

The regular monthly meeting of the Winchester-Frederick County Tourism Board was held Thursday, November 19, 2020. The meeting began at 8:01 a.m. and was held virtually.

Board Members Present: Kristen Laise, Priya Patel, Gwen Walker, Arthur Kearns, Julie Shaffer, Josh Huff

Board Members Absent: Karen Helm, Lani Pendleton

Staff: Justin Kerns, Renee Bayliss

Non-Voting Board Members, Guests & Media: Judy McKiernan, Winchester City Council; Shawn Hershberger, Winchester Economic Development; Brian Brehm, Winchester Star; Holly Redding, Old Town Advancement Commission; Cynthia Schneider, Top of Virginia Chamber of Commerce; Blaine Dunn, Frederick County Board of Supervisors; Joey Gawrysiak, Shenandoah University

Call To Order: Gwen Walker, Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order.

Roll Call: Renee Bayliss

Approval of Minutes

The October minutes were approved on a motion by Kristen Laise, seconded by Priya Patel.

Status of Tourism in Win/Fred Co. during COVID-19

Justin Kerns reported that hotels continue to improve month over month. The statewide average is down about 28% for occupancy, and locally occupancy is down about 15%. Locally, ADR (average daily rate) is down about 4% from last year. He noted that rural destinations are doing better than urban destinations. Mr. Kerns also mentioned the reimbursement program that the City of Winchester implemented to assist restaurants with purchasing outdoor heaters, and a shop local campaign that is being implemented by the Northern Shenandoah Valley Covid Response Team.

Executive Director's Report

Gwen Walker asked if anyone has questions related to the Executive Director's report that was sent to board members in advance of the meeting. There were no questions at this time, but Kristen Laise noted that she had trouble viewing the videos from the ad campaign provided in the email. Mr. Kerns stated he will resend the video links.

Committee Reports:

Board Appointment and Nominations Committee – Kristen Laise and Lani Pendleton

For the benefit of the new board members, Kristen explained the purpose of the committee. They met virtually on October 26 with a potential candidate. The committee is waiting on changes to the MOU between the City and County before continuing with the process.

Marketing Committee – Kristen Laise and Lani Pendleton

Kristen Laise noted that due to CARES funding from Frederick County, the CVB has had the opportunity to do additional marketing. She went over plans for the spring campaign and also mentioned the television features that were purchased on ABC7 and WUSA9. Mr. Kerns explained how they are able to see multi-platform statistics for the October campaign, and how it is performing. This will continue through December, and there will be a report for next month's meeting. Kristen Laise thanked Frederick County for the funding to do this campaign, which is more robust than anything the CVB has been able to do in the past.

Personnel Committee – Gwen Walker and Julie Shaffer

Gwen Walker explained the purpose and activities of the Personnel Committee. Julie Shaffer is new to this committee, and they have their first meeting on December 1. Gwen Walker asked if there was anything to refer to regarding their review of the Executive Director. Mr. Kerns said not that he is aware

of, but that the board is making an attempt to more closely follow the guidelines of the bylaws, which includes an annual performance review.

Finance Committee – Priya Patel and Kristen Laise

Priya Patel reported that the committee met on Friday, November 13. They discussed assisting Mr. Kerns with where money can be spent, including the possibility of adding a staff member. She also mentioned how they were able to cut costs on marketing due to the CARES funding that was received. In addition, they decided on a way to fund the Visitors Guide production, while lowering costs for advertisers during Covid. They decided to use funds from reserves to assist in making advertising more affordable for local businesses.

Video Featurette Ad Hoc Committee – Arthur Kearns and Gwen Walker

Arthur Kearns noted that the committee has been working on the videos for about six months now, and that they have produced quite a few nice featurettes, and that they are very pleased with the videographer. This month they reviewed applications for retail shops, and EBS Gallery was chosen as the video to be created. The board also had a discussion on how to distribute the applications, so that everyone interested has the opportunity to apply, and also adjusting the categories due to demand.

Unfinished Business:

City/County MOU Update – Justin Kerns

Justin Kerns gave an update on the progress being made to the MOU between the City and the County regarding the CVB. The CVB's funding will be outlined and updated in this document, from recommendations of the finance committee. The joint finance committee will meet soon, and Mr. Kerns noted that this will create a sustainable path forward for funding of the CVB. Gwen Walker asked if there will also need to be any adjustments to the bylaws due to this update, but Mr. Kerns said that no, it will not need any changes.

New Business:

No new business at this time.

City and County Liaison Comments

Blaine Dunn mentioned a rural land use meeting that both he and Mr. Kerns attended, and asked Mr. Kerns to contact him with ideas and information he can relay back to the farmers regarding agritourism opportunities. Judy McKiernan announced that City Council has new committees, including a boards and commissions committee. She is hoping that this committee will help address some of the issues with filling empty spots on boards. Holly Redding noted that she is pleased to hear this, since OTAC has had trouble filling seats on their board, and that she was glad they have started emailing out applications, rather than waiting to interview people in person due to Covid. She also was appreciative of the reimbursements for patio heaters for her business.

Public Comments

There was a discussion regarding a variety of Covid grants, including Rebuild VA. Josh Huff reported that Bright Box was able to take advantage of one of these grants. Cynthia Schneider noted the new hotel that was opened by Nerangis Management. Kristen Laise announced that Belle Grove is doing an outdoor Christmas market this year.

The meeting was adjourned on a motion by Priya Patel, seconded by Arthur Kearns at 8:49am.

Respectfully Submitted by Renee Bayliss, Creative Design and Visitor Services Manager, City of Winchester