

A Meeting of the  
**MONTANA HERITAGE COMMISSION**  
March 12, 2015  
Reeder's Alley Conference Center, Helena, MT

MISSION

*The Montana Heritage commission preserves and manages historic resources in Virginia City, Nevada City and Reeder's Alley and promotes the appreciation of history through quality visitor experiences.*

**Commissioners Present**

Marilyn Ross, Barbie Durham, Cyndy Andrus, Bill Beck, Bill Howell, Philip Maechling, Jennifer Pelej, Matthew Marcinek, David Hoffman, Shera Konen

**Commissioners Absent**

Bruce Whittenberg, Timothy Lehman, Andy Poole, Jason Davis

**Staff Members Present**

Elijah Allen, Executive Director; Dianne Carey, Administrative Assistant, Garrett Norcott, Legal Staff from the Department of Commerce

**Interested Persons**

Dave Schultz, Madison County Commissioner and President of the Montana Association of Counties

**Call to Order**

The Montana Heritage Commission was called to order by Chair Ross at 9:00 am.

**Public Comments**

Dave Schultz, Madison County Commissioner, made a statement that the County is very supportive of the Commission and appreciative of everything the Commission does.

Marilyn commented on the success of the Montana Historical Society reception.

**Approval of December 12, 2014 Minutes**

Minutes will be approved at the June meeting.

**Financial Report**

Elijah. Bed tax has not changed. Vehicle tax is down which is typical for this time of year. It has grown over the years even though it is voluntary. Projected revenue from these taxes is \$756,000. Visitor Services is

projected to grow by 10%, including merchandise sales. Payment for the land sale is in and we would like to hold on to it for an emergency fund. Rental incomes should be around \$200,000 this year.

The Office of Tourism grant is being utilized for the restoration of buildings that can be used as potential income properties. The solar lighting project is being finalized. It will decrease our electric bill by 15% and increase safety in Nevada City. In the Pioneer Cabin we plan to install plexiglass so we can open the cabin to the public for viewing. Tom Donnelly has offered to paint more train cars in the back of Nevada City. This totals about \$70,000 for all the cars he has donated for and the future cars.

Bill Howell inquired about the new director of the Montana History Foundation. The new person should be at the June meeting to be introduced to the Commission.

Bill Beck asked if we are pursuing any grants. Elijah mentioned we will be requesting funds from FEMA for the stream at the Brewery which is creating a problem in Daylight Village. This will help mitigate water problems in Nevada City and Virginia City. Bill Beck asked if there were any preservation grants. Elijah mentioned the Office of Tourism grant we currently have. Philip Maechling said preservation monies have practically dried up.

Staffing is under par and operationally we are sitting fine. We have hired a couple of contractors locally to work on historic buildings. We will be hiring seasonal employees in a couple of months.

Communications/marketing is high at this time due to the timing of advertising and our fiscal year end. Our merchandise is marked up 100-300 percent. Our approved operating budget is \$1,250,000.

Tommie Lee Jones will be doing some voice overs for us. His production will be shooting in Nevada City next year. Dates are still an unknown. Shera Konen asked if there is a standard location fee to which Elijah responded that there is one that we are considering raising to cover an employee's time for having to be on site during the filming.

### **Director's Report**

Elijah stated we have a lot of support from our public. We are a 62 million dollar footprint in Montana. People that are fighting for us have made the difference. Madison County really fought for us. Senate Bill 64 has been signed and is in law. Now we can apply for general funds in the future. We are one of the largest historic sites in the nation which is a huge benefit for us. Senator Keene really pushed the bill for us. Cyndy Andrus spoke with him and he said this bill is his shining moment. Marilyn said the bill was the culmination of 3 years of work by the Environmental Quality Council (EQC). Most members of the EQC came to Virginia City and Nevada City for a site visit which made a huge difference in the level of support.

Dave Schultz wanted to thank the Commission for the sale of the land. Their management of the water supply will help with the land flooding issues in Virginia City and with Montana Heritage Commission properties.

