

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Inc.
Board of Directors Meeting
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
175 Main Street, Pawtucket, RI
Thursday, January 21, 2021, 12 noon
Via Zoom Meeting

Attendees:

Dave Richards, Chairman
Dr. Joyce Hindle Koutsogiane, Secretary
Judy Fischbach, Treasurer
Thomas Kravitz
Kathy Roberts

Absent:

Barry Mechanic, Vice Chairman
Louis Yip
Michael Gwynn
Mark Brodeur

Also Attending:

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

1. Call to Order. There being a quorum present, Chairman Dave Richards called the meeting to order at 12:05 p.m.
2. Approval of Notes from October 15, 2020. There was a typographical error on the agenda, listing the minutes to be approved as being the October 21, 2020 minutes. Dave Richards moved to change the date listed on the agenda to October 15. Joyce Hindle-Koutsogiane seconded and the motion passed unanimously. Following the change, Tom Kravitz moved to accept the minutes from the October 15, 2020 Board of Directors meeting. Kathy Roberts seconded the motion and the minutes of the October 15, 2020 Board meeting were unanimously approved as presented.
3. Treasurer's Report. Judy Fischbach presented the Treasurer's Report. She explained the Balance Sheet as of December 31, 2020 as compared to the previous year. She also explained the Income Statement for July 2020 through September 2020, budget vs. actual and as compared to the previous year. Judy explained the effect that inability to sell Polar Express tickets as well as our PPP loan have had on our financial reports. Natalie explained the work she has been doing on the PPP loan, the status of the first loan and forgiveness, as well as getting a second PPP loan. In general, it was felt that our financials are looking better, as we have been able to keep expenses down and bring in income.

Dave Richards moved to accept the treasurer's report as presented, Joyce Hindle-Koutsogiane seconded the motion, and the treasurer's report was unanimously approved as presented.

4./5. President's Report/Organizational Status

Bob reported that we have been able to create programs to bring in income, such as Swamp Scare and Search for Santa/Christmastime Marketplace at Central Falls Landing and on The Explorer. These programs are considered a success, even though we had to limit the number of people we could sell tickets to because of COVID. We received many positive comments about these events, and we hope to be able to run these programs in 2021. Bob also noted that we have not had to lose any of our BVTC staff, with the exception of Silvio, who worked part-time in the Blackstone Shop.

Bob has been speaking with management at the Genesee & Wyoming Railroad. They stated they missed running Polar Express in 2020. They are taking our proposal for Polar Express 2021 to their Legal Department. We need a decision soon in order to start selling tickets for Polar Express 2021; however, it was noted that we must take precautions with funds in case COVID-19 still affects the operation.

The Visitor Center has been closed since March. We have been moving our property into staging areas in preparation for moving out of the Visitor Center at some point. Some things will go to Central Falls, some to the garage in Pawtucket and we hope to be able to move some things into the Woonsocket Depot. Bob has been meeting with Peregrine/Pet Food Experts about rent for the space we are occupying. We are hoping to be able to stay in our offices at the Visitor Center until the end of May 2021.

Boston Surface Railroad is continuing to move out of the Depot. Bob met with officials from RI Department of Transportation and discussed what areas of the Depot we are requesting to use – the main floor and the basement. We look forward to hearing back from them soon.

The building at Central Falls Landing is coming along. The outbuilding is being built and the elevator shaft is being built. Central Falls Planning, through former Mayor James Diossa, wrote a grant to help us move our offices to the Central Falls Landing building. We hope to learn how the grant may benefit us in about two weeks.

Paul Palange and other staff members are working on planning our annual event, which will be virtual this year.

We are working with a consultant to upgrade our Polar Express Online Shop, which has been a good source of income for the Tourism Council.

The former employee case has gone to the Human Rights Council. We will find out what information the HRC would like and submit that.

Bob commented that he was in the Chepachet area several times this winter and was very impressed with the pop-up shops and small vendors working with the Gloucester Business Association. Kathy Roberts stated that this collaboration will continue.

The Tourism Council is beginning to work on an event to commemorate Project ZAP's 50th anniversary in 2022. Bob showed some ZAP posters and talked about why it has taken so long to make the Blackstone River fishable and swimmable. Dave commented that the bar keeps getting raised for what qualifies as swimmable and fishable. It was agreed that we have come a long way toward the goal and the work should continue.

Joyce asked Bob about the status of the William Blackstone statue. Bob stated that it is nearing completion and the structure that will be underneath the statue is being worked on at the corner of Roosevelt Avenue and Exchange Street. The statue installation is being held up, pending a decision on how the story/history will be told.

Joyce commented on the Lewis Tower house on Mendon Road which is being nicely remodeled. There are large blocks of granite available if we can use them at the Central Falls Landing site. Bob will investigate.

6. Discussion and Vote on Lee Eskilsen, Johnson & Wales University, as Board Member

Lee Eskilsen, Professor of Sports Management at Johnson & Wales University and consultant on sports venues around the world, has expressed interest in joining our Board of Directors. Tom Kravitz moved to extend an invitation to Lee Eskilsen to be on our Board of Directors, Joyce Hindle-Koutsogiane seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

It was noted that Mike Gwynn plans to stay on our Board for as long as he can after the PawSox move to Worcester.

7. Adjournment. There being no further business, Joyce Hindle-Koutsogiane moved to adjourn, Tom Kravitz seconded and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned by Dave Richards at 12:55 p.m.



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