Present: Kathleen Bertoncelj, Brad Jackson, Brady Hammond, Rebecca Walsh, Page Malmstrom, Mike McShane (present via phone), Mark Pearce (present via phone) Pat Gabriel - Laramie City Council Liaison, Scott Larson-Executive Director, Mike Gray-Assistant Director, Sara Haugen-Marketing Manager, Lyndee Johnston-Office Assistant

Absent: Terri Jones

Guests: Jason Arnold from Leadership Laramie, Chris Brown from Wyoming Travel Industry Coalition (WTIC), Ned Collins from 307 Film Festival

1. Regular Board Meeting called to order at 4:05 p.m. by Vice Chair Mr. Brady Hammond
   a) Confirmation of a Quorum-YES
   b) Introduction of new Marketing Manager, Mrs. Sara Haugen – Mrs. Haugen is a UW alumni and previously worked for the Boomerang and the North Forty News in Laporte, Colorado before moving back up to Laramie. She started the position here at the beginning of October and has been a great addition to the team.

2. Additions and/or Corrections to agenda
   a) None

3. Consent Agenda
   a) September 2019 Minutes
   b) Profits and Loss Budget vs. Actual
   c) Advertising and Grants

MOTION BY Ms. Bertoncelj seconded by Mr. Jackson that the Consent Agenda be approved and that each specific action on the Consent Agenda be approved as indicated. Motion was passed unanimously.

4. Financial Reports
   a) Lodging Tax Collections 2019-20 – Mr. Larson reported that during the month of September the entire state was up 14% with Albany County reporting a 30% increase. The UW first football game and the student move-in day was the first weekend of September which contributed partly to this large increase. Across the state, Natrona was up 36%, Laramie was up 7%, Sheridan was up 23%, Albany was up 30%, Teton was up 12%, Park was down 5%, and the state as a whole was up 14%. Mr. Hammond asked if the staff could report the statistics from the Laramie Regional Airport as he has noticed that more people are flying in. Last meeting it was discussed that the higher gas prices may have contributed to fewer people driving. Mr. Larson said that the staff would look into getting these numbers to see if there is a correlation but that they would like direction from the board as to which metrics to measure in correlation to lodging tax numbers.

5. Old Business
   a) 307 Film Festival – Mr. Nid Collins reported that the event was well attended and stated that 17 people stayed at the Hilton during the weekend when last year 0 people booked a hotel room at the Hilton. The ticket prices were $25 for a day pass and $40 for 2 days which the organizers thought was reasonable for a film festival. He also reported that only a few award sponsors showed up to present awards and he would like to see more sponsors attend as this event is very important to the film makers winning the awards. Mr. Collins will be focusing on traditional methods of advertising to further involve the community rather than attracting out of town folks through social media. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that she attended the event and was impressed with the talent, but also wondered how we could get more locals to attend. Mr. Hammond asked if they would consider a student price as a good portion of the Laramie community are students and would attend if they received a special deal. Mr. Collins said he would report back to the organizers for next year.

6. New Business
   a) Marketing Report – Dashboard (new) – Mr. Larson explained that the dashboard is useful in that it gives a much more detailed view of where people are viewing from, how long they spend on our website, and how many of these viewers are new to our site. He reported that there was a 21% increase in new visitors to our website and that the viewers spend an average of 1 minute and 53 seconds which also increased over the month of September. The dashboard also shows the increase in website sessions and what devices our visitors are using to view the webpages. Looking at year-over-year stats, the “homepage” on visitlaramie.org is up 153%, the “where to stay” page is up 23%, the “visitor guide request” page is up 58%, and the “where to dine” page is up 90%. Mr. Larson also reported that the majority of the blog posts that were put out in September made it on the first page in Google. As far as email marketing, Mr. Larson stated that the following numbers reported are from month-to-month, not year-to-year. In September of 2019 we sent out 260,931 emails versus the month of August where we sent out 237,677 emails containing the newsletter Mr. Larson assembles. The social media followers and total reach are also improving with Instagram’s numbers steadily increasing and the Twitter numbers doubling in the last month. Facebook numbers have stayed fairly static. Mr. Larson mentioned that in the last month we have received some free public relations with the nation highlighting the first woman voter and Wyoming as the “Equality State”. Mr. Jackson asked what is there to report on the app data. Mr. Larson stated that he and Mr. Sam Trautman are working on the web design and would also like to gather data on the app to re-evaluate. Mr. Hammond asked about the possibility of geo-fencing with our app or involving the local community by, for example, offering a discount at stores if you show the Laramie app.
   b) Advertising Report – Mr. Gray reported on the ads he has been organizing with Mrs. Haugen. He has submitted various ads to the following magazines: Horizon Travel & Lifestyle Magazine, American Journal (multi-language print), Food and
Travel, and National Parks Journal. The ads include the theme “Trails, Rails, and Ales” as well as western history and an itinerary from Laramie to the national parks in Wyoming. Mr. Gray is also preparing for the 150th anniversary of Louisa Swain voting in 2020. Mrs. Mary Mountain at the Ivinson Mansion printed a booklet in 2018 on the historic women of Laramie and Mr. Gray is working with the museums and historical society to print a new version for the anniversary. Mr. Gray pointed out that the money left over in the 150th account will go towards printing these as well as celebratory post cards which highlight these influential women. He also has plans to print stickers and buttons for the museums and community to hand out during the year.

