

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

Present via Zoom: Kathleen Bertoncelj, Page Malmstrom, Kaley Holyfield, Rebecca Walsh, David Wright, Brad Jackson, Scott Larson-Executive Director, Sara Haugen-Marketing Manager, Lyndee Johnston-Office Assistant
Absent: Tessa Cedillo, Pat Gabriel-Laramie City Council Liaison, Terri Jones-Albany County Commissioner
Guests: Dan Johnson, Amy Larsen

1. Regular Board Meeting called to order at 4:05 p.m. by Vice Chair Mrs. Page Malmstrom

a) Confirmation of a Quorum - YES

b) Introduction of New Board Members

c) Introduction of Guests if Any – Mrs. Amy Larsen from the Wyoming Office of Tourism (WOT) who will be joining our meetings as the year continues. Mr. Dan Johnson from the City of Laramie to present a grant application.

2. Additions and/or Corrections to agenda

a) None

3. Consent Agenda

a) June Minutes - Mr. Larson stated that Ms. Bertoncelj had a few changes that Mr. Larson corrected.

b) Profits and Loss Budget vs. Actual – Mr. Larson noted to the board that the report does not show one deposit that was put into the account. Mr. Larson reported that over the month of June, 5% of the 2020-21 marketing budget has been spent and that we have had to decline some opportunities and jumped on some in order to make the most of the summer travel window and consumer demand. So far, total expenses are at 4.2% of the total budget. Mr. Larson also noted that the Lodging Tax numbers that have been received hadn't been updated on the spread sheet. Mr. Larson reported that the Summit Penny Press funds from last summer were cashed out and came to \$521. The manufacturer of the press takes a commission from the machine when he returns to cash it out. Mr. Jackson asked if the funds were any different from 2018. Mr. Larson stated that it wasn't a huge difference, but 2019 had a slightly higher amount of money at the end of the summer season even though the traffic was down in 2019 from 2018.

c) Advertising and Grants – Mr. Larson noted that without going through every line item that the month of June would look different than normal because of the amount of transactions on the report. Mr. Larson stated that this is because there were quite a few bills that were prepaid before the start of the 2020-21 FY. Normally these transactions would be made within the first few weeks of July, but this was done so that the money wouldn't be taken out of the 2020-21 budget since it has already been cut back significantly. For example, HMS Global, Leads program with WOT, Wyoming Public Radio and regional stations, and National Parks Trips Media were all normally paid in July but were prepaid in the 2019-20 FY budget. Mr. Larson also stated that a down payment was made for the website redesign. Mr. Larson explained that the company the staff chose to go with not only has some of the industry leading expertise, but they also allowed us to make a down payment and then not pay another amount until October of 2021. Mr. Larson stated that this clears up the 2020-21 budget so that we can focus on advertising throughout the next year.

Motion by Mr. Jackson, seconded by Mrs. Malmstrom 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) None

5. Financial Reports

a) Lodging Tax Collections 2019-2020 – Mr. Larson reported that the month of June was approximately down 50% which puts us down 54% YOY and 28% down in terms of the budgeted projection. Mr. Larson did point out that compared to other counties around the state we are doing fairly well. Laramie County was down 59%, Natrona County was down 44%, Sheridan County was down 62%, Park and Teton Counties were down 75%, and the state as a whole was down 61%. Mr. Larson stated that he analyzed two months into the fiscal year how we compare as well as how we sit from March forward in terms of tax collections relative to the other lodging tax boards around the state. He found that we are faring moderately better than others. Mr. Larson also analyzed the data that we are able to track like referrals through the booking widget, visitor guide requests, website traffic, and social media traffic and found that these are all up YOY. So even though lodging tax numbers are down dramatically, there is still a strong interest in Laramie and Wyoming as long as our case count stays low. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that the Hilton's numbers are up YOY for the month of July already although the average rate on rooms is down 25%. Mrs. Malmstrom also stated that most of the traffic is short-term bookings with people driving across the country. They are not making in-advance reservations and only staying one or two nights forcing hotels to drop their rates to entice them to stay. Mrs. Malmstrom said it is tough to predict what August will be like because the Hilton isn't seeing as many in-advance reservations like they normally do when the students are returning. She stated that the "wild card" is will students be returning, not just at the university, but all the schools in town. If classes remain online and parents still have enough flexibility, will there be more family road trips after school has started back up? With the university back in session, will there only be conference football games throughout the season? It is hard to tell. Ms. Holyfield asked if the Hilton is seeing corporate travel still. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that it seems a different kind of business is traveling like construction workers, but not so much workers that usually travel to work/visit the university. Ms. Holyfield stated that the rules at the university are changing to where visitors are required to wear masks and that there isn't much happening on campus now. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that UW Catering is starting to show up more at the Hilton which hints to her that things are starting to get back to normal. Ms. Bertoncelj stated that UW employees are set to return to their offices on campus starting on

