

ALBANY COUNTY TOURISM JOINT POWERS BOARD
210 E. CUSTER ST., LARAMIE, WY
MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2020

Present via Zoom: Kathleen Bertoncelj, Brady Hammond (phoned in later), Rebecca Walsh, Page Malmstrom, Kaley Holyfield, Mike McShane, Scott Larson-Executive Director, Sara Haugen-Marketing Manager, Lyndee Johnston-Office Assistant

Absent: Brad Jackson, Mike Gray-Design & Operations Manager

Guests: Rebecca Pexton-Director of USA Softball, Jodi Guerin-Laramie Parks & Rec Manager

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

a) Confirmation of a Quorum-Yes

2. Additions and/or Corrections to agenda

a) None

3. Consent Agenda

a) December Minutes, February Minutes – Mrs. Bertoncelj stated that she had minor corrections to the December minutes but the board can approve both months minutes.

b) Profits and Loss Budget vs. Actual – Mr. Larson reported that over the last couple of weeks, we have had to cancel a few ad contracts including a USA Today ad in a round of March Madness held in Omaha, NE because the events have been canceled due to the COVID-19 virus. Mr. Larson pointed out that the marketing expenses for the month are down because of this, but he was able to get a full refund on the ads that were cancelled and some companies offered deals on upcoming ads, as well. Mr. Larson also noted that the total expenses will rise in the upcoming months as the virus scare tones down. As far as total income for the year, Mr. Larson stated that almost 90% of what was budgeted has been accumulated which is great. Mr. Larson is optimistic that we will still reach the budgeted amount by the end of the fiscal year. Mrs. Malmstrom asked if the projected lodging tax collections have been adjusted for the decrease in travelers over March, April, and May because of the virus. Mr. Larson stated that those numbers were assigned last year, but he does believe the actual numbers will report less than expected. Mr. Larson believes that UW will postpone or cancel this semester's commencement as the university has lengthened spring break and converted all classes to online. This will have a significant impact on May lodging taxes. Mrs. Malmstrom also pointed out that events such as the Wyoming FBLA Conference have already cancelled their rooms which will also impact our revenue stream. Mr. Larson stated that he is grateful that we are \$52K in the green for the year which will provide us a cushion over the next couple of months. Mrs. Malmstrom believes that the forecasted numbers for lodging taxes should be re-adjusted in case we have to curve our spending. Mr. McShane also believes items on the budget should be re-adjusted since the Hilton has lost a couple major events. He specifically pointed out the \$35K allocated to Special Event Recruitment because at the moment we won't be using it and we may need it for other purposes. Mr. Larson stated that he would re-visit the budget this next week and plan out spending accordingly. Mr. McShane also asked if we are wasting our time on ads right now or not. Mr. Larson stated that quite a few people still had spring break plans in Colorado and other surrounding states where events, ski resorts, etc. have shut down so travelers are looking for ways to spend their spring breaks. He will be working with the staff to alter the direction of ads and social media. Ms. Holyfield asked if the staff is working on any social media marketing currently because most of the population is on social media looking at updates on the virus so we could get some good exposure.

c) Advertising and Grants – Mr. Larson pointed out to the board that Mr. Gray was working on updating new brochures which were printed in February. Mr. Larson stated to the board that the \$1,250 towards Madden Media, \$500 towards Google AdWords, and \$975 towards SEO should remain the same if not increase at this time because digital marketing is important. Mr. Larson also pointed out the amount paid to the Pilot Hill Project which supports them in their marketing and community outreach efforts. Mrs. Sarah Brown Matthews wanted to present at the meeting but Mr. Larson decided to table that until the April meeting because of the time constraints at this meeting. Mr. Larson lastly pointed out the Television transactions to Cox Media were payments towards snowmobiling ads which ran in January during the Winter X Games.

Motion by Mr. McShane, 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) Governor's Tourism Conference – Mr. Larson reported that he along with Mrs. Haugen, Mr. Gray, Mr. McShane, and Mr. Hammond all attended at least one day of the conference in Cheyenne. Mrs. Malmstrom, Mrs. Haugen, and Mr. Gray weren't able to attend the second day of the conference because of road closures. Mr. Larson stated that it was a great time to network and re-connect with industry partners and the governor.

b) Staff Retreat – Mr. Larson reported on the first ever staff retreat which was hosted on March 3rd at the Hilton conference center. The UW staff was kind enough to give us a room at no charge. Mr. Larson stated that this should take place every year because the staff can connect and learn more about how each other works and what we would like to accomplish over the next year.