c) Web Updates – Wireframe – Mr. Larson reported that he has been meeting with Mr. Sam Trautman about the Visit Laramie website wireframe. This includes the ease of navigation, page set up, color selection, etc. Mr. Trautman has sent over a mock-up that Mr. Larson and Mrs. Haugen will be evaluating in the coming weeks.

d) PR and Media – C-Span and Sports Illustrated Recap – Mr. Larson reported that these two organizations filmed in Laramie the first week of October with C-Span focusing on historic features and attractions and Sports Illustrated focusing on “Top 5 Things in Laramie”. Mr. Larson escorted the Sports Illustrated crew around Laramie, met with Mrs. Mary Mountain at the Ivinson Mansion, and met with Mrs. Rebecca Walsh to hike like a woman at Vedauwoo. The crew also visited the Snowy Range and the Brush Creek Ranch. This article should be published next spring. Visit Laramie paid nothing for these companies to highlight our town so we will receive some great PR. Mrs. Walsh pointed out that she received some backlash for hosting the Sports Illustrated crew so we should prepare for similar comments in the spring.

e) Groups and Conferences Update – WACO – Mr. Larson attended WACO in Casper at the end of September to pitch Laramie as the next host for 2021 and 2022. He told the board that we did not win the bid, in part because Campbell County offered to host the event at their facility for free based on what he had heard. If Laramie had won the bid the event would have been held at the Rochelle Gateway Center which is expensive to reserve.

f) Summit Update – The Summit Rest Center closed on October 14th. Visitor traffic for the entire year was down an average of 10-20% with the numbers in September reporting a 20% decrease from 2018. The numbers for October have not been reported yet, but all visitor centers across the state reported lower numbers throughout the entire year. It was discussed again that gas prices may have had an effect on traffic throughout the state. Ms. Bertoncelj pointed out that the website visitors are increasing so travelers are using online sources to plan their road trips and have no need to stop for information. Mr. Larson, Ms. Johnston, and Mr. Les Levi will meet to debrief and determine what steps to take to make next year better.

g) Board & Staff Retreat – Mr. Larson stated that the board members were not able to agree on a date before the 2019 year ends so he asked Mrs. Malmstrom to meet with him to put an email together to send out to the board members so they can discuss what next steps should be taken for the 2020 year. As far as the staff retreat, a date has not been decided yet.

h) Building Update – Mr. Larson reported that nothing has been decided. Mrs. Malmstrom and Mr. McShane are assisting in narrowing down the search for a new location. The most realistic option so far is at the Wyoming Territorial Prison Historic Site.

i) Football Championships – Mr. Gray reported that he is preparing for the High School Football Championships which will be held at War Memorial Stadium on November 15th and 16th. He created an ad which the football association will put in their program. Mr. Gray told the board that we are paying for hats, football freebies, banners for all teams that qualify, meals for the kids and press members, and hotels for the announcers and press. The football association informed Mr. Gray that some of the hotels in town are telling the teams that if their team doesn’t qualify and they cancel their reservations then they get charged 50% of the cost of the rooms. Mr. McShane stated that we cannot lose this event because of the hotels actions. Mrs. Malmstrom stated that the hotel industry has a high turnover and many of the current employees at the hotels in Laramie are new employees who haven’t experienced the football championships. She asked the staff to re-educate the hotels in town as to how important this event is and that they will fill their rooms during this weekend. Mr. Gray also asked Mr. Pearce if he had any solutions to streamlining the process of booking the hotel rooms. Mr. Pearce will meet with Mr. Gray and Mr. Larson on Friday to discuss.

j) WOT Fall Summit – Mr. Larson will be attending the state tourism summit in Cody from November 13th-14th where he will meet with directors of tourism and chambers from the entire state as well as the state office of tourism and Governor Gordon.

