

2-9-17

Nancy Chennault: March 6th is the annual CRCDA meeting, location to be determined.

New Business: Jennifer Engkraf was voted in as Chamber of Commerce Secretary by unanimous vote.

Treasurer's Report: Susie Barker, bank balance is \$9616.00, \$5 in savings account and \$735 in Scholarship fund. Map Ad account has \$233.

Recognition of new members: Rod & Savannah Rice, Liz from Castle Rock Curiosities.

Kori Quatermass: Update on happenings at MSH Institute. The Music on the Mountain program had been overseen by a position funded through the Cowlitz Economic Development Council that has since been cut and she has inherited the various projects. There were a host of complications with the Music on the Mountain, specifically with regard to weather and cancellations. It was discussed that a wider variety of events should be offered, with more indoor options as the weather can be iffy, even in the summer. Some of the events coming up are family camps, music, art, etc.

In order to sustain these programs, more funding needs to be secured. There will be opportunities for local businesses to sponsor events and be displayed in ads and promos. For more information contact Kori Quatermass at kquatermass@mshinstitute.org.

Marilyn Young Skogland: Today's discussion will be the pros and cons for the Chamber of Commerce taking over running the visitor center. A Task Force was assembled a few months ago to discuss the possibilities. The funds that are designated to run the Visitor Center from hotel/motel tax are not sufficient to operate it in the capacity that it needs. The funding is anywhere from \$13,000 to \$15,000 per year. Utilities alone for the building are roughly \$8500 to \$10,000.

A more sustaining model needs to be devised. The Task Force, co chaired by Marilyn and Ellen Rose, has been working on fact finding and talking to other local visitor centers. The bottom line is that the city can afford the building, but not a person(s) to staff it. Just the base cost of a person would be \$20-\$25k and to have a trained person with knowledge of the area and event planning, marketing, etc would be \$35-40k.

It was discussed that the only viable plan is to have a Non-Profit run the Visitor Center, as Non Profits can obtain grants and WSDOT (the owner of the land) specifies that only a Non Profit can operate there.

Pros: could be very successful in a small community, it's a good location, could be run by an AmeriCorps or Goodwill volunteer?

Cons: finding and keeping volunteers is always a challenge, the Exhibit Hall needs to be dealt with, where will the money come from to staff it, is it sustainable

Kelso/Longview and Woodland Chamber run their Visitor Center, however their hotel/motel taxes are enough to sustain an employee(s) as well as having other revenue sources such as merchandise/food sales, ad revenue, grants and sponsorships.

Mike Vorse: A higher end marketing staff would pay for itself in the long run. There needs to be more social media and digital marketing for this area. Higher cost but higher return on investment.

Marilyn: In the past the Exhibit Hall came into being due to a petition to assess a B&O tax specifically for that purpose that generated about \$40,000 per year. The B&O tax sunsetted after the Exhibit Hall was purchased, but as there was no more funding the Exhibit Hall began to deteriorate.

Another option is a Building Improvement Area tax or Tourist Promotion Area. More info to follow in the future.

Dave Vorse discussed an opportunity to install 2 more electric car chargers at Exit 49. There are three options including a quick charger, an overnight charger and a 4 hour charger. He asked the chamber members if this was something they wanted to pursue. The group agreed that it was something they wanted to do as it could help bring in out of town people.

Meeting end

9:30 a.m.