**Mat-Su CVB**

**Board Meeting MINUTES**

**August 11, 2020**

**Zoom Meeting**

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| **Board Members Present**  Mark Fleenor (T)  Israel Mahay (T)  Travis Taylor (T)  Cole Chambers (T)  Rick Peterson (T)  Fernando Salvador (T) | **Board Members Absent**  Cheryl Metiva  Ina Mueller  Roberta Warner  Dan Wilcock | **Staff Present**  Bonnie Quill (T)  Neil Campbell (T)  Casey Ressler (T)  Justin Saunders (T) |

Mark called the meeting to order by at 10:04 am. The roll was called.

**AGENDA**

Cheryl moved to approve the agenda. Rick seconded the motion. The motion carried without opposition.

**MINUTES**

Roberta moved to approve the June 23, 2020 board meeting minutes. Israel seconded the motion, which passed without opposition.

**FINANCIAL REPORTS**

Bonnie stated that the FY21 financial reports provided prior to the meeting did not reflect the expected but not yet received COVID grant funding but did show that $120,000 remains in the reserve account.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**OPERATIONS UPDATE**

Bonnie recapped the board activity to-date since the February 28 board meeting at which the FY2021 budget was passed. Six meetings have been held since then, with staff being focused on pivoting activities to our members and community and keeping the board up to date on operations.

Bonnie referred to her summary of staff activities since the last board meeting June 23, detailed in her report emailed previously. She added that the most recent member newsletter was a special edition focusing on efforts and strategies in dealing with the effects of the COVID pandemic on members and stakeholders. The email with the link to the newsletter was tagged urgent and was opened by at least 45 recipients out of the more than one hundred who received the email, a good opening rate. She noted that staff continues to participate in about ten national and state industry webinars per week per person, which focus on travel intentions, communications and messaging, best practices, and new and emerging protocols and guidelines for reopening. A fourth round of calls to members has begun and has gotten very positive feedback.

**IN-STATE CAMPAIGN**

Casey reported that the in-state advertising campaign that began on July 1. In-state only pay-per-click advertising, geotargeted on Anchorage, Southcentral and a little bit of Fairbanks, A print ad is running three times a week in the Anchorage Daily News and an ad running once a week in the Warrior military paper. 300,000 impressions of Google display ads across a number of different websites and 60,000 mandatory viewing commercials, geotargeted to Alaska that are placed in streaming TV shows. $18,000 has being spent on the campaign which has been very successful in driving traffic to the website and member specials.

For the period of July 1 through August 10, overall sessions to the website are up 16%, well above industry averages. Currently, DMOs are seeing an average decline of about 38%. This is significant as all of the increases seen at our website are being driven by in-state traffic as national pay-per-click advertising has yet to be started again. Traffic from Alaska-only IP addresses is up 109% from last year, generating 9,888 total session. Traffic from just Anchorage website visitors is up 147% from last year, 4,700 sessions generated from people in Anchorage. Wasilla is up 60%, Knik-Fairview is up 95%, and Palmer is up 40%. Casey added that the overall organic traffic for the entire site is down about 3-4%, while it is 38% industry wide. Alaska DMOs are collectively down 18%, a figure that includes the Mat-Su CVB. Taking the Mat-Su CVB numbers out, the other Alaska DMOs are realistically down 20-25%.

The Alaskans page is currently, by far, the most visited page on the website. This is significant as the only way to get to that page is through the ads placed for the current campaign. This page generated almost 6,000-page views, followed by the special offers for Alaskans page. Casey attributed some of the success of the website to the eight videos produced in‑house by Justin. These videos are available on YouTube but are used mainly on the Mat-Su CVB website and social media, with reposts on Facebook where they get more engagement. Casey then shared two of the most recent videos with meeting participants.

**DUES AND VISITOR GUIDE AD SALES**

Justin reported that 25 of 218 members have renewed at this point, making the odds of winning the early bird free visitors guide ad drawing from renewals received by this Friday pretty good. Some members have upgraded their advertising at this time, taking advantage of the discounted rates offered to members by the Board in response to the COVID crisis. Justin noted that many of the members he has talked to have expressed their gratitude for the consideration shown to members through the free three months of membership and the ad rate discounts.

Justin stated that, at this point, visitor guide advertising sales stand at $12,721 While less than the sales recorded at this time last year, it is not bad for month one of the renewal season, which began in mid-July this year. This is revenue after the discounts have been taken. Justin added that he is encouraged by the willingness of so many members to stay in the game and renew the ads they had last year, some even upgrading or adding new ads.

**INDUSTRY UPDATE**

Bonnie reported that the next ATIA board meeting is scheduled for August 26. She noted that the ATIA convention, scheduled for October, will be virtual this year, with a registration fee of $49. The convention is usually one of the main sources of revenue for the ATIA but the board decided to subsidize the event in order to get as many members as possible to participate.

