

**Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Inc.**

Board of Directors Meeting  
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council  
175 Main Street, Pawtucket, RI  
Tuesday, August 17, 2021, 12 noon  
Via Zoom

**Attendees:**

Dave Richards, Chairman  
Judy Fischbach, Treasurer  
Dr. Joyce Hindle Koutsogiane, Secretary  
Kathy Roberts  
Michael Gwynn  
Lee Esckilsen  
Adriana Carter

**Absent:**

Barry Mechanic, Vice Chairman  
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. There being a quorum, Chairman Dave Richards called the meeting to order at 12:13 pm. Bob noted that Adriana Carter resigned from the Board of Directors, as she is relocating to Atlanta, Georgia.
2. Minutes from the June 14, 2021 Meeting. Kathy Roberts moved to accept the minutes of the June 14, 2021 Board of Directors meeting as presented. Joyce Hindle Koutsogiane seconded, and the minutes of the June 14, 2021 meeting were unanimously approved.
3. Treasurer's Report. Treasurer Judy Fischbach reviewed the Balance Sheet as of June 30, 2021 compared to June 30, 2020, as well as the Income Statement, Budget vs. Actual, July 2020 to June 2021 and as compared to the previous year. Judy explained the effect of ticket sales for Polar Express, and how the timing of receipts of lodging tax, ticket sales and grants affects the financials. Judy noted that the negative net income is decreasing, which is what we expected, and that the financials are looking good. Dave Richards moved to accept the Treasurer's Report, Kathy Roberts seconded and the Treasurer's Report was unanimously accepted as presented.

#### 4. President's Report.

Polar Express Train Ride. Ticket sales began in June and approximately \$250,000 in tickets were sold in three days. We are pleased that sales are continuing to go well. We are working on planning the event in a way that offers a safe experience for our staff, performers, volunteers and guests. Bob noted that staffing will be a challenge this year. Lee Eskilsen offered to see if Johnson and Wales students would be interested in helping. Joan will follow up with Lee about volunteers and potential performers from Johnson and Wales.

East Providence Update. Bob reported that East Providence will be organized for tourism development by the BVTC. We are working with East Providence officials and their Planning Department to develop advertising and a tourism program with about \$500,000 that East Providence has for such purposes.

Woonsocket Depot Update. Bob explained that a long-term lease with the RI Department of Transportation and the required insurance would be extremely costly. We think that using our existing insurance and signing a short-term agreement will be the best thing to do as we work toward a long-term lease and the insurance expense. Bob explained the issues involved with insurance costs both at the Depot with the RI DOT and with having volunteers at the I-295 rest area with the RI Department of Environmental Management.

After discussion of a long-term lease vs. a short-term yearly authorization (reference the August 16, 2021 Letter of Authorization submitted by RIDOT) at the Woonsocket Depot, Dave Richards made a motion to support Bob Billington signing the short-term Letter of Authorization, as we work toward a 5-year lease agreement. Mike Gwynn seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.

Central Falls Landing. Construction is moving along. Our area is currently being plastered and will be painted soon. Our move-in date may be in October, but the focus at this time is on getting the two restaurants on the property up and running.

Blackstone Valley Expeditions and Kayak Program. Our kayak program has begun at Central Falls Landing, being coordinated by BVTC's Mike Martin. We are working with the City of Central Falls to get Central Falls youth out on the river kayaking. We have also developed a rental program for the general public with kayaks and canoes.

SVOG Grant. We did not get the Shuttered Venue Operator Grant, but Natalie is submitting an appeal for our Polar Express event.

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Donated Boats. We received a donation of two pontoon boats by DevCo North America. They are being registered today. We will use at least one of the boats for river clean up.

Golf Tournament. The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Heritage Golf Tournament will take place on Monday, August 30, 2021 at Crystal Lake Golf Club. Sponsorship is great this year and we have almost 100 golfers signed up. Dave Richards will host the event.

Arnold Mills 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade. Bob reported that the BVTC Dragonboat entry in the parade received a Chairman's Award.

Champlin Grant. Natalie is working on this grant for educational materials and equipment in our River Classroom at Central Falls Landing. Bob explained that Champlin is questioning the amount of financial support that the BVTC receives from its Board, as well as if The Champlin Foundation will support a tourism organization. Natalie is appealing their decision and re-applying in a different category.

Tom Kravitz Resignation. Tom Kravitz has resigned from our Board of Directors after taking a position as planner for the City of Warwick, Rhode Island.

Workshare Program. Bob reported that the BVTC staff is working on a 24-hour a week schedule rather than a 40-hour a week schedule and is still participating on the RI Department of Labor and Training Workshare Program. We hope we will be able to end our participation in that program soon and return to a 40-hour work week.

Fall Foliage Train. We are hoping to run 1 or 2 fall foliage trains from the Woonsocket Depot to Putnam, Connecticut and back in October, as it has been a very popular program in the past.

Don Kennett. Bob shared that Don Kennett, Operations Manager for the Genesee and Wyoming Railroad, suffered a stroke recently. He has worked closely with us on Polar Express and has been instrumental in having the railroad keep the train cars we use for Polar Express, as the railroad is primarily a freight line.

Dave Richards moved to accept the President's Report as presented, Lee Eskilsen seconded, and the President's Report was accepted unanimously.

5. Adjournment. There being no further business, Dave Richards adjourned the meeting at 1:10 p.m.

Joan Loos, BVTC Staff



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