

Tourism Walla Walla Minutes

February 18, 2010

Chamber of Commerce Board Room

Call to Order

President Michelle Rennie called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Present: Justin Wylie, Ron Anderson, Michelle Rennie, Michael Davidson, Andrew Holt, Nancy Mitchell, Shane Laib, Jay Brodt, Cory Perkins-Hewitt, Jennifer Skoglund, Tim McCarty, Skip Cundiff, Mark Hess, James Payne, Jeffrey Townsend.

Absent: Kay Wessel, Rick Standard, Elizabeth Martin-Calder, and Leroy Cunningham.

I. Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the December 17, 2009, minutes were reviewed and approved with the following corrections:

*Section I: The minutes from November 19, 2009 **meeting** were reviewed and approved by a unanimous vote.

*Section VI: Among the issues the group needs to resolve as **it** moves forward is to determine the size of events we are trying to attract.

*There were two items listed as Section VII; one was corrected to be listed as Section **VIII** and text within that corrected to read: Dave also informed the board that the Chamber will be working with area hotels to further the discussion of the possibility **of** enacting a local TPA.

II. Tourism Indicators

Michael Davidson reviewed the Tourism Indicators for January 2010 explaining to new board members what we measure and how we get the data. There was an increase of 22% of visitors to the website from 1/09 to 1/10. Stakeholders receive a monthly report on click throughs from our website to theirs.

Michael also reported that the room tax revenue that comes from the state through the City of Walla Walla for the month of January was \$41,951.42, down 19% from last year. Rooms sold in December were up 10.1%, room revenue was up 8.9% and hotel occupancy was up 10.1%. If there are other numbers that the board thinks we should be tracking, please let Michael know.

James Payne asked if Tourism WW sees how many click throughs are coming to our website from other websites. Michael indicated that this information is tracked through web analysis; Google is the highest search engine with Whitman College the highest local referring website. We know that web visitors who spend the longest time on our site come from the Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance website. Our Facebook page and blog drive people to our website as does www.wallawalla.com. Michael will hash out some ideas of what we want to look at in regards to our top referring sites.

Michelle reported that the executive committee has been talking about ways to track the impact of our print ads. We are thinking about tagging each print ad and the results would be tracked via web analysis.

III. Treasurer's Report

Jay Brodt reported that because we cut expenses due to the anticipated revenue shortfall of \$14,000, we were able to finish the year without having to cash in a Certificate of Deposit or dip into the funds we have in the bank. Areas where expenses were cut included advertising, operations and payroll.

As of the end of January 2010, we had expenses of \$16,000 and income of \$2,400 so we are in the red but we are expecting approximately \$40,000 in revenue from the city at the end of January.

Mark Hess moved to accept the Treasurer's report, Cory Perkins-Hewitt seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Highlights of Board Retreat

Michael and Lawson Knight, our retreat facilitator, have not had an opportunity to meet as a follow up to the board retreat on January 28. They will meet next week and distribute the full report. This information will be the basis from which we will establish our objectives for the year.

James Payne commented that he felt that the food and wine panels were very effective and would like to see more of them in the future. Jeffrey Townsend was unable to attend the retreat but suggested adding an arts panel. Michelle responded that it was considered but due to time constraints an arts panel was not included but there is interest there.

V. Sports Commission

The Sports Committee did not meet this week but it was reported that they are close to announcing two events (tennis and volleyball) affiliated with the Washington State Games; both events are being planned by the Whitman College Athletics Department. Once the plans for the tennis event have been finalized, Michael will send out a press release as this will be the first time this event will be held on the east side of the mountains. In addition, a collegiate cycling competition is being planned by the Whitman College Cycling Team for April of 2010.

The Sports Committee will continue its efforts to bridge a relationship with other sports groups in the community.

VI: 2010 Wine Bloggers Update

Michael reminded the board of the Wine Bloggers' Conference that will be held at the Marcus Whitman Hotel from June 25-27. The Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance has taken leadership on coordinating this event; we have provided some funds for the "Walla Walla Day" activities associated with the conference. Michael is also working with the B&B Association promoting a "Road to Walla Walla" event. This will bring bloggers to town the day before the Wine Bloggers Conference; they will be staying at area B&Bs.

Ron Anderson reported that the Marcus Whitman Hotel has upgraded their Wi-Fi system and is ready for the Wine Bloggers Convention.

VII: Committee Assignments

Michelle distributed sign-up sheets and asked board members to commit to working on a committee that fits their talents and interests. The committees are: Marketing, Finance/Budget, Strategic Planning/Funding, Matching Funds Program, Signage, Sports Committee and the Arts Committee.

VIII. President's Report

Michael reported that the public relations reports are now being run internally and this saves us money. Maxwell Public Relations helped get this process in place and Andrew Holt will be in charge of creating the reports. Information on anything that is published either on the internet or any publication, periodical or newspaper that has to do with tourism visitors coming to Walla Walla will be collected.

A Superhost program took place in Milton-Freewater with eight participants. All along we have wanted Superhost to be a regional program and this was the first effort outside of the City of Walla Walla. Andrew and Elio Agostini, Walla Walla Downtown Foundation Executive Director, will become certified trainers. Unfortunately, we have lost several trainers and there is a need for a Spanish language trainer.

The Bike Map Project has exceeded our revenue projection numbers; our target was \$7000 and \$7150 has been raised. Ten advertisers have participated and this project has been a regional one encompassing not only the City of Walla Walla but the County, College Place, Dayton and Milton-Freewater. Mark commented that three years ago we weren't getting support from outside entities and if we could do more of this type of thing it could have tremendous potential. Michelle noted that the funds generated by this project can be used for other projects. This allows us to put this money aside to start building a fund so that when opportunities present themselves that need financial support (like purchasing saddles to attract a rodeo) we'll have the funds to do it and not lose the event to another community.

Michael asked Jeffrey to give an update on the art group. Jeffrey reported that the group is active, that tasks had been assigned and several of the members will visit two or three nearby arts organizations that are visible and well organized; the group hopes to learn some valuable things from that visit.

IX. Other Items

Ron reported that the attorney for the Spokane Hotel and Motel Association who was responsible for drafting the original TPA legislation there will be in Walla Walla to meet with him and others to talk about the TPA. (TPA refers to Tourism Promotion Area or an assessment hotels place on their customers that they can then use to promote their properties. Only the hotels can do this and only properties with more than 39 hotel rooms; there are 7 or 8 in Walla Walla that fit this criteria.)

He indicated that one concern the hoteliers have is that our contract with the City of Walla Walla can be terminated with a 30-day notice. Tim McCarty said that this could be brought before the City Council but a 30-day termination notice is standard on their contracts although some contracts do carry a 90-day cancellation clause. Ron suggested that this issue be brought before the City Council. Tim suggested that it be discussed with the City Council at a work session. Shane and Tim will

meet to discuss this strategy and suggested a letter from the Tourism board of directors be drafted for the March work session.

Michelle asked Ron how the board might be of further help. He suggested that the TPA effort needs to be come from inside the hoteliers but that later on we may be able to help with administrative support or with legal issues.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.