

Small Business Council Meeting Minutes

Feb. 18 2016

Committee members present: Carla Schuessler, Elizabeth Howland, Steve Kahn, O'Neil McCoy, Bernita Platt, Wes Standish, Sarah Morrow, Josh Williams, Jeffrey Wisniewski, Lee Zulanch.

Committee members not present: Peter Gasca, Wendy Parkman, John Rickard, Jamie Saunders, John Sawyer.

Staff present: Diana Greene, Cindy Gettig, Kori Hippe, Kema Faulk, Amanda Blomquist.

The meeting was called to order at 3:31 p.m.

I. Welcome & Introductions

II. Review 2016 Committee Packets

Diana Greene reviewed the council packet which includes overviews of the division and the council, the 2016 Board of Directors and their committee assignments, a MBACC organizational chart and overview and Robert's Rules.

Greene told the council the most important thing to remember when making decisions on the council is to remember "Promote, Protect, Improve."

"That is what we do," she said. "Promote, protect and improve. If what we're talking about doesn't fall into one of those categories than quite honestly it's probably not something we need to focus on or worry about."

III. Small Business Membership in Chamber

Cindy Gettig told the council about 80 percent of our membership are small businesses having 25 or less employees. The council was provided with copies of our membership and sponsorship booklets.

Gettig told the council about the programs we oversee including networking events, chamber access, Chamber Academy which had 63 classes last year, Youth Leadership Academy, the ambassador program, affinity program, Member-to-Member discounts and ribbon cuttings.

IV. Small Business Benefits Overview

Gettig also told the council about the Small Business Resource Center on our website which has information and resources for small businesses including how to go into business.

V. