

Potomac Highlands Creative Economy Team Meeting

April 28, 2022

10 am

Zoom

Meeting called by:	Phyllis Baxter	Type of meeting:	Informal Discussion
Facilitator:		Note taker:	Maria
Timekeeper:			

Attendees: Phyllis Baxter, Robert Burns, Cheryl Wolfe, Jonathan Bellingham, Kimberly Byard, Patricia Halterman, Katie Wolpert, Megan Webb, Cara Rose, Greg Greenwalt, Haley Shreve, Jessica Waldo, Dawn Hein, Ennis Smith, Katie Light, Logan Smith, Morgan Glup, Anne Beardslee, Melissa Shockey, Maya Paul, Michele Moure-Reeves, Beth Gill, Maria Bray

Meeting notes

Discussion:

- Welcome! - Phyllis Baxter, Executive Director AFNHA opened the meeting. Lukas Ray has accepted an exciting job opportunity in Vermont. We do miss him but he is doing well and having a good time. We are still recruiting for his job as Communications Director for our organization. This is posted on our website so if you, or anyone you know, has a background in communications, promotion, working with community groups and might be interested in applying for that position, please have them reach out to us. We are actively hiring right now. In the meantime, Phyllis will facilitate these meetings, Rob and Megan have stepped up to support this work as they are familiar with what is going on. Our team also includes Maria Bray who has been attending meetings for a while to take notes and she has taken over sending out the notices and communications. Logan Smith is also on our AFNHA team and is quite tech savvy.
- Farm to Table Event & Training Updates: Rob Burns - The Farm to Table Event is scheduled for June 29th starting at 4pm in the evening. The link to the details is: <https://bit.ly/EasternF2T> We are bringing in a gourmet chef, Todd Seligman, to cook a four-course meal with appetizers during that evening as well as having fundraising events and other activities such as a farm fellows reception starting at 5:15, a silent auction and other raffles inside. Please take a look at the link. It is a fundraiser for the college. We use these funds for operations as well as scholarships. Please share the information with people who like to eat good food and have a good time. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out.

- We are also trying to do “Best Of” baskets for each of the six counties in our region. If you have a tourist guide or some additional information like a map that we could share, we would appreciate it if you could send copies. We would be happy to include them in the baskets as well as any recommendations of things we should purchase for the basket. We are always looking for new and interesting products from our counties so that we can highlight them appropriately.
- Training (Rob Burns)- The lodging panel took place on April 20th and was well attended. It was a good session hosted by Richie Heath. The speakers were Kelly Williams, Todd Harman, and Sam England. They are each running different establishments in the region. That will be posted on the website and will be shared once it has been uploaded.

We have a new schedule for the Kelley TaylorDayton event on Business ownership and work-life balance. It has been rescheduled for June 16th from 5 to 7:30 pm at the Southside Depot in Petersburg. During the event, they will also be doing a bit of wine tasting and food. “The life of a small business owner and entrepreneur is typically so much more hidden than the public realizes. This informal workshop gives you space to share your struggles and wins with others to help you become comfortable sharing more than the pop version of reality. Because - believe it or not - people want to see you in real life.” The flier for this event should be available soon.

Olivia Miller - works in marketing/communications at WVU. Over the next several months will be doing a series of marketing training that is free and available to everyone to help you grow your online business presence and connect with your audience. These are on the website as well and will be updated at the end of every month.

We have a specialty crop grant from the USDA and will be holding an open house panel discussion in Davis, WV at the new Heritage Distillery on May 26th. We will be bringing in a couple of panelists from the area and other brewers such as Still Hollow and Stumptown Ales to talk about what is going on. It’s a connection for farmers as well so we will be bringing in farmers to hopefully talk about what supplies are needed for distillers and to let distillers understand what's going on with suppliers. On top of that we will hear from Ena Ennis. She is a farm fellow through our program but she is also a distiller and has worked with a new program that will be announced later. It is open to the public and there will likely be a tasting from a new distillery that uses sonic waves to help the product age quickly. A flier will be coming out in a couple of weeks.

