

General Meeting – Virtual Zoom Call

Thursday, February 11, 2021

9am – 10:20am

20 members and guests were in attendance

Meeting Topic: Legislative Initiatives and Tourism Day

Speakers: Mia Blom, Visit Baltimore and Kristin Hanna, Maryland Tourism Coalition

**BTA Business**

BTA president Chris Riehl (Rent-a-Tour) called the meeting to order at 9:04am. Chris introduced himself to everyone because he recognized some new faces to the Zoom call.

***Bylaws Amendments***

Chris first addressed the meeting with BTA business. The first piece of business was the bylaws, Section 5.2 and 5.10. Chris stated that at the BTA Board Retreat in January, the board looked at these bylaws and suggested amendments be made. The board passed the amendment changes – 7 yes and 2 members not present. Chris explained the changes to all in attendance. A motion was made to pass the amendment changes by BTA treasurer, Mike Haynie (Maryland Center for Hospitality Training). Michelle Torres (Phillips Seafood Restaurant) seconded the motion. Motion passed by all attendees, none opposed.

***2021 Budget for Approval***

The second piece of BTA business that Chris presented was the organization’s 2021 Budget for approval. BTA treasurer Mike Haynie presented the proposed 2021 Budget. Mike informed those in attendance that at the BTA board retreat the board examined income and expenditures for 2020. Revenue is down because of the board’s decision to extend membership dues due to the financial impact of the pandemic. Membership dues paid in the amount of $13,462.75 reflect 2020 months of January and February. Expenditures reflect the organization purchasing member services to support members during the pandemic that suffered closures and financial difficulties. Mike commented that the board is looking to reinstate dues later in 2021. BTA netted in 2020 $5,555.29. Some of the expenditures that BTA spent supported many of its members during the pandemic due to closures and financial hardships. Next Mike presented expenditures for each committee which totaled to $11,400 which was about $2500 less than expenditures for 2019. Michelle Torres (Phillips Seafood Restaurant) stated that she and other BTA members were under the assumption that BTA had suspended dues for all of 2021. Chris replied that the board voted to suspend the first 6 months of 2021 and then would determine if dues should be extended further based on the current situation of the pandemic. Mike added that the board is very sensitive to reinstating dues and that the second half of the year may be based on a flexible option of members paying voluntary. Mike apologized to Michelle for any miscommunication. Chris made a motion to pass the budget. A motion was made to accept and pass the budget by Liz Cipriani (National Aquarium) and Caitlin Feeley (Select Event Group) seconded the motion. All were in favor and none opposed. The budget passed. Mike added that his treasurer’s report will be available each month at the BTA meetings for members to review. Chris thanked Mike for his comprehensive report.

**Speaker Presentation: Tourism Legislative Advocacy and Representative Support**

Chris introduced and welcomed the first speaker, Mia Blom, of Visit Baltimore. Mia stated that Visit Baltimore is part of several advocacy groups. Mia asked the question, “Does everyone know who their elected officials are?” Several members raised their hands. Mia advised that sometimes legislators do not know about tourism issues and the impact that tourism has on the economy. Mia urges everyone to reach out to their legislators to make them aware of the financial support that the tourism industry is in need of because of the pandemic. Mia stated that Baltimore City is positioned for a full recovery for it citizens who are out of work. Next Mia advised the group that there is a new apprenticeship program with Guinness Brewery. Mia stated that more people need to apply at this link <https://baltimore.org/foundation/diversity-apprenticeship-program/>. Mia also added that Visit Baltimore is gearing up for National Tourism Week, May 2-8. Mike asked Mia if that is a number of how many jobs have been lost. Mia stated that the data is still be compiled. She commented that the new administration is using focus groups to platform the industry. Chris added that members should take advantage of Charm City Creates that Mia coordinated. Mayor Brandon Scott and a representative from Senator Chris Van Hollen’s office were present and it was great to remind them of Baltimore’s greatness. Chris added that Senator Bill Fergerson is also very supportive of the industry. Mia concluded by stating that she will provide everyone with the Charm City Creates video <https://vimeo.com/509821530/553e84f9d9>. Mia also reminded everyone that CIAA is still coming to Baltimore virtually. She stated that you have to register but it does provide a good view of what the convention will look like when it comes physically to Baltimore in the next upcoming years.