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August 3rd. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that in terms of marketing, we should be thinking ahead to the winter months if people will be attempting to drive on the icy roads, maybe we should be targeting other types of travelers. Mrs. Walsh chimed in that at a trade show recently she communicated with other businesses in the outdoor industry and they believe that there will be a huge surge in cross country skiing and snowmobiling because they are social distancing activities. She also believes downhill sports will see a large decrease because of the high volume of people. Mrs. Walsh found out that at the Vail resort in Colorado they are not letting downhill mountain bikers on the trails. Because Laramie isn't a resort town, we are in a good position to attract this other type of adventurer. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that as far as inventory for outdoor retailers, most shops are out of outdoor equipment because people are looking for different activities to do. Mr. Wright chimed in that anything that has to do with campers, ATVs, UTVs, or any mobile equipment is out of stock and even if a rental company has a mechanical failure the equipment can't be replaced. Mr. Wright also stated that at the Albany Lodge, most visitors are staying one or two days rather than a week because they are trying to get away. Mr. Larson stated that typically this time of year there is a two or three month marketing plan in place, but this year it has been shortened to two to four week plan since COVID-19 has been changing things. Mr. Larson believes that last year's SEO will help us throughout the rest of 2020 and all we need to do now is stay in the back of travelers' minds.

b) Possible CARES Act Relief – Mr. Larson gave a shout out to the WOT who requested \$5 million in CARES Act funding specifically for DMOs (destination marketing organizations) and found out last week that that has been approved. Mr. Larson stated that the total amount will be distributed on a tiered system which is based on the 2019-20 FY lodging tax collections and dictates what we are able to receive. Mr. Larson believes it is not a first come, first served situation. If the total amount of \$5 million was distributed equally amongst the 23 counties, each county would receive \$200,000. Mr. Larson stated that we may receive more or less than that amount. Mr. Larson is optimistic about the potential funding. Mr. Larson also mentioned that he has been in contact with the City of Laramie to see if there are any grants they are pursuing. The city is looking at how to structure that and how to loop in the tourism board, Mainstreet Alliance, and the Chamber of Commerce (LCBA) as it pertains to economic development and destination marketing. Mr. Larson stated that he is putting that on hold until he learns more about the CARES Act funding. Mr. Larson asked if Mrs. Larsen had any more information. Mrs. Larsen stated that she hasn't learned anything different and that they are currently in meetings today and we should know more within the next couple of weeks. Mr. Larson also reported that the WOT has secured 500,000 disposable masks specifically for visitor centers and chambers. This will definitely help promote safe travel even though we cannot force people to wear the masks. Mr. Larson stated that we only need to submit a form to the state office detailing how many visitors we expect to see in the next few months and they will give us as many masks as they can. Ms. Bertoneclj stated we should brand the masks. Mrs. Larsen stated that with the short turnaround time that wasn't doable. Mr. Larson stated it was a good idea, we would just need to find a funding source. Mrs. Walsh stated she has a source that she gets her outdoor gear from if we would like to follow through with this idea.

6. New Business

a) Marketing Report – Mr. Larson highlighted a few items on the report. On the 10th of June there was a large spike due to the National Parks Trips Media (NPTM) e-blast which Mr. Larson attached in the board packet. This created the busiest day on our website since the website has been established. The opportunity cost \$1,500 and we highlighted Wyoming road trips and we are participating in another e-blast in July which the data shows that day was the second busiest day on our site. Mr. Larson explained that we participated in the program to go after people while we know the interest and demand is there. Mrs. Haugen chimed in that the bounce rate was good as well meaning that visitors to our site didn't immediately go away from our site. Mr. Wright asked where the NPTM e-blast was distributed to. Mr. Larson stated that it went out to their entire database and that they have a Rocky Mountain Journal and a National Parks Journal along with road trip itineraries that we submit material to. If people check the boxes that state they would like additional information from us, then we receive those leads. Mr. Larson believes there is approximately 90,000 people on their database. Mr. Wright asked if there was any time on that or where those people came from. Mr. Larson stated that he could find that information and take a look at our Google Analytics. Mr. Wright asked if we have access to those leads if we chose to send out a blitz later on or if we would have to get in touch with the company to pay for the leads a second time. Mr. Larson stated we don't have access to the full database but we do have access to those we pay for in the leads program. Mr. Larson next reported on the top web pages. Biking, Fishing, and Where to Stay pages have high page views partly because of the display ads we are running. Mr. Larson also pointed out that the Visitor Guide and Home Page views lift is mostly organic. Mr. Larson stated that although the revenue report doesn't look good, there is definitely increased interest in our area and Wyoming YOY. He asked the board to review the other numbers and email campaigns in the board packet. One email was specifically for requesting the visitor's guide which we have done in the past and this time around we tracked the digital copy page views. It was a 50/50 split between who wanted the digital version versus the hard copy version. Mrs. Walsh gave a shout out to Mrs. Haugen for her work on Visit Laramie's Instagram feed – it is making her want to visit our area.