5. Financial Reports

a) Lodging Tax Collections FY 2019-2020

6. New Business

a) Marketing & Advertising Reports – Mr. Larson reported that we were up for the month of February by 3.5% YOY. Across the state as a total lodging taxes were up 3.7% YOY. Laramie, Carbon, and Teton counties were down while Albany, Natrona, Sweetwater, and Sheridan were up. Sheridan was up significantly because of their winter rodeo (up 50% YOY). Mr.

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Larson did not go into as much detail as he usually does because he would like to speed the meetings up – the board receives the board packets early so they can review numbers and ask questions if needed. Mr. Larson did point out that the top 10 webpages visited are reporting incorrectly because of a bug that duplicated some of them after updating the program. He stated that this wasn't a big issue and now it is fixed. As far as email marketing stats went in February, one fewer email was sent out compared to January. Mr. Larson did attach the emails for the board members to look at. Mr. Larson also reported on the ads and campaigns Mr. Gray has been designing. Mr. Larson pointed out the new tours that the staff has been organizing. Mr. Gray put three new pages in the visitor guide along with designing stickers for a Foodie Tour, a Brewery Tour, and a Pet Friendly Town. Mr. Larson stated the tours will hopefully launch at the beginning of April. He also stated that the staff has been working with the Hilton on a partnership with the brewery tour. Ms. Holyfield asked if the other hotels in town are involved with this. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that her staff at the Hilton coincidentally had been working on a brewery package for guests at the hotel. They reached out to Mrs. Trey Sherwood at Main Street who directed the hotel to Mr. Larson. Ms. Holyfield wanted to make sure others are involved too and asked if they have been told about the tours. Mr. Larson stated that the tours have not been marketed yet.

b) 2020 Visitors' Guide Update – Mr. Larson reported that the visitor guide is in its final stages as the staff has been re-writing, proofing, and collaborating on what should be put in this year's guide. Mr. Larson stated that it should be printed by the beginning of April.

c) Groups and Conferences Update – OWAA – Mr. Larson reported that he has been working on a proposal to the Outdoor Writers of America Association. He has talked to local representatives of the organization, one of whom will be next year's president, but the information that Mr. Larson received stated that our chances are slim to win over the board. This is because the 2020 conference is being held at Winter Park, CO but it wouldn't hurt to throw our name in the pool. Mr. Larson reported that the estimated ROI for the event is a couple hundred thousand and the event will give Albany County great PR as the writers will publish articles and blogs of their time here.

d) Legislative Update – Mr. Larson wanted to remind the board that the 5% Lodging Tax bill passed, has been signed, and will be put into effect as of January 1st, 2021.

e) Building Update – Mr. Larson stated that the location at the Territorial Prison does not seem likely anymore. Mr. Larson has already viewed other buildings throughout town including downtown. One of particular interest is the Chamber of Commerce building which could be a possible co-location with the chamber. The location is ideal because of the parking lot, easy access from the interstate, and it is an existing structure. The chamber is looking to obtain a new location as well as their old building needs some work done. Mr. McShane stated that it is disappointing that the Wyoming Parks department wasn't able to make it work as both parties were excited about the collaboration. Mr. McShane told the board that we could add on to the existing building, renovate, or start new. Mrs. Bertoneclj asked if the 4th and Fremont Streets location had been looked at. Mr. McShane stated that 4th St. is not a street a visitor center should be on – it should be on Grand Ave, 3rd St., or Snowy Range Rd. in order to be accessible to visitors. Mr. Larson stated to the board that he would like for them to vote on whether or not to pursue this location with the chamber. Mr. McShane made a motion to move forward with pursuing a partnership with the chamber. Mrs. Malmstrom seconded the motion. Ms. Holyfield asked where the location is exactly. Mr. Larson said it is located by the Loaf 'N Jug gas station on 3rd St. and Park Ave. The motion passed unanimously.

