**Mat-Su CVB**

**Board Meeting MINUTES**

**October 23, 2020**

**Zoom Meeting**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Board Members Present**Mark Fleenor (Z)Roberta Warner (Z)Cole Chambers (Z)Cheryl Metiva (Z)Rick Peterson (Z)Fernando Salvador (Z)Dan Wilcock (Z) | **Board Members Absent**Israel MahayTravis Taylor**Guest**Wes Hoskins – MSTPF (Z) | **Staff Present**Bonnie Quill (Z)Neil Campbell (Z)Casey Ressler (Z)Justin Saunders (Z) |

Mark called the meeting to order by at 2:00 pm. The roll was called.

**AGENDA**

Cole moved to approve the agenda. Roberta seconded the motion. The motion carried without opposition.

**MINUTES**

Roberta moved to approve the August 11, 2020 board meeting minutes. Fernando seconded the motion, which passed without opposition.

**GUEST SPEAKER**

Wes Hoskins, Executive Director of the Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation (MSTPF) reported to the Mat-Su CVB board on an ad hoc committee formed to address a threat to a popular greenbelt and trail system posed by potential gravel extraction by the University of Alaska. The greenbelt, consisting of about 1,000 contiguous acres managed by several different entities, including the UA system, lies north of the Glenn Highway, east of Trunk Road and south of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway. The University, a land grant university facing challenging financial pressures, has been charged to evaluate the potential for revenue that can be derived from University-owned lands, such as that which can be derived from the extraction of gravel in a parcel owned by the UAF Experimental Farm. The 70-acre parcel in question is part of the greenbelt and is crossed by many of the trails in the greenbelt used heavily by recreational users. The exploratory coring was undertaken without prior public notice, created trespass issues, damage, and disruption to existing trails and engendered public distrust.

An ad hoc committee, consisting of landowners and stakeholders, was formed thereafter to address the issue and get the University to the table to hear and address the differing views of others. While no decision or plan has been forthcoming from the University, the ad hoc committee is working to prepare for any plan that negatively impacts the greenbelt. As such, the committee was reaching out to the Mat-Su CVB Board for a resolution or letter of support seeking to maintain the integrity of the greenbelt. The committee is looking for a workable solution, such as a conservation easement on the 70-acre parcel, outright purchase of the parcel, or a land swap.

Bonnie stated that much of the testimony from stakeholders at a meeting last night held that the recreational value of the land exceeded the value of the gravel. She noted that she did not testify at the meeting as the Mat-Su CVB board had not had a chance to consider the issue prior to the meeting. Given that the greenbelt was adjacent to the site of the new Gateway VIC, she did express confidence that the Mat-Su CVB board would offer some support for the ad hoc committee. Rick asked if the University has a plan in place or if it was, at this point, only exploring its options. Wes responded that it was the latter.

**STANDING REPORTS**

**CHAIR’S REPORT**

Mark stated that he intended, later in the meeting, to set a date for an Executive Committee meeting before the annual meeting. He stated also that he will add a discussion regarding greenbelt support at the beginning of New Business.

**ATIA REPORT**

Bonnie reported that in August the Mat-Su CVB had renewed its ATIA membership at the same $10,000 commitment level as last year. In addition to other benefits, detailed by Bonnie, the membership package included a convention sponsorship that allowed Bonnie to give a two-minute presentation about the Gateway VIC project and the EDA grant application for funding it at the recently concluded ATIA convention. She noted that this is the same level of commitment the Mat-Su CVB has provided for the last three years.

Bonnie reported also that the ATIA board met on August 26 for a regular meeting and again on September 3 for a special meeting with Commissioner Crum and Dr. Zink, called to address ATIA board concerns regarding Covid-19 travel restrictions and mandates. It held another special meeting on September 25 to meet with the Federal Maritime Commissioner who was visiting Alaska to gather information on the economic impact to the industry resulting from cruise cancellations. His report noted the greater impact of the cancellations on Alaska than any other state.

