

Walla Walla Tourism
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Thursday, April 15, 2010

Present: Michele Rennie, Rick Standard, Ron Anderson, Andrew Holt, Arum Kone, Justin Wylie, Shane Laib, Skip Cundiff, Elizabeth Martin-Calder, Kay Wessel, Jennifer Skoglund, James Payne, Nancy Mitchell.

Absent: Michael Davidson, Jeffrey Townsend, Jay Brodt, Cory Perkins-Hewitt, Mark Hess, Tim McCarty.

Michele Rennie called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

1) Approval of the Minutes – Michele Rennie

There were no comments or corrections to the minutes. Elizabeth moved to accept the minutes as written, Kay seconded the motion. Motion carried.

2) Tourism Indicators – Michele Rennie

Michele went over the highlights of the Tourism Indicators: visits to the website are up 7%, unique visitors up approx. 1%, but click throughs down by 25%. The reason for this is unknown.

Year-to-date indicators show that March room tax revenue was down by 2%, rooms revenue down by 2.7%; year-to-date shows rooms sold and hotel occupancy down by 2.1%.

Facebook visitors in March rose steadily with 300 new fans added this month. Michael has additional data to share about Facebook. He will bring this information to the May meeting.

3) Treasurer's Report – Jay Brodt

Jay Brodt was unable to attend the meeting; Michele gave the treasurer's report.

Michele reported that the profit and loss statement shows a total income of \$45,805 for March; revenue to date is just under \$90,000 and expenses for March are slightly under \$50,000. The net ordinary income shows -\$3,986.54. Michele commented that we are paying more in the first five months for advertising and that the expenses for advertising will be lighter in the second part of the year.

The balance sheet shows assets of \$99,110; the Profit and Loss budget vs. Actual balances out.

Ron asked why we can't accrue for the lag in the funds received from the City. James commented that it is a result of wanting to have a budget broken down by month. If we changed the method of reporting and showed that income with an asterisk it would give us a more accurate picture of where we are. Michele will discuss this issue with Jay and Michael and report back at the May meeting.

Skip moved to accept the treasurer's report, Kay seconded the motion. Motion was carried.

4) Economic Impact of Tourism – Arum Kone, Regional Economists for the Employment Security Department

Arum referred to the chart in the board's packet. He has tracked retail sales going back to 2004. The blue line shows total retail sales (minus car/motor sales); this includes accommodation and food services. The orange dots show what percentage of all retail sales were due to accommodation and food services.

In 2004, 20-23% fell into this category. In 2009, it is 22-25% which shows a significant increase in that sector for the area. Putting into real dollar: \$50,000,000 to \$70,000,000 in 2009. Please note these statistics are for Walla Walla County and are adjusted for inflation.

This is the first year that the accommodation and food services sector has seen an overall decrease in sales (down approx. 2%), but if you look at the state, the growth at the beginning was steeper and has declined the last few years. That figure declined 9% across the state and comparatively we've only seen about a third of that.

Arom's office is based in Walla Walla; he can be reached at akone@esd.wa.gov or 509-527-4125. Related articles can be found at workforceexplore.com. Arom will forward quarterly updates of the chart to Michael for distribution to the board.

5) Sport Committee – Rick Standard and Ron Anderson

Rick reported that the Sport Committee met earlier today. He announced that Walla Walla will be the home of the Washington State Games, July 9-11 (this is a tennis tournament). Andrew is writing a news release and will forward it to the Washington State Games for approval. Jeff Northam, Whitman College tennis coach, is the commissioner of the event and it will be held on the Whitman College campus.

The Committee had worked to try to secure a volleyball tournament but the west side of the state had strong representation and no one here volunteered to act as commissioner.

Skip Molitor, Mike Washington (the men's soccer coach from Whitman College), Kurt Hoffman (vice president of the Blue Mountain Soccer Association) and a representative from Walla Walla High School talked about the possibility of bringing a soccer tournament here this summer. They are trying to get that event sanctioned. The tournament would bring 16 teams comprised of 16 people. The proposed date is July 16-19.

Last month Ron reported that they were working with Don Wilkins, athletic director at Walla Walla High School, to bring a basketball tournament here in late December. The tournament requested too many complimentary rooms and none of the hotels responded to the request.

Rick reported that Skip Molitor is currently working without a contract and has not been paid. Rick will address this issue with Michael.

James stated that if we can put packages together to encourage visitors to stay an extra day, it would be beneficial. If Ft. Walla Walla Museum can offer discounted museum visits to sweeten the deal, let him know.

6) Signage Committee – Justin Wylie

Elizabeth, Michael and Justin met to discuss signage. It is a huge project and they are going to meet with representatives from other communities that have done similar projects (Napa, Ellensburg and Yamhill were mentioned). Representatives from those communities will be in Walla Walla on May 13. James asked how the expenses for those visitors are being covered. Justin will speak with Michael about how these travel expenses will be covered.

7) Culinary Committee – Cory Perkins-Hewitt/Skip Cundiff

Michael, Michele, Cory and Skip met to discuss the idea of an event that would showcase “everything good about Walla Walla.” It was decided that there was great potential here and they will move forward with this idea. It has been suggested that the month of August be considered for this event (not this year but next). The idea of bringing a celebrity chef to do demonstrations was discussed by the committee.

The Culinary Committee is compiling a list of who they want to meet with to see if there is interest; this list includes area chefs, wineries, farmers, etc.

8) Blogger Update – Elizabeth Martin-Calder

The schedule of events for the Bloggers’ Conference, June 24-26, 2010, can be found on the web. The event includes wineries outside of the region including international wineries. The Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance has organized events downtown for after hours. Conference activities include a presentation by Kevin Pogue, professor of geology at Whitman College, and excursions to vineyards, visits to wineries for panel presentations and lunch at the Marcus Whitman Hotel. Michele is attending.

9) Meeting with Woodinville wineries – Justin Wylie/Michele Rennie

Local wineries with tasting rooms or those opening tasting rooms in Woodinville were invited to a meeting. It was recommended that Gibson Media meet and discuss what could be created to showcase the Walla Walla area as the tasting rooms have agreed to a bag stuffer.

Woodinville is a gateway to Walla Walla and we need to educate the people working in those tasting rooms about the area. James suggested a FAM tour to bring people working in those tasting rooms to Walla Walla. Justin indicated that some of the wineries are already doing this.

10) TPA update – Ron Anderson

Ron reported that qualifying hotels have been educated and they have informally polled their owners; 60% of the owners responded positively and this level of support would give them the votes needed to implement a TPA. The official vote has yet to be taken.

Michele congratulated Ron on his hard work and success on this issue as it is significant.

Ron asked that Gibson Media make a presentation to the board of directors. It has been some time since the board has seen what they are doing. Michele stated that Gibson gave a marketing presentation last fall and that because of tight budgets no new creative has been developed. Michele recommended that anyone interested is welcome to join the marketing committee.

11) 2010 Goals and Objectives

Andrew Holt was excused for the remainder of the meeting that focused on a discussion about 2010 Goals and Objectives for Michael Davidson. Notes from this discussion have been submitted to Chair Michele Rennie under separate cover.

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