

**Tourism Walla Walla
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 18, 2010**

Present: Michele Rennie, Michael Davidson, Mark Hess, Nancy Mitchell, Justin Wylie, Ron Anderson, Kay Wessel, Cory Perkins-Hewitt, Tim McCarty, James Payne.

Absent: Jay Brodt, Rick Standard, Jeffrey Townsend, Skip Cundiff, Shane Laib, Elizabeth Martin-Calder, Jennifer Skoglund.

The meeting was called to order by Michele Rennie at 3:40 p.m.

1. Approval of Minutes – Michele Rennie

One correction was noted; the spelling of Michele Rennie's first name throughout the document was incorrect. James moved to accept the minutes with the said corrections. Mark seconded the motion. The motion carried.

2. Tourism Indicators – Michael Davidson

Michael reviewed the Tourism Indicator report; occupancy rates for January were down 8.3%, revenue was down by 8.1% but room tax revenue for February was 49% above last year.

Michael reported that our meeting packets will now include a report on web activity. The first report shows which search engines are driving visitors to our website (Google is by far the most popular); the second report shows the top referring websites (Whitman College is at the top followed by tourismwallawalla.com and the blog.wallawalla.org); the third report shows what pages people visited. The "attractions" webpage received the highest numbers and we should look at ways to expand this page.

Michele and Michael are looking at a new report on Facebook and will share it with the board at next month's meeting.

The Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance website is not driving people to our site. This is troubling and we need to talk to them about having a more prominent presence on their page. Michael suggested that the Tourism Board meet with the Wine Alliance board since it has been quite some time since the two have met. This would give us an opportunity to address this concern.

3. Treasurer's Report – Jay Brodt

Jay was unable to attend the meeting; the financial report was given by Mark Hess.

Our net income for February 2010 was approximately \$26,000. This report shows us being one month into the cycle as far as revenue with two months of expenses; this is due to the fact that our revenue lags by one month. Our assets are currently at \$103,000. The profit and loss vs. actual budget is under by \$10,000 which is not that far down if you look above ordinary revenue; things are looking good for staying on track.

James moved to accept the treasurer's report. Cory seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

4. Board Retreat – Michele Rennie

The first page of this report shows the initiatives that were accomplished from the 2008 board retreat. There are many items that will carry over from the 2008 retreat to the 2010 plan; there are two new goals that were generated at the 2010 Board Retreat. They are:

- A. Develop and deploy necessary enhancements in the “way finding system.”
- G. Establish initiatives that strengthen Walla Walla as a culinary destination.

James commented that he likes breaking the goals down into smaller segments as it helps us to stay on track.

Michele asked if the Sports Committee was ready to give an estimate on the number of room nights it is generating or if we should look at each event and see how many rooms they take up. Michael and Ron will sit down come up with an idea of numbers of room nights are being generated.

Michele asked if we needed to change any of the goals and objectives based on the discussion. Ron suggested that Goal E. #7 be expanded to read:

- E. 7. Develop a goal approaching 60% occupancy in the marketplace divided into specific room nights per market.

5. 2010 Committee Assignments – Michele Rennie

Committee assignments based on interests have been set. Committee chairs should call a meeting and begin working with their committees. Chairs will be called upon at future meetings to give reports.

A chair has not been identified for the Matching Fund Committee; that group needs to determine who will serve in that capacity. Mark recommended that Jay serve on the Finance Committee since he is board treasurer.

A Culinary Committee has been added and Michele appointed Skip Cundiff as chair. The Culinary Committee will be charged with developing and promoting Walla Walla as a culinary destination. Cory volunteered to be a member as her organization is looking at this same issue. It was recommended that non-board members be added to this committee. Two suggestions were Chef Andrae Bopp and the owner of Thundering Hooves. Justin will check to see if Andrae would be interested in being part of this committee.

Michael indicated that if we can start marketing Walla Walla as a culinary destination, this will give our media company fresh stories to send out to publications.