f) Coronavirus – Mr. Larson gave the board an update on what the staff is currently doing to reduce the spread of the virus. Ms. Johnston has been cleaning the office after visitors come in. Mrs. Haugen and Mr. Larson have put together a unified message addressing what we are doing to keep travelers and staff safe. Mr. Larson contacted WOT to ask if they have a unified message that they are sending out and they stated that they are currently working on that and it will be posted on their website in a few days. Their response is to pause all of their national campaigns that aren't already running and they are asking others around the state to be cautious in their wording (ex: social-distancing). Mr. Larson also sent an email asking what is happening with state run visitor centers like the Summit which is supposed to open in May. The WOT stated that the plan currently is to open the center, but this may change. Mr. Larson had a meeting with the WOT, WTIC board, WLRA board, and other counterparts across the state to discuss what actions are being taken or what should be taken during this time. Mr. Larson stated that they will be meeting weekly. Mr. Larson asked the board what their thoughts are as there are currently no cases in Laramie or Albany County but there is in Cheyenne and Fort Collins and if we close, how long will we be closed. Mr. Larson also stated that we have currently decided to stay open but this may also change as events develop. Mrs. Bertoneclj stated that as she has done her shopping, she has run into folks from Chugwater and Colorado who came to Laramie to buy their supplies. Mr. Larson reported that if we close now, we would be the only center in Wyoming to close – he believes it is still premature. Mr. McShane brought up an example of the mayor in the Jaws movie where he was adamant about keeping the beaches open when in hindsight he should have closed. He explained that Wyoming's mentality is usually "everything will be ok" while other bordering states have shut down which he believes is reckless. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that it would be wise to wait to see what happens when other states shut down. Mrs. Malmstrom also asked what the current traffic flow in the office is like. Mr. Larson and Ms. Johnston stated that today there were three people in which is high for this time of year and that we looked at the last three years' data to see what we would lose if we closed our doors. Mr. Larson stated that the numbers aren't significant enough for us to keep our doors open unless there is a threat internally in our team. Mr. Larson also believes that our team is at a low risk because we are small. There is an option to working remotely but Mr. Larson would play it by ear. Mr. McShane stated that his concerns are about the safety of the staff and visitors, the revenue lost should not be a big concern right now. He reported that the Snowy Range Ski Lodge is closing their ski lodge this week

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and will close the entire area by next week. Mr. McShane thinks the tourism industry isn't being proactive enough and because we are so close to a state with many confirmed cases, when the virus reaches us it will hit us hard. Ms. Holyfield chimed in stating that she will support whatever decision the staff makes and agrees with Mr. Larson that the visitor center should be a sign of solidarity to businesses in the area because many hotels and stores do not have the option of closing. Ms. Holyfield also stated that this could be a great opportunity to be creative, maybe compiling goodie bags for visitors to take while keeping the doors closed or delivering food to people's cars. Mr. Hammond stated that most of Italy is now in a state of regret because they didn't close soon enough and now the US infection growth rate is almost 1:1 in exponential growth as was seen in Italy. Mr. Hammond also stated that the test results in our county won't return until a week's time so he believes we should be proactive and cautious as several tests have been sent out. He also thinks we should make our decision based on what other municipalities have already done. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that we are not a hospital or in another critical situation but we do have the option to close and the board will support the staff if a closure is needed.

g) Destination Next & Wyoming Best Program – Mr. Larson stated it is a state run co-op with an estimated total value at \$25K where we would contribute half of that cost for a professional third party to do a community assessment and establish a strategic plan. Mr. Larson stated that we do not currently have a strategic plan and it is imperative that we establish one. The majority of the counties in Wyoming have either completed the program or are in the process of completing it which means we are behind and it will take us longer to catch up. Mrs. Bertoneclj made a motion to move forward with and participate in the Destination Next program. Mr. Hammond seconded the motion. Mr. McShane asked why would we spend the money on this, wouldn't we be able to do this ourselves. Mr. Larson stated that we need a neutral third party and community-wide input is needed. The motion passed unanimously.

h) 401k Plan – Mr. Larson attached a sheet to the board packet on the rates of this new plan. We currently do not offer a competitive plan for employees and Mr. Larson believes this is an important step for the organization. The board would contribute approximately \$4,000/year plus a \$1,000 fee for installing the program with an employer match of up to 4% towards employee retirement accounts. Mr. Larson asked for approval from the board to roll this out. Ms. Holyfield stated she believes a great asset for the employer. Mrs. Malmstrom moved to move forward with the program. Ms. Holyfield seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

