

Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association

MINUTES

Virtual Meeting held on **Thursday April 23, 2020 @ 2:00 pm**

Present: Jesse Hamilton, Jeff Suddaby, Scott Doughty, Kaushal Gandhi, Karin Terziano, Christine Kropp, Mathew Phillips
Staff: Kelly Haywood, Bill Farnsworth, Torin Suddaby, Scott Ovell, Morgan Richter, Kirsten Maxwell
Guests: Bob Stone

1. Welcome

Approve Agenda as presented

Be it resolved that the agenda be accepted as presented

Moved by: Christine Kropp

Seconded by: Jeff Suddaby

CARRIED

2. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

No conflicts were brought forward.

3. Approval of Minutes

Be it resolved that the minutes from the April 8, 2020 meeting be accepted as presented.

Moved by: Christine Kropp

Seconded by: Jeff Suddaby

CARRIED

4. Band on the Run and Macaroni Festival

Kelly Haywood reported that Band on the Run (BOTR) and Macaroni Festival organizers have agreed to hold both of their events on September 12, 2020. The running portion of BOTR will take place from the Summit Centre and the route will not interfere with the Macaroni Festival's Main Street location.

After a couple of clarifications, the Board voted to accept the event with the new date provided the contract has a clause clearly stating that HMATA will not pay any expenses if the event must be cancelled due to COVID-19

Be it resolved that the HMATA Board agrees to support and extend a Partnership Agreement to the Band on the Run event organizers with the contractual understanding that no funds will be paid if the event has to be cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moved by: Mathew Phillips

Seconded by: Christine Kropp

CARRIED

5. Huntsville Community Recovery Marketing Plan

Kelly Haywood presented to the Board a potential plan for community recovery marketing plan to address current and future issues/needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan is comprised of 5 main components: 1) A Summer “Stay and Play” Voucher Program; 2) A Huntsville Gift Card Enhancement Plan; 3) A Summer Digital Content Marketing Campaign; 4) Huntsville Adventures Website Optimization and Upgrades and 5) The Ontario Tourism Summit. Discussion was held about each of these components.

Summer “Stay and Play” Program

This program would follow a format similar to the RTO-12 “Fuel and Fun” promotions where consumers would receive vouchers for booking multiple room nights with Huntsville accommodators. The plan recommends reaching out to an established tourism organization, such as RTO-12, to partner in the program. The following issues were discussed:

- RTO-12 is hoping to run a version of their Fuel and Fun campaign potentially starting in August. They are currently awaiting confirmation of funding from FedNor before officially launching the program. There is currently not an existing agreement between RTO-12 and HMATA to run a shared program.
- Any partnership for this program should be able to prove a Huntsville focus so HMATA funds are not simply spent marketing the whole region. One way to mitigate this is to allocate HMATA funding to create and implement a Huntsville specific digital marketing campaign to market the program for our community.
- Could we take out the gas card portion of the program and run something sooner than August to help businesses faster? Would this suggestion be getting too far away from the Board’s mandate of driving occupancy because gas cards promote overnight stays?
- Jesse Hamilton asked the Board if everyone was comfortable amplifying an existing RTO-12 program and there was no disagreement.

Next Steps:

- The Board would like to see a final presentation from RTO-12 over the budget from the previous Winter Wonders program.
- Kelly Haywood to talk to James Murphy at RTO-12 to try to bring back to the Board an idea of the effect on the community of a given amount of investment.

Huntsville Gift Card Enhancement Plan

This program would see local businesses sign up for an e-commerce platform through the Huntsville Adventures website for the purpose of selling gift cards. A voucher plan would be put in place to reward gift card purchasers with additional vouchers to be spent at any of the participating businesses. A \$25 voucher would be given for every \$50 gift card sold up to a maximum of \$500 worth of gift cards. This program would give local businesses much needed revenue immediately. The following issues were discussed:

- Who would be paying into this program and how much would each partner provide? How much of the Town of Huntsville’s 30% of MAT dollars would they be willing/able to spend on this recovery plan as a whole and for this gift card portion specifically?
- Is this program meeting the Board’s mandate to drive occupancy? Would it be a better idea if HMATA funds were used to simply purchase a given amount of gift

cards from local businesses to then give to accommodation guests when they arrive in Huntsville as an incentive? Accommodators would be encouraged to participate in this current program as outlined.

- How can we ensure that the greatest number of businesses possible will benefit from this program, not just a small number of established and popular restaurants and tourism businesses?
- The program is targeted more locally versus to tourists. If many tourism businesses in our community do not find ways of generating revenue very soon we may see many local businesses have to close which will have a negative effect on tourism and ultimately occupancy.
- Many businesses are already selling gift cards – is this program necessary on top of current efforts? The program is designed to promote all the businesses in one easy location and provide additional incentive to purchase more gift cards than are currently being sold.
- Some people/organizations are waiting to see what HMATA is going to do to help the local economy recover and some sort of help for the tourism sector and local businesses in particular is necessary, but are gift cards the right answer?

Next Steps:

- Tweak this program or come up with something new for the next Bard meeting to address current concerns while still providing support to local businesses.

Summer Digital Content Marketing Campaign

This program would see the creation of digital content in a three step plan: 1) Develop outdoor adventure content that promotes Huntsville as a “safe place to play.” 2) Develop content focussed on Huntsville accommodation 3) Develop content for once restrictions are lifted to show that Huntsville is “open for business.” All content would be posted to the Huntsville Adventures website with a significant marketing budget to promote content on social media.

The Board did not raise any concerns with this program.

Huntsville Adventures Website Optimization and Upgrades

This program would see upgrades to the Huntsville Adventures website. The site will be made easier to use, especially for mobile users. The site will also undergo Search Engine Optimization to ensure that it ranks very high in internet searches. An integrated accommodation booking platform would be added to the website.

There was discussion about the need for the booking platform, and the consensus was that it would not be necessary. There were no other concerns with this program

6. New Business

The Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce and other partners are looking to send a letter to multiple levels of government on behalf of businesses currently struggling. Ideas that will be highlighted include property tax deferrals, HST forgiveness, relief from utility costs like hydro, water and sewer and other specific rebates for businesses, bank and credit card fees, garbage and waste/garbage fees. Looking for government to advocate on behalf of businesses. Question was asked if Board has any suggestions of other issues that should be brought up in this letter. The Board did not make specific recommendations.

7. Next steps

- Kelly Haywood to come back to the Board with an updated or new version of the gift card program for consideration.
- The Board would like to know the amount of money that other partners, including the Town of Huntsville and the Huntsville BIA, will be providing to implement this plan.
- The Board would like to have a presentation by James Murphy about the results of the Winter Wonders voucher program and details/insights on how much money should be spent in a new voucher program and the tangible results of a specific spend

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8. Adjournment

Be it resolved to adjourn meeting at 4:10 pm

Moved by: Jeff Suddaby

Seconded by: Christine Kropp

Next meeting to be held virtually on Wednesday May 6, 2020 at 2:00 pm.