

Montana Heritage Commission
Minutes

Board Retreat and Work Session
January 15, 2008 – Cheever Hall, MSU Bozeman

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Mary Oliver, Philip Maechling, Randy Hafer, Vicki Hucce, Marilyn Ross, Leslie Schmidt, Joe Maurier, Colin Mathews, Andy Poole, Richard Sims
STAFF PRESENT: Paul Reichert, Karlee Smith

Purpose: Paul recapped the purpose of this retreat/work session for Commissioners—to foster board relationships, better define board roles and energize the board to support staff in their work. Paul added that MSU Architecture Dept. will be sharing a presentation later in the day pertinent to our partnership with them.

Objectives of the meeting were reviewed:

- Develop a board work plan based on the strategic plan
- Clarify decision making roles for committees and full board
- Establish committees and define purpose
- Vote on board officer elections for 08
- Act to modify the governance plan as needed

Paul opened the session by having each Commissioner share something about themselves that others might not know. He then had each participant complete a Quick Board Assessment/Analysis—an exercise he obtained at a meeting of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This analysis assesses board requirements, attendance, mission/vision, frequency of meetings, board structure, administrative overhead, how board decisions are made, financial contributions of board, participation in fundraising, long-range planning and progress made, active committees, bylaws, staff participation on board committees. Scores of all board members were averaged for a total of 50-60 out of possible 115 points, falling in the “needs improvement” category.

Discussion followed regarding specifics of the assessment. All agreed that one thing in particular stood out from the analyses—the importance of both board members and staff participating actively on subcommittees.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities - Paul then suggested that the group go through a SWO (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities) analysis to help with the process of defining board roles, committees, and work plans. Each person was asked to put at least one item under each of the three topics. Results of the exercise are shown below. The number in parentheses indicates that more than one participant endorsed that particular item.

Strengths

- Committed and experienced staff
- Diverse and experienced board members
- A great site, with great resources, and great stories right in front of us. (2)
- The physical property is already there
- Dedicated staff and professional (2)
- Breadth and depth of collections

- Isolation of the village
- Impressed with the passion of the staff (2)
- Montana supports historic preservation
- Leadership of board/staff
- Partnerships—Montana History Foundation, Montana Historical Society, Montana Preservation Alliance, National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Virginia City/Alder Gulch story 1864-1920
- Board members current & past with great connections for fundraising and influence
- Unique project – to US history and Montana history

Weaknesses

- Lack of state support—financial (2)
- Lack of interpretation
- Lack of outside funding (3)
- Governmental structure
- Active subcommittees
- Lack of professional grant writer
- Seasonal aspect
- Clear focused projects to implement
- Isolation of the site
- Uncertain relationship with town and state (3)
- Volume of work – limited staff
- Difficult to keep staff (seasonal, lack of housing)
- Site needs visitor conveniences to keep visitors
- Permanent funding
- Lack of rapport between staff and board

Opportunities

- To preserve a state treasure
- To educate constituents—create excitement! (better/easier interpretative experience)
- Momentum—progress made in many areas provides opportunities in many directions
- Grants
- To strengthen Madison County and VC economies and gain a financial partner(s) in preservation (2)
- Partnerships with some great outside organizations (2)
- Promote sites to an international level
- It's still there!
- Need to utilize resources (sell) to move program forward
- To develop a living history village
- Partnerships with universities, nationally and internationally
- Current tourism trends—geotourism, voluntourism, etc.
- More destination “tourism” – more potential.

Discussion followed. Commissioners agreed that a number of changes could be made to improve working relationships with staff and to better educate commissioners on issues and operations. The following changes will help Commissioners make better-informed decisions and will provide them with a better understanding of concerns that need to be addressed at the Commission level.

- Staff (at least managers) should be invited to Commission meetings

- Possibly include staff at the table with Commissioners (NOTE: this will require a larger meeting location—maybe the community center)
- Include staff at lunch to encourage individual discussion between staff and commission
- Ask staff to provide updates/demos at meetings (maybe one program per meeting). This could possibly include an afternoon work session for Commissioners to experience “hands-on” tasks in that specific program area.
- Work with Madison County Board of Housing to help alleviate housing shortage
- Begin looking at items/properties that could be sold to alleviate storage problems. This would also bring \$\$ to help care for remaining collections/properties.
- Work with staff to promote Vocation Vacations. Retiring baby boomers are looking for “working” vacations where they are willing to volunteer some time and incorporate rest and relaxation in the same trip.
- Volunteers – Work with staff to better coordinate projects of this type.

Work Plan Tasks

Paul led a brainstorming session for tasks to develop a board work plan. Results follow:

- Have staff attend board meetings and participate in lunches and dinners.
- Form additional task-oriented committees
 - Legislative strategy and legislator meetings
 - Fund raising committee for donors and new funds
 - Sales committees (one for real property and one for personal)
- Fundraising training—seek out a training for all board members
- Improve and expand university partnerships
- Clarify w/assumptions how site management will occur—further discussion needed on various options. Paul explained that since 50% of staff are being paid out of temporary funds we should look at possible options other than rehiring the position as it was. It was pointed out that the Site Manager is critical in the summer months, along with constant property management issues year round.
- Develop standing joint board/staff committees—one for each program area
 - Within each program areas – 1-2 board members each
 - Hold standing committee meetings the afternoon before regular commission meetings. If additional committee meetings are necessary to accomplish tasks, the committee chair may call meetings at an agreeable time for members.
- Promote “way finding” and better signage—staff/MSU
- Proceed with Master Site Plan
- Mission Statement – revise to be more clear and concise
- Board/staff presentation at National Tourism Assn. – We need to make a presence at national bus tour conventions. Memberships and attendance are expensive but should pay off in the long term.
- Start sale process of excess property – real and personal property
 - Prioritize. Start this year
- Define board’s role(s)
 - Money – influence – policies
- Grant eligibility criteria
 - Ability to raise \$
 - MOU w/history foundation. Revise existing agreement w/history foundation—re: using their c(3)
 - Analyze non-profit status
- Partnership w/VC/Madison County for funding/grants/projects