Next Chris introduced and welcomed Kristin Hanna (Flying Dog Brewery) of the Maryland Tourism Coalition. Kristin urged members to send legislative letters to their legislative officials. She stated it does make a difference and that local and state representative will respond to your stories. Kristin advised that letter templates are available for everyone to participate. Kristin provided the attached power point presentation. If you have any questions in regards to the presentation about state legislative issues, feel free to email Kristin at Kristin.hanna@flyingdog.com. Kristin concluded her presentation by reminding members about Tourism Day, Friday February 12 at 9am. Expected appearance by legislators and government officials are Kelly Shultz from the Governor’s office, State Comptroller Peter Franchot, and Senator Bill Fergerson. Kristin urged everyone to sign up to attend and commented that officials to note large attendance as an importance of how important the tourism industry is to the economy and work force. Michelle Torres who also sits on the board of Maryland Tourism Coalition stated that 90 people have signed up for Maryland Tourism Day. Mike asked Kristin about job losses at the state level. Kristin reported that about 40% has been reported. That is about 60-70 thousand of jobs lost. Chris reminded everyone that new members can join MTC for $99 and received a discount for Tourism Day.

**Committee Reports**

***Vice President*** Scott Barr (National Aquarium) reported that all BTA meetings will remain virtual for the next few months. The next BTA Meeting on March 11 at 9am will be Keith Daw of McDonell Consulting, a Sandler professional development company.

***Treasurer*** Mike Haynie (Maryland Center for Hospitality Training) reported that BTA has $32,958.84.

***Marketing Chairs*** Caitlin Feeley (Select Event Group) commented that co-chair Jen McIIwain (Miss Shirley’s) was unable to make the meeting today due to her need to be on hand at the restaurant to handle front line orders. Caitlin thanked committee members Patrick Smith (Pride of Baltimore) and Liz Ciprani (National Aquarium) for the dedicated work they have been doing in regards to BTA’s social media channels and its website. Caitlin reported that BTA is bringing back social media takeover weeks for its members. Caitlin urged everyone that it is easy to do. All that is needed is a word document with content and social media handles. BTA takes care of the rest. Caitlin provided this link where members can sign up for their preferred week in 2021 <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1v0rYoU-4Os5O1Lx5ZY6O8uYr0gyVwz1OPtTPe2yXGdU/edit?usp=sharing>. Liz reported that they have been some updates to BTA’s website. There are new sign up buttons for new members to join and the on-line membership directory is also updated. Liz urges members to send photos that they can use. Liz concluded by stating that BTA’s website now has Work from Home resources and they will continue to upload more resources that may be useful to members. Chris reminded all new or rejoining members to update their membership information via the BTA website so all contact information is correct and that you will be added to BTA’s email list.

***Membership Chairs*** Dana Twardowski (McCormick & Schmick’s Steak & Seafood Restarant) commented that co-chair Allison Bruce (Fogo de Chao) was on another call and may not be able to join the meeting.

Dana also encouraged everyone to sign up on the BTA website as well as any additional member for the organization or company. Dana reported that BTA has 8 new members. On March 30, BTA membership is planning to host an outdoor networking event at Phillips Crab Deck. Membership is also working with the marketing committee to roll out some social media campaigns that would include New Member Mondays, Tasty Tuesdays, Wacky Wednesdays, etc. to highlight BTA members. Dana urges everyone to send 2-3 minute videos or photos that can be used for these purposes.

***Outreach Chairs*** Danielle Emich (Fairfield Inn) welcomed her new co-chair Rebecca Gisriel (Hotel Monaco). Danielle reported that they are starting to reach out to tour operators find out what their planning schedules are looking like for 2021. The committee is working to find ways to reconnect with these tour operators and any trade shows that may be happening virtually or in-person.

***Advisors*** Eric Masterton (Visit Baltimore) had to jump off the call for another commitment. Rich Gilbert (Maryland Office of Tourism) could not attend the meeting. On their behalf Chris made everyone aware that the American Bus Association (ABA) that was scheduled to take place in Baltimore this June has been cancelled. However there still is a virtual on-demand component where Baltimore is being highlighted.

Chris reminded everyone to accept Mail Chimp in their email accounts. Mail Chimp is how all BTA news is disseminated.

**Member Announcements**

Everyone on the call were able to highlight their company or venue.

The meeting adjourned at 10:20am