Megan Webb - The Potomac Highlands producer is supported by USDA local food promotion program award. We received that award about three years ago and we are in the final year of our grant procurement and we are very excited to share that we have been able to develop a monthly specialty box program. It works to highlight and feature the great agriculturalists that we have the the great Potomac Highland area. We encourage growers and farmers to join us. There is no cost for membership. We just have a simple application. If you have any questions please reach out to me. At Eastern we hired a new AG director Marissa Peer. She is a native of Hardy county and is local to the area. We have a new business coach who is going to be helping the growers and producers. His name is David Workman. You may know Mr. Workman as the previous and now retired Hardy County Extension agent. David is going to be helping to coach the producers/growers. Additionally we have Maya Paul who is on the Zoom today. Some of you may

know Maya and her efforts with the Makers Space grant, the BRITE challenge that is coming up on May 6th and she will be coming on as an assistant to Rob. Learn more about the Potomac Highlands Producers June box here, <https://www.potomachighlandsproducers.com/> The box sales are going well and we are selling out monthly so place your orders soon. We are looking forward to next steps and new directions as this grant closes.

- Haley Shreve - Haley is heading up the Pollinator initiative this year while serving as an Americorps. She and Lukas Ray were working on community outreach and education. They have been visiting local council meetings, discussing what AFNHA is and what the pollinator initiative is and working to convince those communities to sign the pledge. The pledge includes working towards preventing habitat fragmentation and to try to increase pollinator numbers across their area. This year they attended three town council meetings in Maryland and West Virginia and just received the forest service's signed pledge. In addition to the forest service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has signed as well. This means that we have two federal agencies on board which is fantastic for our area. Haley has been working with the forest service on some projects. The Seneca Rocks discovery center had a pollinator garden that had been overtaken by invasive species so we have been working to revamp it. Also at Seneca Rocks, they are working to create a floodplain management plan and looking to add a barrier of trees. After discussions with the project lead, they may be willing to plant a native pollinator meadow. For outreach, Haley traveled to Greenbank and talked to students during their spring celebration, worked at the Elkins Garden Expo, and worked with the Summer Soul program to enrich student education. Also working on lesson plans and public handouts that she carries to events. Topics include, How to plant your own pollinator garden, what species are native and can help with recovering the local pollinator species. Haley has also been working with one of the schools in Summersville. They have created a pollinator garden and wanted an interpretive sign. Haley is filling a split position as she is also working with the Elkins City Council Tree board which is allowing her to get involved with tree planting. She is just wrapping up her final project which was on the second growth understory at the Elkins City Park. About half of the trees that were planted are native pollinator species. Contact Haley at pollinator@afnha.org

A lot of this information is posted on our AFNHA web page

<https://www.appalachianforestnha.org/pollinator-initiative>

<https://www.appalachianforestnha.org/afnha-pollinator-pledge>

If any of your organizations, sites, historic sites or businesses or CVBs would like to sign onto this, it's not just cities, it can be any organization that is interested in this, whether or not you actually do something like a garden, you can just say that you support it and that helps with promoting and sharing this information.

- Creative Economy - Thank you to many of you who helped with support letters on the massive EDA grant around the New year. We have not heard anything yet except that it was a highly competitive grant. We still have the Benedum grant funding that will allow us to move forward for awhile.
- We are starting to plan the tourism summit for this summer. We are probably looking to doing that in August which will allow time for us to hear about the EDA grant. The expectation is that we will be doing an in-person meeting barring a resurgence in Covid. The survey will come out in the next month and will need feedback on where you are traveling from, how far are you willing to

travel, what would you like to see included (education, training, speakers, workshops, networking, small groups, a mix of these). Please share your suggestions.

- Twice a year we will send out a survey about these meetings and how they benefit you. This is needed for the Benedum grant reporting.
- Tourism development grant awards have been announced in our recent newsletter and notified everyone. We did receive more requests than there were funds available. In many cases the decision came down to how targeted the project was to tourism development. The grant agreements will go out in the next couple of weeks.

- Attendee Discussion (Open Forum, County Updates, etc.)