k) Chris Brown, Wyoming Restaurant and Lodging Association - Mr. Brown came from Cheyenne to give an overview to the board of a bill in the state of Wyoming for the creation of Tourism Improvement Districts (TID). Mr. Larson asked if the funds can be used for infrastructure as well. Mr. Brown said he would look into it as he did not know at this time. Mr. Gabriel asked about how much support the bill had from the state legislators. Mr. Brown stated that he believes there is a good chance that this bill will be passed this year. In order to ensure this, the local legislators across the state need to show their support. Mr. Pearce supports this as he had dealt with it while he was working in West Yellowstone. Mrs. Walsh asked for clarification on how the funds are collected and who has control over the funds. Mr. Brown stated that, for example, the hotels in the boundary drawn will add 2% or $1 to the hotel room cost which will be collected by the city or a committee, whatever the industry decides. The city or committee will then give the funds back to the industry, after charging a handling fee for collecting the funds, which the industry will decide what they want the funds to go towards. Mrs. Malmstrom expressed her concerns with this as it can create competitive prices between businesses. Mr. Pearce pointed out the fact that these rates would be behind the scenes so guests shouldn’t be questioning it. Mr. Brown also noted that the industry in the specific community will get to decide the rate that is charged, whether it be a percent or monetary amount. Mr. Hammond
stated that depending on the industry (hotels vs restaurants) the rate would be different. Mr. Jackson stated that a $1 rate would give more value rather than a 2% rate, depending on what time of year it is as hotels decrease their prices when an event isn’t happening. Mr. Hammond told the board that at LCCC they have a similar legislature called BOCES and he has some concerns about explaining the bill to the local industry. He stated that BOCES does a great job of collecting funds, but people are still unsure on what the money can be used towards. This bill has much more detail than the BOCES legislature. Mr. Larson wondered what the biggest criticisms are about the bill and what if 60% of the hotels in town want to participate but 40% don’t want to be involved. Mr. Brown said that this was the biggest criticism about the bill and the solution is to exclude those who don’t want to participate by drawing the boundary line around them. Mr. Larson asked Mr. Pearce what he remembers from his time in West Yellowstone. Mr. Pearce stated that they drew the boundary in a different way with excluding any hotel that had less than 15 rooms. This way the smaller businesses could still compete with the prices of the larger hotels.

7. Grant Reports
   a) Turf Wars – The board discussed that Turf Wars always has a great turn out, so the question was asked if their request for $4,500 is necessary anymore. In January of 2019, they estimated the total number of room nights came to 2000 which Mr. Gray stated was accurate. Mr. Jackson noted that the program now profits about $30,000 during the weekend it takes place so the grant request is basically going into their savings. He also stated that it is a great event for Laramie so we don’t want them to try to find another facility and we don’t want to blindside them by not approving their grant this year. Mrs. Malmstrom agreed with Mr. Jackson that we have helped the program succeed, but the board doesn’t need to keep giving them money if they are profiting from the event. Ms. Bertoncej pointed out that every year new families are visiting Laramie to watch their kids so the event is constantly introducing people to the town which they may come back to. Mr. McShane asked the board how many people they thought actually came back to Laramie and that we should ask the Turf Wars organizers if Visit Laramie could have a booth at the event. Mr. Hammond asked if we could have our logo on the program. Mr. Hammond, after taking a look at how the grant was allocated, asked the board if they should talk with the organizers to reallocate where the money goes. The board agreed that the money should be used differently, that we should have a booth at the tournament, and that it should be explained that they may not get a grant next year because of the success of the event.

   Ms. Bertoncej moved to give the requested amount of $4,500 to the association and Mr. Pearce seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

8. Review of the Board/Staff Activities
   a) September Office Stats – Ms. Johnston reported that the leads looked unusually high at 16,757 compared to 2018’s leads at 1,204. The Wyoming Office of Tourism contract was signed so this contributed to most of the leads in September. The number of walk-ins is slowly decreasing as the winter sets in and less board packets are being requested.
   b) Weekend Staff Update - Mr. Larson reported that Ms. Taylor Thomas is a big help, but the season is slowing down. After looking at the weekend data, it is difficult to say whether travelers need our facility open on all weekend days or not. Mr. Larson is going to talk with Ms. Thomas in the upcoming week to determine if it was worthwhile to have the visitor center open. Eventually Mr. Larson would like to have the center open seven days a week to accommodate every traveler.
   c) Johnston – Mr. Larson reported that Ms. Johnston has taken the initiative to create a dog-friendly brochure listing dog-friendly hotels, restaurants, and parks in Laramie sense tourists often ask for such locations.
   d) Larson
      i. WY/CO Main Street Best Practices Tour – Mr. Larson reported that he met with small groups of people from different Main Street programs who were touring Wyoming and Colorado. Mr. Larson led the groups around downtown and answered questions they had about how we target tourists and other steps taken to get them to our town.
      ii. Networking – Timberline, WACO, 4th Economy, AAA – Mr. Larson stated that he is still busy networking throughout town.

9. Public Comments
   a) Mr. Larson asked the board about changing the November board meeting date because the third Monday of the month falls right after the WOT Fall Summit and High School Football Championships. The following Monday (Nov. 25th) is during the week of Thanksgiving – Mr. Hammond and Mr. Pearce stated that they won’t be able to make that work. Ms. Bertoncej asked about the Monday prior (Nov. 11th), but the board decided that didn’t give the staff enough time to compile the data for the meeting. Mr. Larson said we would leave the next meeting date as is (Nov. 18th).
   b) Mr. McShane asked if the board would still like to meet in December as the holidays are approaching. It was decided that if there was nothing time-sensitive that we would skip the December board meeting.

10. Adjournment
    
    Motion was made by Mr. Jackson seconded by Mrs. Malmstrom to adjourn. The motion was passed unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 5:45 pm.
The next ACTB board meeting will be at the ACTB Office at 4 p.m. on Monday, November 18, 2019

Minutes respectfully submitted by Director Larson and Lyndee Johnston, Office Assistant