b) Building Update – Mr. Larson reported that he has a meeting with Mr. Brad Enzi at LCBA to go over the building status – what the timeline looks like, what we need to do, etc. The mutual agreement with LCBA allows us to not prepay rent on the building as they are using their funds to build a new office space. A co-location will benefit both organizations because we each frequently get calls or visitors looking for the other location. It will also bring us more visibility and there will be some synergy across the two organizations in terms of efforts that we are working towards.

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c) SI Swimsuit Releases July 21 – Mr. Larson reported that the Swimsuit Edition drops on July 21st. Mr. Larson thanked everyone who helped out with the project that happened last fall. We didn't have to spend a cent on this and SI is now posting pictures on social media of the Snowies with the print coming out on the 21st. The WOT told Mr. Larson the video footage, stories, etc. will follow. Mr. Larson is excited because of the international and national stage it is presented on. Mrs. Malmstrom reported that she saw the Akal Truck Stop Indian Food Cuisine on CBS over the weekend. Mrs. Haugen said the footage was from last October. Ms. Bertoneclj stated that that caught the attention of the State Department of Health when the footage first ran, since then they have cleaned things up at the truck stop. Ms. Bertoneclj asked Mrs. Walsh if SI followed up with her. Mrs. Walsh stated that they had asked for a few more videos and a Q&A. She also mentioned that SI has dropped a short story and that among all of the model stories they posted a "go on a hike" story. Mr. Larson and Mrs. Haugen stated that's why it's so cool that they featured us even though on social media it looks out of place.

d) Board Positions – Mr. Larson asked the board to vote on who will be filling the board positions. Mrs. Malmstrom asked the members if anyone would like to hold a certain position. Ms. Bertoneclj noted that Mrs. Cedillo didn't make the meeting and that Mr. Wright should be introduced. Mr. Wright stated that he previously worked in the marketing world for 27 years before running the Albany Lodge. He explained that one of his greatest achievements was "Visit Florida" so he has specific experience in the tourism industry. Mrs. Malmstrom then asked Mr. Wright if he is interested in the Chairman position on the board. Mr. Wright said that would be fine. The board voted unanimously to appoint Mr. Wright as Chairman. Mrs. Malmstrom stated she could stay as Vice Chair unless someone else wanted the role. The board voted unanimously to appoint Mrs. Malmstrom as Vice Chair. Mrs. Walsh asked for clarification of the roles of the Secretary and Treasurer. Mr. Larson stated the Secretary primarily reviews documents and the minutes of the board meetings. He stated that the Treasurer watches over the board's finances, insurances, bonds, etc. and also co-signs checks for audit purposes. Ms. Holyfield asked if we could keep the current members in those positions. Mr. Larson said of course, but if they no longer want to have those duties now is the time to elect a new member. Ms. Bertoneclj stated that she didn't mind being Secretary and asked Ms. Holyfield if she would like to take on the role. Ms. Holyfield stated she was interested. The board voted unanimously to appoint Ms. Holyfield as Secretary. Mr. Larson asked Mr. Jackson if he still wanted to be the Treasurer. Mr. Jackson stated that as this will be his last year, he would like to finish his term out as the Treasurer. The board voted unanimously to appoint Mr. Jackson as Treasurer.

