

Mad River Valley Chamber of Commerce
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
May 31, 2023

Zoom Attendance: Sean Kramer, Mimi Buttenheim, May Tuthill, Stephen White, Kim Donahue, TJ Greenwood, Suze Edwards, Roger Nishi
Chamber Staff: Eric Friedman
Regrets: Matt Lilard, Anna Nasset, Diane Forrester

Meeting via Zoom, no in-person.
Meeting started at 3:03pm, by Sean Kramer.
Meeting recorded by Eric Friedman

Meeting opened with remarks from board president Sean Kramer. Sean noted that the tourist traffic has been slow, he spoke with the president of Inntopia (based out of Stowe) who noted that travel and tourism are down everywhere, not just in Vermont.

Board Reports:

Financial Reports: Continuing to work with the bookkeeper to have better YOY reporting. Eric is working with Mimi B and Roger N to change member dues to be collected annually and not quarterly throughout the year. Steward MRV and the Memory Tree need to be coded differently and/or removed from the reports. Bottom line is positive \$793 without those items on P&L.

Membership Report: CRM is being setup and beginning to roll out. The setup is time consuming with doing the data entry for all businesses. The accounting system for CRM will be integrated into QuickBooks. CRM also has the ability to integrate newsletters.

Membership is holding steady at about 186. Eric wants to get that number up - hoping to do that during the summer with more in person business meetings.

Management Reports: Eric is changing around the format of the management report in his recap to the board. Report is meant to be more casual to encourage conversation and strategy. In the report for the May 31 meeting Eric put in notes to clarify the percentage of time he is spending doing different tasks. As it stands, the majority of his time is spent on general communication - hoping to lessen that as the Visitor Center gets settled. Eric is hoping to keep the board more informed during the time between meetings. Sean K would love to have the “interacting with businesses” amount of time increase. Eric is hoping that will happen as the summer continues and the Visitor Center is more staffed. Roger N asked if Eric had set goals for himself and what those looked like. Eric’s two biggest goals are to increase “interacting with businesses” and “community engagement” Eric would like to see those closer to the 30% mark.

StewardMRV kickoff was great - Green Up rally was a huge success. Tom is back on board, but this is definitely his last year. Hoping to have Tom write a guide/training book for the next point person to have. All sites have a volunteer steward, some sites even have a waitlist. Three more sites have been added due to demand. Portalettes and garbage pickup have begun for the season.

Visitor Center is looking good! Signs are ready to be hung, TV monitors have arrived and the new reception desk was delivered Tuesday 5/30. Volunteer signup is going well - ability to sign up online which is helpful.

VOREC grant to be signed in June

Event calendar with Valley Reporter is going well - still some fine tuning on the back end to be done.

Women in Business meetings are happening every other month - next meeting at the 1824 House.

Legislative work is going well but limited when not in session. Eric is trying to get some action around the heat bill and the paid family leave for employees. Paid leave is expensive for employers who are struggling with having slower customer traffic. Kim D has asked the committee to frame the most recent legislative with the up side and cost to businesses. Vermont Public is doing a story on the wedding industry for 2023/2024 season. Kim D believes the industry still needs to recover for a few more years post covid. Lodging needs activities other than weddings to bring in tourism.

Eric put in a request to tap into the reserve fund (currently at \$36K). Eric wants to use the money in conjunction with the money from the VOREC grant to pay for the touchscreen program in the Visitor's Center as well as the upgrades to the website to integrate with the touchscreen technology. This allows visitors to access the itinerary building feature from anywhere and hopefully attract more visitors to the MRV. It will also make the chamber more attractive to new members - showing businesses ways that the chamber is attracting more customer traffic. Sean K asked if the company making the website/software has other sites for us to view. Roger N asking when Eric needs a decision - Eric would like to have an answer today to keep the project moving forward. Suze E asked if the money would be enough, Eric said yes, he confirmed the total with the company. Kim D is in favor of moving the valley tech forward - thinks it will attract a broader (younger) audience. Eric points out that the tech helps the visitor center volunteers as well. Helps them to answer in person questions. The tech will also help with backend SEO searchability. Sean K asked when the website was last redone - 10 years ago. Suze E wondering if some of the membership dues can go into the reserve fund to build it back up. Eric says the best way to regain that money would be new members and possibly grants. Eric would like to grow the reserve fund to have a year's worth of financial needs in it. Sean K is wondering if all NEW membership dues should be automatically put into the reserve fund. Vote was taken at 3:58pm - Kim D was first, Roger N seconded the motion, motion approved by all.

Eric is also looking at the roles of the board and who does what. Is hoping to have board more involved in different areas. Here is where we are currently at:

- Mimi B & Roger N on financials
- Roger N & Sean K on strategy
- Sean K on lodging
- TJ G on CRM
- Anna N on Women's initiative

Eric's list of aspirational goals for the business community:

- Creating ADA compliance committee
- Diane Forester to plan mixers and annual meetings
- Restaurant & Retail groups - Lisa R & Stephanie G

Having these committees also builds the bench for future board members

- Events committee
- Membership development
- Website development

Date of next meeting: July 19, 2023 at 3pm - in person at Visitor Center

Meeting adjourned at 4:13 pm

Minutes taken by Mary Tuthill