

La Conner Lodging Tax Advisory Committee Meeting

Date: Thursday, September 8 at 3:30pm

Location: La Conner Civic Garden Club

In attendance: Bill Bruch, Mary Lee Chamberlain, Maria DeGoede, Jane Schmidt, Christopher Shainin, and Cindy Verge

The meeting began at 3:34pm. Bill Bruch chaired the meeting. Maria DeGoede left after the presentations.

Fund Projection

Maria DeGoede noted that the La Conner Weekly News will not be applying for funds this year.

Minutes

Cindy Verge moved and Jane Schmidt seconded approval of the minutes. The minutes were approved with all in favor.

Presentations**Skagit Valley Tulip Festival**

Cindy Verge of the Skagit Valley Tulip Festival presented first. She spoke about the distribution of the brochure which would be funded through the LTAC grant. She noted that many people use the brochure from outside of the area, and that the brochure has received between 60-80,000 downloads. She also spoke about the impact of the early tulip blooming in 2015. Attendees came from all 50 states and 95 countries. 11,345 visitors came through the festival offices. The office recorded 5,200 people in March. 3,288 came on Easter Sunday alone. Cindy spoke about the number of articles covering the festival. She stated that Skagit County lodging tax funds showed a 19% increase, and La Conner a 28% increase from March to April, likely due to the Tulip festival.

La Conner Chamber of Commerce

As Executive Director Heather Carter was sick, Jo Wolfe spoke on behalf of the Chamber as Secretary of the Board. She noted that the Chamber plans to continue marketing the town, growing the La Conner Daffodil festival, 4th of July parade, holiday events, and shoulder season events. The Chamber also supports town flower baskets and seasonal event cards promoting La Conner. The Chamber would like to hire a part time assistant to work on events. The Chamber is evaluating its office lease to address costs. The Chamber boasts 160,000 followers on social media. The Chamber also receives 3,000 volunteer hours a year to maintain the visitor center.

La Conner Live

Alan Holtzheimer presented for La Conner Live, a group of local merchants planning music performances at Gilkey Square. He noted that the past performances have drawn crowds. But funds are needed to continue the program with a goal of presenting music each Sunday throughout the summer. He stated that Burlington and other towns also present live music.

La Conner Quilt & Textile Museum

Amy Green spoke about the annual Quilt and Fiber Arts Festival. The museum has increased its advertising budget to \$11,000 a year. About half of that goes to marketing the festival. She noted that they gave an opening reception for 100 people at the museum. The hands on demonstrations are also popular. The marketing has been broadened to include all fiber art, not only quilts. She noted that there is national and international interest in the festival, and that the popular Japanese quilt exhibit will return in 2016. The museum is a member of the Alliance of American Museums. The festival will be evaluated next year. Amy Green noted that the full funding for the project would be \$2,000. She stated that coupons have been used to test the efficacy of the marketing.

Skagit County Historical Museum

Jo Wolfe spoke about the elections exhibition scheduled to occur during the presidential election season. She felt that the exhibition should be popular.

Museum of Northwest Art

Liz Theaker spoke about MoNA Style. She noted that the museum relies on that event income to support free admission. The admission to MoNA Style is free. The event will occur on March 19, 2016, during the shoulder season.

Skagit Symphony

Debra Smeltzer spoke about the symphony's 36th season including four concerts plus chorus events, and family and school concerts. She passed around an article about the Symphony in the Skagit Valley Herald. The family concert was free for students and families and sold out this year. The symphony provides two schools concerts for 5th grade students for free. The symphony performs for about 3,000 people a year from October through June. The symphony launched a business sponsorship program this year to generate more support. The Gardens of Note garden tour was in La Conner in 2013, and the event brings patrons from outside the area. In 2016 a River to Ridge Run will also be scheduled for autumn, with a goal of bringing 1,000 to participate. She noted that season ticket holders and musicians provide support to the community from outside the area.

Skagit Artist Together

Monica Jaress spoke about the association of 65 artists in the county. They put on events three times a year. The artist tour will include 20 studios in 2016. 368 people attended in 2015. 19 stayed in hotels. The tour adds to the economic activity in La Conner.

Lincoln Theater

Roger Gietzen spoke about the Lincoln Theater, entering its 90th anniversary year. Funds are requested to update the website to be mobile responsive. Lincoln Theater had its most successful financial year this past year. About 77% of income comes from ticket sales. Roger spoke about upcoming events including Paul Poundstone and Loudon Wainwright III. The theater will celebrate its anniversary on April 21, 2016.

Deliberations

The committee began deliberations on the proposals. Cindy Verge spoke about the worthiness of the requests, but only \$115,502 would be available to be disbursed including bonds. \$62,502 is available after bonds. Mary Lee Chamberlain spoke of her interest in the sustainability of the proposals and a focus on economic impact for La Conner.

The committee felt that the La Conner Live proposal was worthwhile, but there are few extra dollars for additional proposals.

It was felt that no presentation by the La Conner Arts Commission and the lack of focus around an event hurt the commission's proposal.

Funding Recommendations

Chamber of Commerce: \$45,473
 Skagit Valley Tulip Festival: \$2,354
 Skagit County Historical Museum: \$1,000
 La Conner Quilt Museum: \$1,000
 Museum of Northwest Art: \$1,000
 La Conner Arts Commission: \$200
 Skagit Symphony: \$250
 Public Restroom Supplies: \$10,000
 La Conner Live: \$500
 Skagit Artists Together: \$250
 Lincoln Theater: \$250
 Audit Fees/Advertising: \$225
 1997 Go Bond: \$38,500
 2003 LTGO Bond: \$14,500

Total: \$115,502

The committee expressed disappointment at the limited funds available to support a number of worthy initiatives, and was hopeful that funds will increase next year.

The meeting adjourned at 4:58pm.

Respectfully submitted by Christopher Shainin.