Bonnie reminded the board that the ATIA submitted a application for a CARES Act EDA grant for $30 million dollars in June, which included cooperative support from state DMOs including Mat-Su CVB. Sarah, the ATIA CEO, reported last week that she had been informed by the EDA that only $2 million in grant funds to the ATIA were being considered. While disappointing, $2 million will greatly help the ATIA and keep it whole. Bonnie reiterated that the legislature failed to appropriate any funding to the ATIA in FY21.

Bonnie ended her industry update by noting that the ATIA marketing committee, of which she is a member, will meet next on August 19.

**CARES ACT RELIEF FUNDING**

Bonnie reported that, on the national level, both US Travel and Destinations International are actively advocating for more relief for travel and tourism, one part of which is making 501c6 nonprofits eligible for the PPP program. Support for this is in both Senate and House bills being considered but negotiations have, at this time, stalled.

Bonnie further reported that, on the state level, the CARES Act Business Relief grants through DCCED and AIDEA have been slow to be distributed. $290 million was appropriated to this grant program. Locally, the Mat-Su borough and the cities of Palmer and Wasilla have announced their small business grant programs. The Mat-Su CVB hosted a webinar on all of these grant opportunities on July 30.

Bonnie included in her board meeting materials the South Denali Visitor Complex Market Analysis prepared for AIDEA on behalf of Alaska State Parks. Ricky Gease, Director of Alaska State Parks gave permission to share this report with the board. It also included a memo outlining two different financial scenarios for the project. The fifty-page report revealed that most of those surveyed felt the need for a top of ridge experience, whether it be a stand-alone visitor center, a campground, or a tram. The report was an analysis, not a recommendation. The next step is to issue an RFI.

**MSB CARES ACT FUNDING / MAT-SU CVB GRANT AGREEMENT**

Bonnie reported that, on May 28, the Assembly passed its FY2021 budget with no bed tax grant funding for the Mat-Su CVB. The expectation was that funding for the Mat-Su CVB would come from State CARES Act funding to the Mat-Su Borough. On July 7, an ordinance was introduced that included $1.5 million for two years of funding for the Mat-Su CVB. The ordinance was appeared for a vote and was passed. Bonnie stated that on July 31 she signed a 2-year grant agreement at the borough with the director of finance and the acting borough manager. At that time, the finance director assured Bonnie that she would initiate the payment of the full two years of funding for payment next week. Bonnie added that, in order to comply with federal and state language, a clause stipulating that the funds must be expended by December 30 was added to the nine-page grant agreement. Bonnie was informed that the borough is choosing to interpret the language as meaning that the borough must expend the funds by December 30 and that sub-grantees are not bound by this requirement. It is expected that more flexible language and guidance from the state will follow.

Mark asked if current bed tax collection information was available. Bonnie responded that third quarter collections will be reported in October and that she will request from the borough the second quarter report which has been released. Mark stated that the reports are a good indicator of the health of the industry and that making the information available to members as a link in the newsletter or an e-bulletin would likely get a high click through rate.

**BOARD DEVELOPMENT/NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**

Bonnie stated that no committee or chair has been appointed yet, which is why the topic is on the agenda. As the terms of Roberta, Cole and Israel expire this year, they cannot serve on the committee. Mark appointed Travis as chair of the committee. Serving also will be Dan, Cheryl and Mark. The first meeting of the committee will be in the third week of September in order to work with the election schedule already published.

**EDA GATEWAY VIC GRANT APPLICATION**

Bonnie reported that all pieces of the EDA Gateway Visitor Center grant are being finalized, with one of two major attachments, regarding the environmental aspects of the proposal, being received for review by her. A complete draft of the application is expected by early next week. The borough will review the application as well, as the Mat-Su CVB and the borough are co-applicants. Bonnie added that the current timeline calls for submission of the grant to the EDA in mid-August. It is then subject to a 120-day review process. Early meetings with the regional EDA director were significant as it was her feedback that blessed the application moving forward. Bonnie reported on getting very positive feedback from HDR regarding the application and the cooperation provided by the borough in applying for the grant. Bonnie stated her intent to distribute the application to the Mat-Su Visitors Foundation board for review once it is received next week.

**MEETING DATES**

The annual candidate forum will be conducted via Zoom on Friday, October 23 at 1:00 pm.

The full board will meet next via Zoom on Friday, October 23, 2020, at 2:00 pm, after the candidate forum.

The annual meeting was scheduled for November 12, via Zoom. Bonnie will try to line up a nationally recognized speaker to participate. The board will meet before the meeting to seat the new board and elect officers.

**ADJOURNMENT**

After board member announcements, the meeting was adjourned by consensus at 10:54 am.

Respectfully submitted, Attest,

Neil Campbell, Recording Secretary Israel Mahay, Secretary

Date Date