

Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association

MINUTES

Virtual Meeting held on **Wednesday April 8, 2020 @ 2:00 pm**

Present: Jesse Hamilton, Jeff Suddaby, Scott Doughty, Kaushal Gandhi, Karin Terziano and Christine Kropp
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: Scott Doughty

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 1, 2020 meeting be accepted as presented.

Moved by: Christine Kropp

Seconded by: Scott Doughty

CARRIED

4. Partnership Program Application Update

Bill Farnsworth gave update on Partnership Applications

- **OFSAA** – Event finished with a final budget of \$16,226.95. Final report and receipts need to be submitted for payment.
- **Huntsville Girls Hockey** – Event finished with approved amount of \$9,000 for equipment upgrade. Partnership agreement to be signed and returned ASAP, then final report and receipts will need to be submitted for payment.
- **Ontario Museum Association** – Annual conference set to take place late October with approved amount of \$15,000. Marie Lalonde to review and sign agreement ASAP
- **Muskoka Hornets Baseball** – Event was set to take place in June and has been cancelled. Will re-apply next year for 2021 event.
- **Tri-Muskoka** – Event has been cancelled and they understand that they will need to re-apply for 2021 event.
- **Retreat to Nature** – Health and wellness website to be created. Signed agreement has been returned – just awaiting signature from Jesse. Project will be getting underway immediately.
- **Band on the Run** – New proposed date of September 12. Discussion was held about conflicting date with Macaroni Festival – BOTR in River Mill and Macaroni on Main Street. Concerns were brought up that the 2 events will create too many people on the

same date whether this event will have to be cancelled entirely due to pandemic. Also concerned whether a fall date will reduce the size of attendance. The Board's decision is that all if event is putting deposits out for entertainment, those deposits must have an "escape clause" to be fully refundable if the event has to be cancelled. It must be made clear to organizers that the Board will not be paying expenses if an event is cancelled. The event will have to get a SEAT application from Town of Huntsville which may conflict with Macaroni festival – it may not be possible to get approval for 2 SEAT applications. The Board approves the event in principle, but must see an escape clause and would like to see this event and the Macaroni festival on different dates unless the 2 organizations can present a cooperative plan for the same date that seems feasible.

- **Huntsville Festival of the Arts** – A new proposal has been put forth by organizers. More focussed on summer to boost whatever summer season can be recovered. Several events and artists proposed. Have a late fall/winter proposal should summer not be possible due to pandemic. The Board decision is to give support to summer plan but, similar to BOTR, the Festival must put escape clause into any contracts for deposits to be refundable.

5. Financial Update

Kelly Haywood shared a financial statement update that has both income and cash flow statements.

- Income received including upcoming payment for 2020 Q1 is \$603,228.27.
- Expenses paid thus far including RTO-12 Winter Voucher Program and administrative is \$144,251.26.
- Projected expenses for 2020 including existing partnerships, accounting/audit costs and bank fees is \$135,895.70
- Final projected cash total after 2020 Q1 received is \$323,081.31

Discussion was had around whether the Board wanted to defer payment of MAT tax for a period of time to give accommodators a grace period while finances are extremely tight during pandemic. There was agreement that deferral would send a positive message to business community. The question was also brought up whether it could be possible to stop collection of tax altogether for a period of time. Scott Ovell to discuss with ORHMA whether stopping payment is possible and what/if other municipalities are doing currently. The decision was made to draw up a letter from Jesse to the Town of Huntsville asking for Council consideration to defer MAT tax payment for 6 months, with understanding that the tax will have to be paid in full by the end of 2020.

Kelly Haywood has created a Request for Quote for accounting services including a 2020 year end audit. Chamber has list of local businesses able to conduct a legal audit. Chamber and Town use BDO Canada and they will be encouraged to submit a quote. Jesse Hamilton commented that having the Chamber as administrator should result in some lower costs due to economies of scale as businesses see additional business from the Chamber and provide discounted services accordingly.

6. Short Term Strategic Plan

Discussion was had about how much money should be held in reserve and how much should be made available for a COVID recovery marketing plan. The Board will suspend the partnership

program for the remainder of 2020. A discussion will be had in fall 2020 about how to proceed for potential partnership intake for 2021. Decision was made to hold back approximately \$100,000 in reserve and put \$220,000 into the recovery marketing plan.

Kelly Haywood presented a short slide deck about potential marketing spending to start Board discussion.

- Start with a summer digital program. Website upgrades, particularly to SEO and mobile to increase search ranking. Branded content has been proven to be successful for tourism marketing. This program would produce a high volume of quality content along with photography to keep Huntsville top of mind when travel becomes possible. Campaign would use booking systems for targeted tourism booking. FedNor grant application could provide some additional funding for this program.
- Highlights the upcoming Ontario Tourism Summit in Huntsville in October. Will be a partnership between local organizations and RTO-12 and will provide significant opportunity to attract political and tourism attention for our community.
- A large spend would also be allocated to some form of voucher program. Proposal that Town of Huntsville could also provide funding for this program from their portion of the MAT tax.

Lengthy discussion followed about voucher program. Jesse Hamilton noted that community saw an excellent return from the winter voucher program with RTO-12 which was built upon their previous experience with similar programs, but raised concerns about HMATA money being used to market the entire Muskoka region and whether creating our own voucher program separate from RTO-12 might confuse consumers. Jeff Suddaby reported that RTO-12 is currently working on a summer voucher program and are reaching out to entire region and will partner with FedNor. Goal is to create a \$600,000 program including vouchers and gas cards, to run July, August and September if pandemic allows, to convince travellers to head north. Jeff noted that maybe HMATA could “double up” program with added funding specifically for Huntsville or maybe the Board does look at some type of complementary program of their own with a local focus. Kelly Haywood will get permission from RTO-12 to share a report with breakdown of winter voucher program costs and benefits to local businesses. Kelly also said there has been talks between the Chamber, Town of Huntsville and Huntsville BIA to create a COVID response plan. Voucher plan is being considered with a Huntsville focus and looking at potential partnerships. Considering retail and hotel vouchers to benefit local businesses exclusively. Jesse Hamilton suggested that local spending on marketing from Huntsville organizations could benefit Huntsville should HMATA partner in a region-wide voucher program. Karin Terziano shared concern that before money is put into a voucher program the Board should be comfortable that it will benefit the entire town, not just a few specific accommodators, restaurants and tourism businesses. Morgan Richter reported that the BIA Board will meet soon and consider partnering on a voucher program provided there would be benefit to downtown. Jesse Hamilton also shared concerns about spending money on a website and would like to see a more detailed plan in order to better understand the project.

7. Next steps

- Town of Huntsville to provide a budget of where their portion of the MAT money is allocated.
- Kelly Haywood and James Murphy should discuss potential partnership and details about a voucher program to hopefully provide Board with some options to discuss.

- Kelly Haywood to provide more details about website proposal, hopefully with quotes, for next meeting, as well as further details on potential digital marketing plan.

8. New Business

No new business was brought forward.

9. Adjournment

Be it resolved to adjourn meeting at 3:55 pm

Moved by: Jeff Suddaby

Seconded by: Scott Doughty

Next meeting to be held virtually on Thursday April 23, 2020 at 2:00 pm.