

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Inc.

Board of Directors Meeting
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
175 Main Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860

Minutes
March 8, 2016

Attendees:

David Balfour, Chairman
Barry Mechanic, Vice Chairman
Judy Fischbach, Treasurer
Dave Richards, Secretary (via phone)
Alexander Parmenidez
Courtney Iannuccilli
Thomas Kravitz
Dr. Joyce Koutsogiane
Paul Palange

Absent:

Louis Yip
Mark Brodeur
Michael Gwynn
Debra Berardis

Also Attending:

Dr. Robert Billington, President, BVTC
Natalie Carter, Director of Operations, BVTC
Joan Loos, BVTC Staff

Before the Board of Directors meeting was called to order, Patty Cerelli reviewed the draft of the audit report with Board members. Bob Billington thanked our financial team of Natalie Carter, Judy Fischbach, Kevin Silvia and Patti Cerilli for their hard work throughout the audit. Patti reviewed the draft audit report, explaining the process, the details of the report and the BVTC accounting procedures that will be updated. She reported that the audit went very well. Patti will be working with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council for the next few years.

1. Call to Order. Mr. Balfour called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.
2. Approval of Minutes from January 12, 2016. Judy Fischbach moved, Paul Palange seconded, and the minutes of the January 12, 2016 Board meeting were unanimously approved as presented.
3. Treasurer's Report. Judy Fischbach reviewed the Income Statements and Balance Sheets as of the end of December 2015. In the future these reports will be revised based on the suggestions in the audit. Tom Kravitz moved, Joyce Koutsogiane seconded, and the Treasurer's Report as presented by Judy was unanimously accepted.

Lodging Tax Report. Natalie explained how the lodging tax is received. This year we are facing a 5% cut of our lodging tax by the Governor, as well as the temporary closure for renovations of one of our hotel properties with loss of lodging tax incoming from that property. The Comfort Inn in Pawtucket will re-open as a Hampton Inn property. Bob reported that Twin River has received approval to build a hotel property at their location. At this point, we expect lodging tax income from that property in 2017-2018.

4. Director's Report. Board members received brochures for upcoming BVTC programs and events.

- The Blackstone River Environmental Heritage Trust Fund was launched at last year's annual dinner. Any contributions were put into a trust fund for repairs on The Blackstone Valley *Explorer* riverboat. Last fall when the boat was taken out of the water for the winter, more extensive repairs than anticipated were necessary. We had received from the June Rockwell Levy Foundation \$10,000 to be used for new engines. The additional repair costs are now approximately \$75,000. We have received \$30,000 which is to be matched. We are working hard to match these funds.

- Visitor Center Update. Our lease at the Pawtucket Visitors Center ends December 2017. We would like to move the organization to another location. Bob is working to keep the Visitor Center here in Pawtucket beyond 2017.

- Bikeway Bond. Our goal is to get the Blackstone Valley bike path completed. We want the entire state to be linked. We have potentially \$10 million in a Green Bond, but the \$10 million does not go far. Bob is testifying in support of the Green Bond to the Senate and House Finance Committees.

- Polar Express/Warner Brothers/Rail Events Negotiations. We are in negotiations with Warner Brothers and Rail Events regarding Polar Express. Our contract expires in 2017. We need to know by November 2016 what we will be doing for 2017. Warner Brothers/Rail Events want to work on a percentage (30%) basis. They may be willing to take 10% next year. Right now we give them 8%. The Polar Express started in North Conway, New Hampshire. The North Conway event is not affiliated with Rail Events. Bob asked the Board for suggestions of people who can counsel him regarding his negotiations with Rail Events.

- Annual Dinner vs. Annual Reception. To keep costs down, we are thinking of doing a reception at the Pawtucket Visitor Center rather than dinner at the Twin River Event Center. St. Ann's in Woonsocket was suggested as an alternative location.

- American Girl 2016 Train Event – Using some leftover product from last year's event, we will again do an American Girl train event this year. Joyce suggested an American Girl float in the Cumberland 4th of July parade.

5. Other Business. Judy stated that the budget is due in a few months. She is suggesting a salary study for the BVTC employees prior to creating the budget. Bob stated that currently we do not help employees with health care expenses. He is suggesting making a small contribution toward health care. Bob would like more information about flexible spending accounts.

Work is being planned for Central Falls Landing to clean up the property. The Tai-O Corporation is working on the building to see if it is feasible to move the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council office to this location when our lease expires.

We are working with Mayor Lisa Baldelli-Hunt in Woonsocket and Woonsocket Planning to get the *Explorer* riverboat closer to Market Square, more north than previously.

Bob will be inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame on Saturday, April 30, 2016 at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. Board members received invitations to attend the ceremony and dinner.

Joyce suggested doing a decorators' show house as a fund raiser and made the suggestion of The Grand Manor house in Pawtucket as a possible location.

6. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned by Mr. Balfour at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Loos, BVTC Staff