Bonnie stated that the legislature failed to appropriate any funding in FY21 for the ATIA. All paid advertising was suspended in March. $1.7 million was preserved from FY20 and carried over to FY21. The ATIA estimates it will collect about $360,000 from coop programs in FY21 that, added to the carryover funds, will provide about $2 million to the ATIA for marketing in FY21. In contrast, the marketing plan for FY20 was $9 million. The ATIA is still waiting to hear about their application for an EDA grant that was revised to seek $2 million for marketing as well.

Bonnie noted that the October 5 ATIA board meeting, held virtually during convention week, was her last as she termed out after fifteen years on the board. She received many thoughtful and kind comments during the meeting. Two new board members, one for Southcentral and one at-large, were seated. ATIA board members have first right of refusal to serve on the ATIA marketing committee, any additional members being approved by the board. Bonnie reported that she submitted her request to continue to serve on the committee. The ATIA board will make appointments to the committee at their retreat in November.

Cole thanked Bonnie for her long service on the ATIA board. She asked Bonnie if there was any talk at the October 5th meeting about the new mandate from Dr. Zink’s office that came out on the 15th. Bonnie responded that it was their discussion with them on September 3rd to make the existing mandate simpler, which seems to be what the intent of the new mandate. Cole responded that, while it is simpler in some respects, the new mandate is more restrictive to some by going into detail what social distancing means and listing all of those indoor activities engaged in by travelers. Tour companies trying to operate within the new guidelines are struggling to comply with the new specific guidance. She asked if the ATIA board had seen the new mandate ahead of time and, if so, if they had any concerns at that time. Bonnie replied that the new mandate was not sent to the ATIA board for review prior to its release.

Cole asked if anyone else was having a problem with the new mandate. Casey responded that, in a conference call with staff at Explore Fairbanks, he heard that the mandate is a huge concern for operators providing winter aurora trips in Fairbanks because visitors are only coming three to five days for the trips, which does not allow enough of a window to comply with the mandate requirements. Operators were caught completely off guard. Cole reported that, after Dr. Zink’s office was contacted by a few tour operators to explain their problems with the new mandate, the operators were informed that the intent was to simplify restrictions, not be more restrictive. Dr. Zink’s office indicated that they needed to hear more from the travel industry about how it operates so the restrictions can be modified to work for everyone.

**TREASURER’S REPORT**

Bonnie reported for Travis who, unable to attend, provided a brief report for her to deliver. Travis stated that the Mat-Su CVB, unlike most industry businesses, the Mat-Su CVB is in a great financial position, adding that caution in spending would be wise to be fair to members who are struggling financially.

Before moving on, Mark stated that a number of curveballs were recently thrown in the VIC grant writing process and that Bonnie was able to hit every one of them. He commended Bonnie in her efforts that were above and beyond.

**PRESIDENTS’S REPORT**

Bonnie reported that this is the seventh board meeting since the passage of the FY21 budget in February. She referred the board to her staff activity report emailed previously, choosing to mention the highlights since the last board meeting on August 11. $1.5 million in funding from the Mat-Su Borough for the next two years was secured and received. Destination Analysts was contracted in September to conduct visitor research focused on travel intentions for the next six to eighteen months, the results to be presented at the annual meeting in November. A well-received weekly webinar series was organized for September, recordings of which are available on the Mat-Su CVB YouTube channel. Bonnie stated that she is confirming a cruise update webinar for December, following the CLIA update offered by Visit Anchorage in September. She noted that Cheryl had invited Bonnie to give a presentation to the Susitna Rotary this last Wednesday, which was a positive experience.

Bonnie stated that she will bring a revised FY21 marketing budget to the November 12th board meeting, as several planned marketing programs were suspended or cancelled due to Covid-19 and several new marketing opportunities have identified to take their place.

Bonnie reported that her main focus since the last board meeting has been the pursuit of grant funding for the Gateway VIC, coordinating with the EDA, the borough, and HDR, the grant writing contractor. Complications in the process included the need to revise the project cost estimates, securing a 20% match, discovering that funds received from the sale of the old VIC had been spent, getting the necessary matching funds restored through emergency action on the part of borough administration, the Assembly, and the help and support of Mayor Halter, and a last-minute change in the grant source. She was successful and was able to finally get the grant submitted and in line for review, a process that will take up to 120 days. Bonnie noted that the borough is the primary applicant, while the Mat-Su CVB is a co-applicant.