- Revisit idea of national heritage status or equivalent
- Seek special purpose H.U.D. grant for affordable housing
- Would dissolving the board matter? Why do we exist? More discussion needed.
 - Actively participate in policy oversight and finding \$\$ (PCC—prospect, cultivate, close)

Governance Plan

Paul provided the Commission with suggested revisions to the Governance Plan (Commission operating “bylaws”). After discussion, additional changes are detailed below—a complete copy with revisions shown is attached as part of these minutes.

- Executive Director and Personnel Management, item 4. Delete the last three sentences.
- Section E. Committees.
 - Combine Executive & Finance & Management Committees to make the Executive/Finance Committee.
 - Under a. first bullet, delete everything after Past Chair and add Secretary-Treasurer.
 - Delete b. Preservation & Interpretation Committee and all tasks.
 - Delete c. Finance and Management Committee and all tasks except the last three—move those to Executive/Finance Committee.
 - Delete d. Railroad Advisory Council
 - Delete e. Nominating Committee
 - Add the following standing committees: b. Preservation/Archaeology, c. Collections, d. Maintenance, e. Interpretation/Education, f. Visitor Services/Marketing, g. Fundraising/Development.
 - Change language in item h. to allow Commission Chair to establish working ad hoc committees as needed to tackle specific issues or projects.
 - Add item i. authorizing the Commission Chair to establish committees for the sale of real and personal property as specified in statute.

Motion: Joe Maurier moved to approve the Governance Plan as revised. Marilyn Ross seconded the motion. Motion passed.

A final copy of the revised Governance Plan will be posted on our website (www.montanaheritagecommission.com) under Commission Information/Policies.

Request from DOC Legal Counsel – Paul relayed a request from DOC Legal Counsel Kelly Casillas asking the Commission to pass a motion for staff to forward any information about an accident that occurred in Virginia City this past August. Kelly also requested that information about the Central City LLC land swap proposal be forwarded to DNRC staff for their review and analysis.

Paul reported that the accident was a result of an unusual windstorm. The wind was reported as a microburst on a weather warning staff received that day after the incident had already occurred. The microburst ripped the River of Gold sign off of its post. The sign then flew through the windshield of a passing vehicle and struck the driver in the forehead. He was air lifted to Seattle and is still recovering from the injuries he sustained. The victim has secured an attorney who requested that we retain any evidence surrounding the scene. MHC staff first on the scene were highly commended by the Sheriff’s Office and first responders for their professionalism in handling the situation.

Motion: Andy Poole moved to have the land-swap information be forwarded to DNRC legal staff as requested. Leslie Schmidt seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Committee Assignments – Mary Oliver asked those present to sign up on specific standing committees according to their interest and expertise. Mary will review the sign ups and make final appointments ensuring that each committee has at least one board member. She will also make sure that each commissioner is assigned to only one committee (excluding Executive/ Finance) since those committee meetings will be held simultaneously the afternoon before Commission meetings. Mary will contact those absent from the work session to obtain their interest. She will then finalize appointments and inform Commissioners and staff prior to the next meeting.

Board Elections – Mary Oliver reported that she appointed a Nominating Committee to contact board members for 2008 officer nominations. The Nominating Committee consists of: Vicki Hucke, Joe Maurier, and Maureen Wicks. Vicki Hucke reported that the Committee received **nominations as follows: Mary Oliver, Chair; Bill Howell, Vice Chair; and Marilyn Ross, Secretary-Treasurer.**

Motion: Joe Maurier moved that the nominations presented be elected for 2008. Leslie Schmidt seconded the nomination. Motion passed.

Legislative Priorities – Paul referred Commissioners to a handout of issues he is proposing for the 2009 Legislature. He also provided proposed revisions to our existing statute.

Next steps suggested:

- Contact DOC Director to discuss the funding ideas. Set up a meeting with David Ewer soon to discuss some of the possibilities.
- Examine the findings and recommendations of the Legislative Audit Committee when they conclude their current MHC performance audit.
- Plan a site tour for key legislative people
- Develop a work plan for moving legislative priorities forward
- Analyze \$\$ we bring to SW Montana (NHA research data may be helpful here)
- Review ITRR data re: value of various visitor types

There was discussion about Lynda Moss's resignation from the board. Paul reported that Lynda resigned based upon a 2005 letter written by Legal Services attorney to Diane Rice. The letter indicated that it is unconstitutional for legislators to serve on public boards. Discussion followed. Commissioners who were on the board at that time remembered the incident but thought it had been solved and OK'd for Legislators to remain on the board.

Mary will appoint a Legislative ad hoc committee soon that will study this and other legislative issues. They will bring proposals to the next meeting.

MSU Architecture School presentation – Terry Beaubois from the MSU Architecture School provided a demonstration to the board on Second Life, a state-of-the-art virtual classroom that is being used at MSU and around the world. We are working on a cooperative agreement with MSU to consider providing historic preservation training via Second Life. This technology would allow the Virginia City Institute to conduct classes world-wide using Virginia City as a living laboratory.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00