6. Sports Committee – Rick Standard

Ron reported on his behalf of the Sports Committee. Skip Molitor met with Don Wilkins, the athletic director at Walla Walla High School; he wants to organize a basketball tournament in Walla Walla for the last week of December. This tournament would bring in several teams from the Tri-Cities and elsewhere. The group would need several complimentary rooms per school/per night. In addition, five paid rooms would be part of the deal plus it would draw parents and families of the participants to Walla Walla. This tournament would be a two-year commitment and Richland is also vying for this event. As soon as Michael hears back from the local hotels he will help work on this effort.

From July 9-11, 2010, a tennis tournament will be held in Walla Walla generating 200+ room nights; and a soccer tournament will be held in mid-summer this year generating another 200+ room nights.

A meeting with Jeff Reinland, director of athletics at Walla Walla Community College, is being arranged, and Skip Molitor and Michael will be talking with staff at DeSales about an upcoming tournament that will utilize Whitman's facilities.

Cory reported that a three-day polo tournament (college team) will be here this week. Her facility rescheduled other events so they could accommodate the group

7. President's Report – Michael Davidson

Michael asked everyone to be sure and read the Visitor Information Center RFP. This project is designed to generate revenue for Tourism Walla Walla. The proposal will be distributed to wineries along Highway 12 to see if there is any interest in one of them opening a Visitor Information Center; the center would be staffed and fully equipped and is designed to provide additional information to visitors who have already chosen Walla Walla as a destination. This Visitor Center would not replace the Downtown Visitor Center but would be an additional site.

Once the RFP is distributed, a meeting will be held for those interested, applications accepted and a scoring procedure developed.

Justin suggested putting a Visitor Information Center in Woodinville to push visitor's to Walla Walla. Michele responded that we haven't sketched out the idea of a tourism office outside the valley but certainly it is worth looking into. Justin said that the Walla Walla wineries setting up shop in Woodinville want to push visitors to Walla Walla to visit their other revenue source.

Michael passed around a sample of a wine bottle tag that the creative team designed; it would be a quality piece and make special offers to encourage consumers to come to Walla Walla. Justin recommended that there be a way to track the response to the tags.

Nancy asked if the visitors to the Woodinville tasting rooms know where Walla Walla is located. Justin stated that they know it is "over there" but truly don't know where we are. A short discussion followed about using tags or recyclable wine bags to help identify Walla Walla as a destination and where we are situated. Justin will "poke around" and see what input he can get from the tasting rooms in Woodinville about a Visitor Information Center and how they would feel about the wine tags/bags.

Michael brought attention to the Marketing Report and Public Relations Report in our packets, but due to time constraints did not go over the information.

8) Other items

a) TPA Update – Ron Anderson

Ron has met with all of the qualifying hotels about the TPA; everyone but the manager of the Budget Inn seems interested. The hotel managers are talking with their owners about the idea. Ron feels that things are looking positive. There will be a meeting the second Tuesday of every month going forward.

b) 2010 Bloggers Update

No report was given.

c) Other business

Cory reported that after 149 years of horse racing in Walla Walla there is a good chance that it will be eliminated. Emerald Downs, which subsidizing the four race tracks on this side of the state, is having financial difficulties and funding is in jeopardy. The Fair Board is putting together a committee to think about other ways to bring people to their facility. If you have ideas please contact Cory. Michael asked to be invited to talk with the group.

Cory also reported that the Gary Allan and Bombshell concert coming in September has generated a huge response from outside of the area. The concert takes place on a Wednesday which means good mid-week traffic. Michael reported that our Facebook page is getting lots of hits about the concert. James wondered about the likelihood of bringing concerts like this to the fairgrounds several times a year especially if it is generating mid-week visitors.

Leroy Cunningham has received notice that his position on the board has been terminated due to non-attendance; that seat remains vacant and needs to be filled.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.