Bonnie continued, reporting that staff still each participate in eight to ten webinars every week, maintain contact with members in a fourth round of calls, and are working with Destination Analysts to provide members with research that should be of benefit in these challenging times.

Casey provided a summary of the results of the Show Up for the Valley ad campaign undertaken this past July and August, much of which was discussed at the last board meeting. He reported that $17,900 spent on social media, print, radio, online blogs, and in-state pay-per-click advertising brought a great deal of exposure for the Valley and traffic to the Mat-Su CVB website. Casey reported on website statistics, noting that while the number of sessions was down only 7% over last year, a remarkable achievement given that no national pay-per-click spending occurred since last March. Organic traffic was up 14.5% while the other Alaska DMOs were down 18%. The industry is down 24% nationally regarding organic traffic. Casey estimated that if national PPC spending was in play, the Mat-Su CVB numbers would have been up 20%. He added that most of the traffic came from in-state residents and that visitation to the calendar of events page skyrocketed during the summer.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**MAT-SU TRAILS & PARKS FOUNDATION (MSTPF) DISCUSSION**

Dan asked whether or not it was premature to voice opposition to a plan that has yet to be determined. Mark responded that the ad hoc group is looking for support for maintaining the integrity and recreational values of the greenbelt in question. Rick stated that, at this point, the University is only exploring the options available to it to bolster its funding. Roberta was of the opinion that the ad hoc committee was seeking support for a transparent process that considers public input regarding long-term resource development plans, plans which recognize the value of the recreational value and integrity of the greenbelt.

Mark suggested that the Mat-Su CVB voice its support for transparency and public engagement in order to best preserve the integrity of the greenbelt. Cheryl stated that a letter of support would be a better course of action compared to a resolution. It was agreed that Bonnie would draft such a letter, which would be reviewed by Mark and the Executive committee prior to its next meeting. Mark stated his intent to share the draft prepared for the Executive Committee with all board members before the committee meeting.

**MSB ASSEMBLY CANDIDATE SURVEY**

Bonnie referred everyone to the four-question Assembly candidate survey distributed to the seven candidates running in the upcoming MSB Assembly election. Their responses will be published in the member newsletter to be released next week. She stated that, after watching a Zoom candidate forum in Fairbanks, it was deemed better for the Mat-Su CVB to have no forum this year. All candidate responses to the candidate survey will be published in next week’s newsletter. Casey stated that four out of seven candidates have already responded and that all were, so far, supportive of the CVB and the industry.

**ANNUAL MEETING THEME/FORMAT**

Bonnie reported that a flyer, announcing the annual meeting scheduled for November 12th, was mailed to 202 members and VIPs. The flyer will also appear as a full page in the upcoming member newsletter. The agenda includes a 45-minute presentation by Destination Analysts and another 45 minutes of reports from board and staff, and feedback from the membership in the Voice of the Membership.

**NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT**

Bonnie reported for Travis Taylor. Seven candidates for four seats were put forward for the election. Roberta Warner, Cole Chambers, and Israel Mahay are running as incumbents for another term each. Mark Austin, Lars Larson, Steve Solari, and Heather Dudeck are also running. Ballots were mailed on October 5th and must be received by October 29th. Cheryl Metiva, Isabelle Bornemann, Bonnie and Casey will count ballots on Friday, October 30th.

**MEETING DATES**

The full board will meet next via Zoom on Thursday, November 12, 2020, at 9:00 am, before the annual meeting. Due to time constraints, the meeting will be limited to the seating of newly elected board members and the election of officers.

The Executive Committee will meet next via Zoom on Monday, November 9, 2020 at 10:00 am.

The Board retreat was tentatively scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday, January 13-14, 2021 and will be in person if possible. Sheep Mountain Lodge was suggested as a likely location for the retreat.

**ADJOURNMENT**

After board member announcements, Rick moved to adjourn the meeting, which was accepted without opposition. The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Attest,

Neil Campbell, Recording Secretary Israel Mahay, Secretary

Date Date