would be held on Tuesday as Presidents Day falls on the normal meeting Monday. The board was fine with this change.

10. Adjournment

MOTION BY Ms. Bertoncej seconded by Mrs. Walsh to adjourn. The motion was passed unanimously. Meet was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

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

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