

A Meeting of the  
**MONTANA HERITAGE COMMISSION**

September 30, 2016  
Rehearsal Hall, Virginia City, MT

**MISSION**

**The Montana Heritage Commission preserves and manages historic resources in Virginia City, Nevada City and Reeder's Alley and promotes the appreciation of history through quality visitor experiences.**

**Commissioners Present:**

Marilyn Ross, Bill Howell, Philip Maechling, Andy Poole, David Hoffman, Bill Beck, Stan Ozark, Matthew Marcinek, Bruce Whittenberg

**Commissioners Absent:**

Jennifer Pelej (Proxy), Dr. Timothy Lehman, Shera Konen, Barbie Durham, Cyndy Andrus

**Staff Members Present:**

Elijah Allen, Executive Director; Amy Barnes, Legal Counsel; Bonnie, Paralegal-Department of Commerce

**Interested Persons:**

John Ellingsen, Bill Bennett, Mike Edwards, Harlan and Joelle Olson, Russ Hamilton

**Call to Order:**

The Montana Heritage Commission was called to order by Chair Ross at 9:10 a.m.

**Approval of June 2016 Minutes:**

**Commissioner Maechling *made a motion to approve the minutes. Commissioner Howell seconded. Motion carried.***

**Public Comments:**

Russ Hamilton, with the hotels wanted to thank the Commission for another fantastic year the numbers were up this year and with the remodel of the Fairweather Inn which consisted of new plumbing, replacement of old wall paper, new furniture and paint. Comments from customers have been outstanding.

Scott Kelly, Wells Fargo Steak House appreciates the faith that the Commission put in him and the investment of the restaurant will pay for itself. The increase of foot traffic compared to six (6) years ago is up considerably. He stated he appreciates the effort that the Commission is doing to get people to town.

Bill Bennett wanted to let the Commission know that he hasn't heard anything bad on the streets this season. He feels it has been a wonderful year.

Elijah introduced Leona Stredwick, volunteer seasonal lead over the Living History program. Elijah wanted to let the Commission know that she did an outstanding job this year. The Living History program changed direction this season from hangings and gun fights to what it actually was like in the 1860's. Visitors had the ability to learn skills of the 1860's, like quilting and medal working. Leona has served as a volunteer for 11 years. Leona stated that she was very proud of the make it and take it program, it was a very successful program this year. She also provided the Commission with a copy of a reprinting of the Montana Post. The weekends coincide with the newspaper that is provided to visitors. The volunteers have also started using them for research for reenactment.

**Director's Report:**

Elijah introduced Harlan and Joal Olson who have been working on refurbishing the carriages and wagons. Harlan stated that his goal this summer was to organize and clean the wagon barn along with the black smith shop in Nevada and Virginia City. He would like to be able to have the black smith shop in Virginia City a working shop for visitors in the future.

Elijah introduced Becky DiGiovanna who was the seasonal lead, Becky also oversaw 15 seasonal workers. She was a great asset to have for the Heritage Commission. Elijah attributed another record revenue setting year to Becky, she went above and beyond to make sure tourists were well informed and that she was a great resource to the living history program and concessionaires.

Elijah introduced Mike Edwards, Mike spends his time working on preserving and fixing the music machines so they can be viewed by the tourists. Mike is in the process of making a working mockup of the gypsy so that she can give fortunes again.

Elijah also introduced Amy Barnes, Legal Counsel for the Commission. Elijah expressed to the Commission that she is a great asset to the Heritage Commission.

Elijah notified the Commission that the Virginia City license plate is now available. 76 plates have been purchased to date.

Elijah discussed with the Commission regarding the request for the Long-Range Building funds. Elijah has requested \$750,000. The request has not been rejected.

Elijah stated that there were 73 registered volunteers and 559,520 tourists visited Virginia/Nevada City during the 2016 season.

Elijah handed out and asked the Commission to proudly wear the Montana Heritage Commission/Virginia City Logo pin, especially while testifying on the behalf of the Montana Heritage Commission.

Elijah went over the biannual report that is required by statute that was prepared and presented for the Economic Affairs Committee.

Elijah demonstrated the new interactive website for the Montana Heritage Commission.

#### **Legislative Update:**

The request to transfer the five (5) MHC FTE's to HB 2 – the general fund was denied, but have not been denied as of yet the Long-Range Building Request Fund. Elijah stated that he is welcome to suggestions on legislative requests.

#### **Strategic Plan:**

Elijah discussed with the Commission what he has planned for the upcoming year. There are three (3) top priority buildings that MHC will concentrate on in 2017: Sarah Bickford Thomas Meagher Cabin; Dames and Corbin; the Methodist Church; and the Lighting Splitter they will be used as an interoperative center and possible vacation rentals for tourists. Discovery Park will have bridges; park benches; Interoperative signs; and overnight camping facilities. For the safety priority fire suppression, will be installed in the Fairweather Inn and Contents Corner. Nevada City just obtained a fire pump that will be install later in the month. For the promotion priority Elijah stated that he has been working with Open Window and Mercury Consulting Services focusing on tourism and Elijah has been working with them for the last five (5) years to help promote Virginia City, Nevada City and Reeder's Alley. Elijah also discussed several business ideas to promote Virginia/Nevada City for the next five (5) years.

#### **Financial Report:**

Elijah went over the budget with the Commission. Elijah stated that preparing the budget can be challenging with how the funds Trickle in. Elijah provided the Commission with a three-month snap shot of the FY 2016. The approved budget to the legislative authority is \$1,799,312.00. Currently there is \$100,000.00 in reserve in an investment account and \$83,000 in the bank account so if projected revenues are low there are funds to keep business moving forward throughout the year, Elijah stated that the Commission is in a much better financial condition than years past. Commissioner Poole requested that at the spring meeting there be time allocated for the Commission to discuss and approve a budget. **Commissioner Beck moved to approve the Financial Report. Commissioner Howell seconded. Motion carried.**

#### **Land Donation:**

Bill Bennett, Attorney for Evelyn Johnson advised to the Commission that Evelyn would like to donate the seven (7) acre parcel that the Montana Heritage Commission is currently leasing that the train runs on. Mr. Bennett stated that they are in the process of having the parcel of land appraised to start the donation

process. **Commissioner Howell motioned to accept the donation from Evelyn Johnson to the Heritage Commission and proceed with through the process of the State. Commissioner Beck seconded. Motion Carried.**

**Standing Agenda Items:**

Commissioner Howell wanted to thank Elijah for his hard work on the hotel renovations and working with Evelyn Johnson on the parcel of land. Commissioner Ross expressed the great resources; knowledge; and talent the living history volunteers bring with them. She felt this season was a pleasant year, everyone was very pleasant and upbeat.

The Commission discussed the impact of having busses coming from West Yellowstone to Virginia/Nevada City with increased traffic is there a concern from the residents here? Commissioner Ross stated that the Business Owners and Business Operators encourage the idea but will always have some concerned residents. Commissioner Beck stated that this was one of the best meetings he has been to and wanted to thank Elijah for all his hard work.

Meeting adjourned at 3:21 p.m.

**The next commission meeting will be December 9, 2016 at Reeder's Alley Convention Center, Helena MT.**