

**Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, Inc.**

Board of Directors Meeting  
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council  
175 Main Street, Pawtucket, RI  
Tuesday, October 23, 2018

**Attendees:**

David Balfour, Chairman  
Judy Fischbach, Treasurer (via phone)  
Dr. Joyce Hindle Koutsogiane  
Michael Gwynn  
Paul Palange

**Absent:**

Barry Mechanic, Vice Chairman  
Dave Richards, Secretary  
Debra Berardis  
Louis Yip  
Thomas Kravitz  
Michael Zhang  
Mark Brodeur

**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 12:20 p.m.
2. Approval of Minutes from August 14, 2018. Joyce Hindle Koutsogiane moved, Mike Gwynn seconded, and the minutes from the August 14, 2018 Board meeting were unanimously approved as presented.
3. Treasurer's Report. Judy Fischbach reviewed and explained the financials as of the end of September 2018, including the Balance Sheet as of September 30, 2018 compared to September 30, 2017, the Income Statement July 2018 through September 2018 vs. the previous year, and the Income Statement YTD, Budget vs. Actual. After discussion, Paul Palange moved, Joyce Hindle Koutsogiane seconded and the Treasurer's Report was unanimously accepted as presented.

It was reported by Natalie and Bob that this year's audit has been completed and paperwork should be finished by next month.

4. President's Report.

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council Annual Meeting was held on Wednesday, October 3 as a luncheon event at the Twin River Event Center. Bob thanked Mike Gwynn and the PawSox for their sponsorship. At the luncheon, awards were presented and the state's tourism advertising plan was reviewed by the public relations firms working with the state.

A portion of the Blackstone Bikeway in Lincoln has had some maintenance issues. There is some rough pavement which is a hazard to riders. Until repairs can be made, Donna Kaehler from the BVTC is working on getting signage installed to warn riders to slow down and be aware of the rough pavement.

The Polar Express will take place this year on weekends from November 16 to December 23. For the opening weekend we are donating \$10,000 in tickets to the people of Woonsocket who might not be able to afford tickets. Tickets are being distributed by family services organizations. There was discussion about publicizing the donation of tickets after the event has taken place.

Professor Ted Hara from the University of Central Florida spoke at the Visitor Center in Pawtucket about satellite tourism accounts. He also spoke on the topic to the state tourism commission.

The Explorer tour season ended on October 21 in Woonsocket.

We have written letters in support of the Green Economy Bond which will provide funds for, among other things, bikeways, open space, waterways and recreational areas. There is \$5 million earmarked in the Bond to expand and improve the state's network of bikeways.

Donna Kaehler has been working on the Circle Blackstone project to get people on the bike path around all 9 towns in the Blackstone Valley, as well as make cyclists aware of the businesses near the bike path. There was discussion about having an annual event showcasing the Circle Blackstone route.

The Blackstone Bikeway runs from North Smithfield down to Providence. To encourage exploration of areas along the bikeway, the Bike Stops program has been started. There are over 50 stops listed on the Cycle Blackstone web site ([cycleblackstone.com](http://cycleblackstone.com)) at this point. Window clings will be given out to participating businesses along the bike path and also to businesses that have worked with Keep Blackstone Valley Beautiful. Paul Palange asked if there could be a bike ride or event held to bring attention to the bike path.

Donna Kaehler also attended a press event for the RI Waves initiative, a safety program for bikers, drivers, and pedestrians to be aware of either other on the road by waving. The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council assisted with photography and video for the program.

There are changes being made in the hotel room tax formula in our favor. Third party booking systems (such as Airbnb) need to be watched closely. There are discussions happening on how taxes are collected and submitted for these types of room nights.

In 1996-1997 the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council took on a project to run ferry boats. After three years, the funding got removed. The boats were sold, all debts were paid and negotiations began with the IRS. We negotiated a 25% reduction in penalties and interest, and the debt was satisfied.

The only debt we have now is for repairs made to the boat after the 2005 flood.

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council offices will be moving to Central Falls Landing. We are working with the mayor of Pawtucket and the landlord of our current building to keep the visitor center open in Pawtucket. The National Park Service will have their offices at the visitor center in Lincoln off I-295.

The Dragonboat Races were held on September 8 and were very successful, with the most number of teams racing since 2001.

Donna Kaehler is also our Keep Blackstone Valley Beautiful representative and is working to end litter, reduce waste and beautify our communities. Donna obtained a grant for cigarette butt boxes to be installed, 35 in bus shelters and over 50 elsewhere in the communities. We will be offering boxes to businesses for free. The Department of Public Works will empty the containers with support from some of the businesses.

5. Adjournment. There being no further business, Joyce Hindle Koutsogiane moved, Mike Gwynn seconded, and it was unanimously agreed to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned by Mr. Balfour at 1:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan Loos, BVTC Staff