

Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association

MINUTES

Virtual Meeting held on January 14, 2021 @ 3:00 pm

Present: Jesse Hamilton, Christine Kropp, Scott Doughty, Karin Terziano, Matthew Phillips, Steve Carr

Staff: Kelly Haywood, Bill Farnsworth, Torin Suddaby, Dan Watson, Morgan Richter, Scott Ovell

1. Welcome

Motion to begin the meeting

Be it resolved that the meeting will begin

Moved by: Jeff Suddaby

Seconded by: Christine Kropp

CARRIED

2. Approval of Minutes

Be it resolved that the minutes from the December 18, 2020 meeting be accepted as presented.

Moved by: Scott Doughty

Seconded by: Karin Terziano

CARRIED

3. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

No conflicts were brought forward.

4. Staff Reports

Kelly Haywood advised the Board that there will be a HLOBARA meeting January 20 to elect a representative to replace Kaushal Gandhi as a HLOBARA Board Member. At the same time, the group will appoint a new Board representative to the HMATA Board. Kelly said the meeting will also be a forum for a HMATA update as well as a discussion about potential meal delivery services coming to Huntsville. Jesse Hamilton informed the Board that ORHMA is trying a pilot delivery project of their own in Toronto.

Kelly reported that there were no new financial numbers to report upon at this time. Karin Terziano commented that MAT remittance seems slow and asked who is responsible for tracking down overdue payments. Scott Ovell responded that the process starts with ORHMA, who can flag an account at which point the Town of Huntsville has the power to enforce and collect payment.

5. Updates and Discussion of COVID Recovery Winter Lighting Initiative

Kelly Haywood recommended to the Board that, because the current Stay at Home order will not end until at least February 11, she is recommending that the portions of the Winter Lighting Initiative planned for Muskoka Heritage Place (MHP) and Downtown Huntsville be postponed until Fall 2021. She advised that the event was approved for the Town of Huntsville SEAT application, which puts the project in a good position when it is ready to go. Kelly explained that the event was created as a winter initiative and setting it up in October would mean that the event could run for 6 months. Kelly said she is actively advocating to the Province and Ministry of Tourism to extend the deadline of the Reconnect Grant so that the funds that have been approved for this event can be spent in the Fall. She stated that the Initiative has been specifically designed around the MHP property and that all lights would have to be taken down by May 9. Kelly also updated the Board that the Chamber received a \$199,000 grant from FedNor to be spent on marketing. Dan Watson added that because the planned Huntsville Streetscape construction has a planned start date sometime in March, it does not make sense to try to install lights downtown at this point either.

Jesse Hamilton opened the floor for comments from the Board.

Jeff Suddaby said he understands that the light show was designed for MHP, but feels the region is going to need all the help it can get for spring and summer and that Huntsville needs some attractions to draw visitors. Kelly reminded the Board that, despite the pandemic, last summer's numbers were quite good for many businesses and that the lighting initiative was originally designed as a shoulder season event.

Matthew Phillips asked if we will still be eligible for the Reconnect grant money if the show is postponed until fall. Kelly responded that she is lobbying the Province to have the grant timelines extended. Matthew said he prefers starting the light show in the fall vs trying to get it set up in time for what would be an extremely short spring experience.

Scott Doughty asked if the grant money could be used for expenses other than the light show, such as regional marketing. Kelly responded that there have already been marketing dollars set aside to market the light show whenever it can happen. Torin Suddaby said that \$40,000 from a successful Rural Economic Development grant will also be available for marketing the light show, on top of what has already been committed and the newest grant money from FedNor.

Karin Terziano said that because of the current lockdown it makes more sense to launch the light show in the fall. She thinks that everyone involved will face criticism if we launch this show in the spring.

Steve Carr said that he is in agreeance that it seems smart to begin the light show in the fall.

Jeff Suddaby reiterated that spring is going to be very hard for the community and we need to come out with a bang. If we delay the light show until fall, he feels we urgently need to come up with another attraction to draw visitors for spring and summer.

Christine Kropp agreed that we need to come up with a plan for spring very soon. She said that we need to ensure that the light show is ready to go as soon as possible in the fall.

Jesse Hamilton said that agreements need to be made with the Town as soon as possible with regards to the usage of MHP and the downtown lights. Karin Terziano said the Streetscape project should be finished in the area of downtown where the lights will be installed by the fall.

Jesse Hamilton concluded that there is consensus from the Board to move the winter light show to the fall. Kelly Haywood said the Chamber team will work on producing ideas and a plan for a spring attraction. She said in the meantime she will work hard to claim as many expenses as possible for the grant in case the deadline is not extended.

Jesse Hamilton asked for clarity about, if the grant deadline is not extended, whether any money from the MAT or Town of Huntsville funding be used prior to the fall? Kelly Haywood explained that a great deal of the capital costs, such as the purchase of the lights and sound equipment, have already been spent. The goal will obviously be to claim as much as possible, but there has already been approximately \$400,000 spent and the maximum the grant would cover is \$290,000.

6. New Business

Kelly Haywood asked the Board for their feedback on how to go about telling the public the lighting project has been postponed. She asked if a release should be sent out very soon to let the public know that the light show has been postponed. She said it would be good to have a spring plan in place before the announcement. Jesse Hamilton said he feels that the postponement should be a part of a release that announces our spring plan.

7. Adjournment

Be it resolved to adjourn meeting at 4:15 pm

Moved by: Jeff Suddaby

Seconded by: Matthew Phillips