i) Employee Manual – Policies, Benefits – Mr. Larson asked that, because of the time constraints, the Benefits portion from the discussion because there will be some discussion on this topic. Mr. Larson asked the board to approve the Policy manual which was split out from the rest of the manual to be able to send it out after this board meeting. Mr. McShane made a motion to accept the Policy portion of the manual as the board has had a couple of months to review it and remove the Benefits portion out of this conversation. Mrs. Bertoneclj seconded the motion. Mrs. Bertoneclj asked if sick leave was included in the Benefits portion because it was previously on the honor system. She wonders what would happen if a staff member were to be put in the hospital because of some long-term or serious sickness – how many days, months, or years would we keep someone on payroll. Mr. Larson stated that that has not been discussed yet and that he can add a line item into the Benefits section if it not already listed there. Mr. McShane stated that it should be in the Benefits section. Mrs. Bertoneclj also asked about getting rid of President's Day and Veteran's Day to trade it off for a Christmas closure so staff doesn't need to take vacation days off during the holiday season. Mr. McShane agrees with that decision and stated that it should be listed in the Benefits section. Mr. Hammond stated that the board should approve the Policies section and from that point on the executive director should make changes since he oversees the employees on a day-to-day basis. Mrs. Bertoneclj agreed. Mr. Larson stated that he will prepare the Benefits portion to be voted on by the next meeting. The motion made passed unanimously. The board thanked Mr. Larson for his work on the employee manual.

j) Reminder: LCBA Banquet Table, March 28th – Mr. Larson reminded the board about the chamber event. Mrs. Bertoneclj asked if the event will also be cancelled. Mr. Larson said he hadn't heard any news yet but would follow up with the chamber. The board stated that they would be surprised if this event happened as planned. Mr. Hammond chimed in saying that all Regal Theatres have closed across the country to combat the spread of the virus.

k) Brady Hammond – Mr. Hammond stated that he will be leaving Laramie and ultimately be leaving the tourism board. He stated that this will be his last board meeting but would still love to help during this strange time. He also thanked the board for the experience and the board members wished him well.

7. Grant and Sponsorship Requests

a) 2020 USA Softball Tournament – Mrs. Rebecca Pexton, Mrs. Jodi Guerin, and Mr. Shawn Faxon were present through Zoom. Mrs. Pexton, director of the USA Softball events, re-presented to the board to answer their questions. Mrs. Pexton explained that in the past they have held the tournament in Gillette, Casper, and Rock Springs where each location worked out a deal that the location would donate fields or the cost of lights instead of gifting grant money. She stated that when the event was held in Gillette, the trackable income the city received was over \$800K. Mrs. Pexton also explained that the program has grown over the last three years and there is a total of 56 teams involved in this tournament and they expect to use 350 hotel rooms with some campsites being used, as well. Mrs. Pexton stated that she has wanted the event to be held in Laramie for some time because of the nice facilities in town and recently the softball organization in Laramie has started to grow. She believes this is a great opportunity to build up the Laramie chapter. Mrs. Malmstrom and Mr. McShane stated that the board didn't want to reject the grant proposal, they just had a few questions. Mrs. Malmstrom asked if Mrs. Pexton has already contacted hotels in Laramie to check their availability. Mrs. Pexton has called several hotels in town and some are not willing to provide any rooms as they would like to save those for LJD guests. She has been able to block off some rooms, but