- AFNHA Management planning document - we are working on the text and accepting comments now. If anyone would like to review the plan, we are currently in rewrite so it has been taken down off the website. Just send me an email phyllisb@afnha.org or send an email to planning@afnha.org to request a copy to read through and share your comments. There are chapters about Tourism, Conserving Assets, Interpretation, Partnerships, etc. We listed many of our partners. We know that it is not everyone. If you are mentioned or would like to be, we would love to hear from you. Please review it and make sure we described your organization or attraction properly. We will also be looking for support letters for the management plan as well.
- Ennis Smith with WV Department of Tourism as the Director of Destination Development - We are working on our comments for the management plan as well as a letter of support. We have a survey <https://bit.ly/tourismworks> This survey is about a tourism workforce development grant that we are working on with other state agencies. We will be developing a variety of related programs. We do need input from those who are employing people in the tourism industry or who will be employing people in the next five years. Questions: ennis.b.smith@wv.gov or Katie.D.Light@wv.gov
- Cara Rose - The state mentioned the Chef Ambassador initiative that they are promoting. Our region did not have a chef ambassador. We are the only region that could not identify a chef for this program. If you know a chef that has not yet been contacted, or who might be interested, please contact Katie Katie.D.Light@wv.gov for more information or suggestions.
- Snowshoe and Pocahontas CVB are engaged in a pollinator project and will connect with Haley.
- Anne Beardslee - Randolph County recently completed a project with Our Town. Each season they look for ways to incorporate art in the community. This Spring it was tulips. Community members painted them and the tulips were mounted around town. Previous projects included Christmas trees, Daisy's, Gnomes over Christmas, Scarecrows in the fall, etc. The trains are running here and will be in Pocahontas county in May. The last three were completely sold out. During the summer our amphitheater in the town square will have a concert every other week. Mama Mia will be performed this spring. July 1 - 3 will be the classic car show with about 400 to 500 cars. There will be fireworks at night, music, and food trucks. The ramps and rail festival was this weekend. The vendors indicated that they had more people and more money than ever before.
- Michele Moure-Reeves - The Lost River Trails Coalition is a small community group who is working with Lost River State Park to develop Mountain bike trails and was one of the recipients of the grant for which they were very grateful. They were also the recipient of a National Park Service grant that will help them develop capacity for their organization. The earth day event at Wardensville garden market, "The Farm Works Wonders," was very successful. The Poultry Festival will be held in Mid July and will announce dates soon. The South Branch River Fest was

canceled this year as they did not have enough time to plan for it. The Hardy County Heritage Trail Historic School House Project is hoping to be on line by the end of September. This project is being completed by our AmeriCorps Shefa Benoit. We are not sure what our next project is going to be but are looking at Ag Heritage, which would be a huge project and would need more staff to make that happen. The Higgins House project - we have applied for the last historic preservation grant that we should need to complete the exterior and also looking at HistoriCorps for future work on the building. The historic building is only 18 x 25 but we are going to be putting additions on either side to house the Visitor's center and an accessible entrance to the museum. Met with someone who is developing an IT makerspace in Hardy County. It is intended primarily for young people to access 24/7 and work on projects. It will also be open to graduates and retirees who have a project to explore.

- Beth Gill at Greenbrier County CVB - On May 4 we will be holding our county tourism talk with partners. Secretary Ruby will be joining the meeting to share what the state is doing. Greenbrier County CVB Tourism Talk on May 4 at 9am:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEpc-urrjMjE9aa1rDX-RQ8VdvSISyNGvTM>
The Greenbriar has an event coming up May 6-8 - The Concourse Elegance Car Show. There is an open admission day. There will also be the Greenbrier half-marathon with a 5k & 10K, The Meadow River Rail Trail is still a few years out but it runs from Fayette County and is projected to run all the way to Rainelle in Greenbrier County.
- Jonathan Bellingham - Hampshire County - Sat May 7 - 25th Anniversary of Ice Mountain festival. July - Farm Crawl. Capon Springs official Opening day is today - 90th Anniversary with a Community open house this Sunday.
- Jessica Waldo - Tucker County - Canaan Valley half marathon this weekend. In May we will have our Memorial Day Art Spring which will be a little more condensed than in previous years. They have teamed up with Timberline to do a larger event in the fall. Corridor H infrastructure bill is passed and they are looking forward to completing this project sooner than later. This is significant for this area. We are getting ready for summer and have a lot of marketing in place to launch. Davis is still working on the short term rental issue which we are monitoring. Canaan is starting the music series back up free every Friday. The Triathlon is happening May 23rd. Blackwater Falls has completed a lot of renovations and is ready for Mother's day. They will be trying to do the Dolly Sods stewards program which may be helpful in controlling the traffic and educating the public.
- The National Community Science Center will be having a BRITE challenge with over 50 students and their teachers. Friday May 6th
- Kimberly Byard - The Potomac Eagle is starting up. The Spring Opening is Mother's Day Weekend. They have many positions that need to be filled.

Next meeting – 5/26/22 at 10 am on zoom