

**CENTRAL MONTANA TOURISM  
BOARD MEETING  
Thursday, March 14, 2024**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT (Zoom Only):** BECKY MILLER, REBECCA ENGUM, CHANDRA MOOMEY, JESSE ANDERSON, CARLY WHEATLEY, CASSIE COBURN, CONNIE JENKINS, JUDY TEMPEL, KATIE MISSICK, CHERI HIRST, CAROL SCHAEFFER, RALPH SCHAEFFER

**OTHERS PRESENT:** SHAWN PETERSON, KATTIE MEYER, STEFANIE BROWN, LINDA BROWN, KATYA PETERSON, BRENDA MAAS

**Meeting called to order:** 10:02AM.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None

**MINUTES & FINANCIALS:**

*Tempel motioned to approved the minutes from February 8, 2024, February 22, 2024 and the February 2024 financials. Corburn seconded. No further discussion and the motion was approved unanimously.*

**BOARD REPORTS:**

Submitted with the agenda. No questions or discussion on reports.

**INSIGHT & TREND REPORT PURCHASE:**

*Moomey motioned to pay Wendt \$1000 upon receipt of invoice for their insight report. Tempel seconded and motion was approved unanimously.*

**BRAND PRESENTATION:**

Meyer has been working since December with the marketing committee to refresh the Central Montana brand. Meyer presented the new brand. The goal was to modernize the brand into the future. There was some discussion on the brand narrative including utilizing the word unpolished. Meyer noted that the narrative could be applied and adapted in various ways such as use on the website, blogs, social media, etc. The overall consensus of the board felt that the new brand and narrative was a good balance of the rugged/traditional side of Central Montana with a more modern twist.

*Corburn motioned to approve the brand proposal. Moomey seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.*

Meyer added the next step is to provide a brand guide to the marketing team and board so things can start getting things updated.

**MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT:**

Guest Brenda Maas spoke about how they have structured a management agreement with Southeast Tourism. Mass noted that Billings is on a managerial agreement with the Billings Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is the managing organization with an umbrella housing the CVB and Southeast Montana. They manage the operating budget, management fee includes rent, use of equipment, etc., which can be defined however you would like.

Engum noted a management can look any way you want and provided an example sheet for each. Under a full management agreement Rebecca would be the Executive Director who would hire a Tourism Director. This provides some senior leadership and allows that person not to have to handle some of the day to day operations and can focus on their job. They get access to the already in place process and have options to share staff. The benefit would be additional admin support with paying bills, sending out visitor magazines, etc. and employee benefits matching Great Falls Tourism. The Regional Board still sets the direction, the budget and we have corporate headquarters within Great Falls Tourism. Maas mentioned some additional benefits include the shared resources especially personnel with hiring, payroll, benefits, advocacy that other staff may be doing, frees up the Tourism Director to do what they do best rather than focus on everything. The board puts in the overall direction for that Tourism Director, but the Director moves those

strategies and goals forward day to day. Maas came in with this structure in place. The contract is looked at every year just as a check-in, but they take a deeper look every 2-3 years. Their projected budget is FY25 which is around \$780k. In 2016 the budget was closer to \$500k but they lost some revenue and with the partnership the Chamber helped cover some of the lost funds. Maas also mentioned that some of her time is billed under marketing, so her full salary is not under admin. Annual reviews happen with the Executive Director of the Chamber, the COO and the Executive Board that includes salary negotiations.

Colocation is another model where all we would do is share space and pay rent.

Mentorship is a hybrid of both and can be done any way you want. It could be an employee of the board or the CVB. Could get bookkeeping services and consulting at an hourly rate. Rebecca mentioned that this can be complicated and it can get confusing for the employee on who they report to. There is likely more day-to-day management.

Miller explained that it is important to decide the structure before hiring. Rebeccas board is in support of any of these but prefer a full management agreement.

There was some discussion on the various models but the general consensus was to move forward with a management agreement with Great Falls CVB leading the efforts on hiring for a tourism director. We will review a more formal management agreement proposal at next months meeting. We can evaluate this model at any time and make adjustments as required to ensure its working for both entities.

*Moomey moved to pursue a management agreement with Great Falls CVB. and Tempel seconded. There was some discussion on the start date. The vote was never finalized as we do not have an official management agreement to review but it was decided that Engum work on creating that agreement that could be voted on during the next meeting. Engum will work on starting the transition working closely Miller. From perspective we can move forward with transition now like the plan, budget, hiring, etc. that needs to be taken care of but could pull some of those duties away from the Executive committee.*

#### **SECURE INTERIM BOOKKEEPING SERVICES:**

Miller discussed the potential of having Great Falls Tourism manage out bookkeeping which was in discussion prior to Cooler leaving.