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she does not know who the teams will be yet to officially book them so additional rooms may be needed. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that she would like to see this event return and asked if there is any flexibility when choosing the dates of the tournament or not. Mrs. Pexton stated the event takes place every second weekend in July because the teams that win will go on to nationals. By code, all games need to be completed by the last week in July. Mrs. Pexton also explained that with the virus spreading, many locations have postponed their games until June when most take place during May so it is shortening the season. Mrs. Guerin stated that the city board reviewed the information on the tournament and recommended that they would sponsor the event if the tourism board split the costs with them. She also explained that the Parks & Rec department would like to cover at least 30% of the costs of the fields as far as maintenance and staffing goes. The estimates submitted are most likely going to be high because USA Softball doesn't have a game schedule yet. Mrs. Pexton agreed that the estimates are high and that there is no intention of making money off of this event. Mr. McShane asked again if they have all the rooms they need or if they will be taking anything from LJD. Mrs. Guerin stated that the city board believes there is enough room for both events and after talking with Mrs. Pexton and Mr. Larson, they believe it won't negatively affect LJD attendance. Mrs. Pexton chimed in stated that she has contacted UW and they may be able to rent out dorm rooms. Mrs. Walsh asked how that would work with our lodging tax in the city. Mrs. Bertoneclj stated we cannot collect the lodging or sales tax off of those rooms. Mrs. Pexton stated that over the last three years her head count has been very accurate because the teams need to physically check-in or they can't play. Her intention also is to reserve the rooms so that check-in is on Thursday and check-out is on Sunday. This way the Laramie hotels are still booked for Saturday night which Mrs. Pexton recognizes is important to the tourism board. Mr. McShane asked how many hotel rooms are in Laramie and how many rooms LJD has used in the past. Mr. Larson stated that there are 1402 rooms in the county which doesn't include Airbnb's, VRBO's, or campsites. Mr. Faxon reported that the officials at LJD only use about 20 rooms/night but agreed with Mr. McShane when asked that approximately 60% of attendees live close enough that they do not require hotel rooms. Ms. Holyfield asked Mrs. Pexton to confirm that she has not booked all the rooms she needs yet. Mrs. Pexton stated that with what the room block prices were from some hotels she had to call around to others. She reported that most team's budget \$89/night for rooms and some hotels did not offer any deals (\$99-109/night) and some refused to block rooms. Ms. Holyfield asked if there is any chance that the event will get cancelled. Mrs. Pexton stated that some of the events prior to the championships have been cancelled and some teams are continuing to play to prepare for the championships. She thinks that the virus could potentially disappear just as quickly as it appeared so she is still planning on ordering trophies for the championships. Mr. McShane asked the board to make a decision and asked Mrs. Pexton to leave the Zoom meeting. Mr. McShane also asked Mr. Faxon weather or not there would be problems as far as finding hotel rooms in town for the LJD attendees. Mr. Faxon left the meeting. Mr. McShane stated to the board that at one point the board was creating a fund for recruiting conferences and groups to Laramie. Mr. McShane asked the board that we use this money to pay the difference between what the groups budgeted for hotel rooms and the actual rates and grant them their requested \$3,350. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that the average rate may be greater than expected since it is LJD rates, but she would be happy to re-visit with Mrs. Pexton. After discussing the options Mrs. Malmstrom reported that her team reached out to Mrs. Pexton again and offered her 25 rooms at a lower rate so all that is left is 25 rooms for her to find. The board decided that Mrs. Pexton almost has all the rooms she needs so it would not be necessary to make up the difference in room costs. Mr. McShane moved to grant USA Softball the original amount of \$3,350. Ms. Holyfield seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. McShane asked the staff that we send the city a thank you for coming forward to help bring this event to Laramie and contributing an amount, as well.

8. Review of the Board/Staff Activities – Mr. Larson stated that the board can review these stats and activities on their own time. He briefly summed up what the staff has been working on. The visitor guide is almost completed, the staff attended the tourism conference, and Mr. Gray has been in contact with the chamber and may be a committee member for the Business Retention & Expansion committee.

a) February Office Stats

b) Johnston

i) Visitors' Guide

c) Gray

i) BRE Committee Meeting

ii) Mural Brochure Meeting

d) Haugen

i) Governor's Tourism Conference

e) Larson

i) Governor's Tourism Conference

9. Public Comments

a) Mr. McShane asked that to avoid more discussion at the next meeting, since Mr. Hammond is leaving Laramie, the board should establish a Vice Chair. Mr. McShane will be Interim Chair and proposed that Mrs. Malmstrom should be the one to fill the Interim Vice Chair position. In July, Mr. McShane will run out of terms, Mrs. Walsh is up for re-appointment or renewal, Ms. Holyfield's/Mr. Mark Pearce's seat needs re-appointed, and Mr. Hammond's seat needs re-appointed. Mrs. Bertoneclj asked if Mr. Larson has made any headway on recruiting new members. Mr. Larson said not yet. Ms. Holyfield asked if this can be advertised on social media. Mr. Larson stated that we have no say in advertising or selecting the seats, it

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is up to the county or city. Mr. Hammond stated you can visit the city's website and send the link to others. Mr. Hammond also stated that we do not need to vote on appointing Mrs. Malmstrom as Vice Chair at this meeting, next meeting it can be voted on.

10. Adjournment

MOTION BY Mrs. Bertoneclj seconded by Ms. Holyfield to adjourn into an executive session for employee personnel matters. The motion was passed unanimously. Meet was adjourned at 6:00 pm.

The next ACTB board meeting will be at the ACTB Office at 4 p.m. on Monday, April 20, 2019

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