

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Inc.

Board of Directors Meeting
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
Pawtucket, RI

Minutes
January 12, 2016

Attendees:

David Balfour, Chairman
Barry Mechanic, Vice Chairman
Judy Fischbach, Treasurer
Alexander Parmenidez
Courtney Iannuccilli
Debra Berardis
Dr. Joyce Koutsogiane
Paul Palange
Michael Gwynn

Absent:

Dave Richards, Secretary
Louis Yip
Mark Brodeur
Thomas Kravitz

Also Attending:

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

1. Call to Order. Mr. Balfour called the meeting to order at 12:15 p.m. Mr. Balfour welcomed the new Board members: Dr. Joyce Koutsogiane, retired educator and consultant, and Paul Palange, General Manager of the The Times and The Call.

2. Approval of Minutes from November 10, 2015. Debra Berardis moved, Courtney Iannuccilli seconded, and the minutes of the November 10, 2015 Board meeting were unanimously approved as presented.

3. Treasurer's Report/Review of Financial Records. Judy Fischbach reviewed the Income Statements and Balance Sheets as of the end of November 2015. Courtney Iannuccilli moved and Alex Parmenidez seconded, and the Treasurer's Report as presented by Judy was unanimously accepted.

4. Director's Report

- Preliminary Polar Express Report – Polar Express operated very smoothly this year with our best team ever. Almost 16,000 people attended over 40 train trips. This is the last year of our 3-year contract, and we have begun to negotiate with Rail Events, Inc. and Warner Brothers regarding our contract for 2017. Bob and Natalie reported that invoices related to Polar Express are still being received. The preliminary Profit and Loss statement was reviewed. Bob stated that the Polar Express event does much to contribute to the economy of

Woonsocket and the Blackstone Valley with related hotel stays, gasoline consumption, food and other retail purchases of guests riding The Polar Express. Barry asked if we conducted an economic impact survey. Natalie shared that surveys had already gone out via e-mail but that the surveys were more qualitative than quantitative. It was felt that such economic impact information would go far in justifying the work the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council does to support tourism in Rhode Island. We receive very few negative comments and will use those comments to make The Polar Express even better next year. We have received comments from many guests that our Polar Express is the best one they have attended. Our goal is to be better than any other Polar Express event.

- Canal Boat Samuel Slater – Bob reported that the canal boat sustained winter freeze damage in 2014-2015. It went into the boat yard in Warwick for rehabilitation. Mold, bugs and frozen pipes were rampant. It appears that all or most of the repairs will be covered by insurance.

- Riverboat Blackstone Valley Explorer – The Explorer has been taken to the boat yard in Warwick. After inspection by the Coast Guard, it needs about \$50,000 in repairs, more than anticipated. The June Rockwell Levy Foundation would like to help, possibly with a \$25,000 matching grant. BVTC staff are researching other sources of funding in order to obtain the matching funds. We will know at the end of February if we will get the \$25,000 from the June Rockwell Levy Foundation. The June Rockwell Levy Foundation has presented a check for \$10,000 for new engines. Bob commented that the boat is what we use to educate students and the general public about the Blackstone River. Bob noted that our educator, Dianne Mailloux, is retiring. Sea Research/Mystic Aquarium has been asked to take over the environmental tours on the riverboat on an “a la carte” payment basis. Sea Research does work all over the globe and would like to have a greater presence in Rhode Island. Mr. Balfour cautioned about supporting a Connecticut organization over a Rhode Island organization. Barry asked if some of the technical schools, such as New England Tech, could assist in the repair of the boat. Bob thought it was a consideration, if it would be approved by the Coast Guard inspectors.

- Analysis of the Visitor Center finances, shop operations and rental opportunities and income will be undertaken by Barry and Judy.

- We have worked hard with The Outpost at the I-295 Visitor Center and our Federal and State officials to solve the suggested issue that possibly the store is operating illegally in the bounds of the Federal highway system. At this time Rhode Island Department of Transportation and Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management agree that The Outpost is within its rights to operate at the I-295 Visitor Center. The attendance at The Outpost in September 2015 was about 12,000 people, almost double from before they opened.

- Paths to Progress – There are 12 miles of bikeway in the Blackstone Valley that are completed; 8 miles are not completed. Bob has formed the Paths to Progress Committee whose members represent biking interests throughout the state, from Woonsocket to Westerly, in order to connect the bikeways throughout the entire state. The Committee is working to build a fund to support this work and to create a state-wide bond. A member of the committee has met with Governor Raimondo to discuss if some funds can be set aside for bikeway completion.

- Bob reported that he is a member of the Special Legislative Commission on Tourism. The State has hired Havas Public Relations from New York City to rebrand tourism in the state of Rhode Island. After initially having difficulty connecting with staff from Havas assigned to work with the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, a meeting has been scheduled in about 1½ weeks.

- The Isle Brewers Guild has bought the old Haskell Manufacturing Company building on Main Street in Pawtucket. Construction will begin soon to convert the building into a brewhouse. They plan to draw 30,000 visitors in the first year.

- Mr. Yip has been awarded the bid to convert the building at Central Falls Landing into a restaurant, second floor meeting space and third floor offices. Bob is hoping the National Park Service will have interest in moving into the current BVTC offices to maintain the Visitor Center, and the BVTC offices can move to the top floor of Central Falls Landing within the next 2 years. Natalie will be working with the Champlain Foundation to determine if funds can be allocated for our construction costs.

- Bob reported that he will be inducted into the Rhode Island Heritage Hall of Fame on April 30 at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. Mr. Balfour and the Committee extended congratulations to Bob for this well-deserved honor.

5. Board Meeting Dates for 2016. It was agreed that that Board of Directors meetings will continue to be held the second Tuesday of every other month in 2016. A schedule will be distributed.

6. Closing of Water Cruises of RI, LLC and BVT, Inc. Natalie reported that the loan for Water Cruises of RI, LLC has been fully paid off. She is working on closing the account. Natalie also reported that BVT, Inc., a 501(c)(6) corporation, has been closed.

7. BVTC 30th Year Audit Update. Natalie reported that the audit continues and is going very well. Bob and Judy felt that the auditors from Mullen Scorpio Cerelli have done a very thorough job. Judy reported that going forward our record-keeping will be different based on the suggestions of Patty Cerilli. By the next Board meeting, there should be a draft audit report available.

8. Annual Dinner Financial Report. The Board members received the Profit & Loss Statement for the BVC Annual Dinner in October 2015.

9. Central Falls Landing – See Director’s Report above.

10. Old Business. No other old business was discussed.

11. New Business.

- Mike Gwynn reported that the Pawtucket Red Sox has a lease at McCoy Stadium until 2020. At this time there is very little talk about moving the team. The stadium will be 75 years old next season.

- Russell Taub, former employee at the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, has left the BVTC and is working for the Mayor of Fall River, Massachusetts. Russell is exploring the possibility of running as a Republican candidate for Congress.

- Joyce reported that the 90th anniversary of the Arnold Mills parade in Cumberland will be this July 4th. She hopes that the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council will have a presence there.

12. Adjournment. Debra Berardis moved to adjourn, Judy Fischbach seconded and it was unanimously agreed that Mr. Balfour adjourn the meeting at 1:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Loos, BVTC Staff