7. Grant and Sponsorship Requests

a) State of Wyoming Firefighter Golf Tournament – Mr. Larson handed it over to Mr. Johnson to introduce the event to the board. Mr. Johnson thanked the board for reviewing the application to support the annual golf tournament scheduled on August 1st and 2nd. The tournament location rotates around the state and was in Laramie about six years ago. Mr. Johnson stated that the event brings in retired and active firefighters and so far there are 17 registered teams and a total of 58 individuals who would book rooms in town for approximately two nights. This year Mr. Johnson reported that because of COVID-19 they made changes to the venue to allow the guests to spread out which costs more than they had expected which is why the grant request is the amount listed. Mr. Johnson stated that six years ago the grant from the tourism board was approved and banners and signs were hung around golf course. Mr. Jackson asked where this grant money would be allocated. Mr. Johnson stated that the event typically has a lunch for the firefighters and the \$1,100 that was requested would help pay for the lunch as well as the venue fee. Mr. Jackson asked if they plan on bringing in any revenue. Mr. Johnson stated no, the money covers the cost of the lunch and \$200 of that would go towards the cost of the venue. He also mentioned that the participants would go out to eat and go to the bars around town over the weekend. Mr. Jackson asked Mr. Larson if, according to the boards' bylaws, the board is allowed to grant money to an event where the money isn't used for marketing purposes. Mr. Larson stated that the bylaws outline that we should allocate the money for marketing, but he noted that in the past the money has been granted for other events in similar situations. For example, FBLA has received sponsorship from the tourism board for meals. Mr. Jackson stated that that was specifically a sponsorship not a grant. Mr. Larson stated that it goes through the same process, but this year we did not spend that money because of COVID-19. Mr. Jackson stated that the board should wait to discuss this further until the revenue tax collections have discussed since we are in an unsure time right now. Mr. Jackson also stated that he thinks it would be wise to not grant any money at this time. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that the board had previously decided that the grants should be discussed first so that the guests can leave the meeting after speaking their piece without listening to the rest of the agenda. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that the board didn't have any more questions and that after discussing the tax collections the board would make a decision on the grant. Mr. Johnson thanked the board for their time and left the meeting.

After discussing the revenue, Mr. Jackson moved to grant \$500 to the Wyoming Firefighter Golf Tournament. He explained that they are asking for money for basically a party, they aren't fundraising for anything, but they will be spending money in Laramie. Ms. Bertoneclj seconded the motion. The board discussed that right now they still didn't feel comfortable granting the entire amount at this time. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that she would contact Mr. Johnson and grant money from the Hilton to cover the rest of the amount. Mr. Wright stated that the Albany Lodge would also be able to help. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Review of the Board/Staff Activities

a) June Office Stats – Mr. Larson stated that the board should review the stats on their own and can contact Ms. Johnston if they have any questions. Mr. Larson did point out that the traffic is down YOY, especially the phone volume which is partially due to COVID-19 and partially due to the Robert Fuller and Jubilee Days events held in 2019. There was also a

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large number of visitor guide requests partially because of organic traffic and partially because of the email sent out. Mr. Larson explained that the leads numbers are significantly greater than years before because of the leads programs, especially because of the contract with NPTM.

b) All Staff

i) Website, Rebrand, Style Guide – Mr. Larson reported that the staff chose the website vendor Simpleview. They were chosen out of a group of nine applicants and the entire staff sat down to review the RFPs and narrowed it down to three, then two, and then made a pros and cons list to choose the winner. Simpleview was chosen because of their industry expertise (they have 700-800 DMOs and chambers under their purview) and their financial flexibility. As Mr. Larson previously explained, they won't charge us another amount until October 2021. Mr. Larson also stated that Mrs. Haugen and Ms. Johnston spent a ton of time on the logo design and he has been contacting various stakeholders around town to get opinions. Because of the Thrive plan (the ten year economic plan for the city), Mr. Larson wants to be sure people from the Mainstreet Alliance, LCBA, UW, Art Coalition, and local businesses give their support for the direction we are headed. Mr. Larson explained that the number two item on a survey for the Thrive plan was that the city and other entities should be more unified. The staff will be sending that information out to Simpleview in the next couple of days to begin the design phase of the website redesign. Mr. Wright asked if the board would be able to view the progress and give input. Mr. Larson stated that we will soon get mock ups of the webpages in the next few weeks and the staff can share logos, taglines, and colors with the board as we work through the process.

c) Larson

i) COVID-19 calls, Meetings, etc. – Mr. Larson reported that he continues to stay busy with phone calls and meetings about COVID-19. He is staying updated as far as statewide, countywide, and communitywide partnerships and co-ops go to make the most of this year.

ii) Rebrand – Mr. Larson stated that he is communicating with partners around the city and county and trying to keep everything on track so we can come out of COVID-19 with a great rebrand in 2021.

9. Public Comments

a) Ms. Bertoneclj asked Mr. Larson if he is still in the rotation as a guest columnist at the Boomerang. Mr. Larson stated he hasn't written one in a while, so he will follow up with them. Mr. Wright asked if the next meeting would be in person. Mr. Larson stated that the members might not be comfortable in the tourism office because it is small. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that she could reserve a conference room at the Hilton. Mr. Larson said that would be great since we haven't had an in-person meeting since February. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that two weeks before the meeting date she would reach out to Mr. Larson to see if we need a room reserved and everyone can respond if they feel comfortable or not.

10. Adjournment

MOTION BY Mr. Jackson seconded by Ms. Holyfield to adjourn the meeting. The motion was passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 5:25 pm.

The next ACTB board meeting will be at the ACTB Office at 4 p.m. on Monday, August 17, 2019

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