### **MHC Highlights and projected projects for 2015 season**

Our brochures are being finalized and we will have 75,000 printed. Some local businesses have paid for advertising in the brochure to help with the cost. Jennifer Pelej asked if there is a current plan that they can review. It was a request that it be added to the June meeting.

We are currently in negotiations with vendors/leasers on new contracts to increase the rate due to the benefits they are receiving from marketing. Businesses have seen positive growth from the commercials and are happy with them.

Elijah expressed his frustrations with a limited budget and not being able to work on projects as needed. However we are currently working on the Thomas Meagher Cabin to be a vacation rental to increase the presence of vacationers staying in town. Americorps will be working on the Sara Bickford house to also be used as a rental. Both locations will have interpretive signage to teach visitors about the families.

Marilyn mentioned the Hibernians working on the grounds of Meagher Cabin every spring. The Hibernians have also extended their support for the Commission with the Legislature.

Jennifer Pelej talked of the Office of Tourism's relationship with National Geographic and they will be visiting Virginia and Nevada Cities. They will be speaking at the Governor's Conference on where the locals visit in Montana.

### **Final Report on Land Sale to Madison County**

The deed has been recorded and the sale has been finalized. Elijah said the sale process has been streamlined now so any future efforts to sell property should be much easier and faster. Marilyn would like the board to revisit any additional properties that might be available to sell. Philip asked that this be put on the next meeting's agenda. The land swap behind content corner has stalled. The owner of the other properties backed out.

### **Legislative Update**

SB64 is officially signed by the Governor and will be law in October 2015. The law regarding the recreational vehicle fees has been tabled. Long range building funding has paused. SB264 was not in the Governor's budget but it is a major funding bill for the Montana Heritage Commission. Not sure at this time what the actual numbers will be. Marilyn would like to thank the Executive Committee for their efforts during this session. Response from the Legislature has been positive. Bill Howell said a great deal of the commission's success is due to the efforts of Elijah and Marilyn. Bill said the EQC's visit to the Virginia City and Nevada City areas was key in their writing a bill in support of us. Philip said Helen Thigpen was brilliant and did an outstanding job in her research that also was a huge help to us in securing funding

Bill Howell wanted to go off topic by advising that the Chinese are coming! Multiple hotels and businesses are being built and developed by Chinese companies for Chinese visitors. Bill noted the Chinese visitors love western history and we could take advantage of this. Marilyn complimented the Department of

Commerce for their presentation in West Yellowstone which was very informative. Cyndy said we should look at this strategically before we translate our brochures. Bill Beck said we have a great marketing tool in Senator Baucus with China. Elijah asked if we could have someone from the Office of Tourism at the June meeting to further discuss this topic.

Stuart Daughtery will discuss SB264. The bill was held off during the first two weeks. Amendments to the bill would be to reduce the requested funding and change the proportions going to the Department of Commerce, Fish Wildlife and Parks, and historic properties throughout Montana.

### **Old Business/Liquor License**

Elijah said we are in the liquor license business. Restaurants in the Alley are suffering due to the lack of a liquor license. We need one for the Alley for the success of the conference center. It would be a good investment. Elijah said he would like to purchase a minimum of one cabaret license (beer and wine) and possibly two, depending on the cost, for the Conference center and Caretaker's Cabin. Cyndy Andrus does not feel comfortable voting on the license at this time due to the wording on the agenda. Commission voted to address this at the June meeting.

### **Discussion of Economic Impact Analysis – Rob Gilmore**

Rob Gilmore was unable to attend and speak.

### **Discussion of 3<sup>rd</sup> Priority in Strategic Plan**

There was a lot of discussion about the history of the Commission being responsible for state properties being strictly historic preservation and opposition to any dealings with the retail portion. Cyndy Andrus suggested we have a marketing committee look at the strategy in promoting through the strategic priority. The commission decided to table this priority to another meeting. The committee members consist of Cyndy Andrus, Jennifer Pelej and Philip Maechling. Jennifer noted we need to promote this site as a destination and tell the story of the area and incorporate it through marketing. This has been tabled for the June meeting.

### **Public Comment**

No members of the public attended the afternoon session. The June meeting will be held in Virginia City, Montana at the Rehearsal Hall

### **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 12.46 pm.