*Schafer moved to contract Great Falls Tourism for bookkeeping services, French seconded. Further discussion included, Engum clarifying that their bookkeeper is a contactor not a traditional employee of Great Falls Tourism. No one had issues with this arrangement.*

*Engum abstained from voting and the vote was approved.*

#### **VISITOR GUIDE DISCUSSION:**

There was a lengthy discussion on the travel planner as the marketing firm needs to move forward if we want a travel planner completed. Engum noted that the Central Montana travel guide has not been the best tool to use to market the area. She believes ad sales are not worth wild. She would like to discuss the vision of the board for the visitors' guide. Does the guide still meet the purposes? Is it time to do a redesign and do we continue to sell ads and what do we want for the distribution of them? Is this still a tool we need or at least in its current state? She mentioned that the Great Falls CVB guide is 53 pages and includes outdoor rec, culture, falls, dining, 5 stories, signature events, hotels, suggested itineraries and they print 7500. The majority is mailed out and they don't have a certified folder. Schaeffer is on the committee and mentioned Banik was working on shifting some of the design of the planner which was minor and would like to see what they come up with. There was additional discussion making the planner evergreen so there was no date allowing more flexibility in how often a new edition is completed. Board members were wondering about ad sales which Miller explained ad sales were there to compensate Gail for her salary but felt that they are not necessary and may not be an effective use of time or resources.

The last planner reduced the number of ads down to 12 pages and it was still a big struggle to get ads. It was also significant time to Banik that is not necessarily compensated. With no ads the pages could even be cut or reallocated to other things. We currently have 54 pages. Engum sees a lot of opportunities to use this as a tool like driving traffic to website and more education on the experiences. Historically we have excess of 10 boxes but overall the bulk of the planners are distributed. There has never been tracking of distribution and peak times for distribution and that needs to be something we focus on moving forward. If we look at doing a multi-year planner there is an opportunity to adjust the schedule so we know when peak season is and to have it ready by peak season.

Moomey asked what the additional costs to completely redo the planner would be. Brown said they will need to put together a budget. Engum mentioned that it took two years to redo their planner and it was expensive, but it was well worth it and they have it as an evergreen piece with no date.

Brown said another issue is the state is not keeping their information on hotel changes on their site up to date.

Meyer was wondering if there were certain advertisers that may be beneficial to keep. Engum thinks we can still highlight businesses without charging and then we have more control of the look of it. We can try it and then change it in the future. There may be some entities that may want to make sure they are included and are willing to pay for an ad or feature.

Tempel was wondering how more rural communities could get featured. Stefanie will need more direction before being able to create a planner.

*Engum motioned to move forward with a travel planner that is redesigned without ads for now and then we can adjust as we move forward. Moomey seconds. Motioned was approved unanimously.*

Engum will work with Brown to work through a proposal.

#### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT:**

Miller notified the board that the Executive Director position has been posted and depending on how the board structures the management agreement with Great Falls CVB they may take over the search and hiring process. She also noted she has been working on the badlands project. Miller requested if anyone is interested in learning more about the pilot tourism program, they can reach out to her. She gave an update on the transition from James Cooler and noted that everything has been moved over to her. In April we will try to meet in person for the board meeting. Miller mentioned that she received a request to be out of our storage unit in Lewistown that is currently shared with Chris Cooler by April 1<sup>st</sup>. Its is very likely that we will not be able to meet that deadline and we may move the April meeting to Lewistown.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

- Engum – Is interested in the Pilot Tourism program and looking into tourism opportunities around the Lewis and Clark trail to push more people to the area. She is looking for partners. Additionally, she mentioned that the state cannot use all their EDA funds and are looking at distributing the excess funds to the regions to implement some of those projects from those plans. She will know more in April or May and how that may impact our budget.
- Tempel- Discussed the upcoming battle of the bands.
- French – MAT is doing a production at the Eagles. The Museum may be closing for part of the week to go to a conference. They are also upgrading an exhibit in the museum.
- Moomey – Havre is updating their local attraction booklet. There is currently a battle of the beast burger happening.

**Meeting Adjourned:** Meeting adjourned at 12:06 PM.

Minutes provided by Carly Wheatley, Secretary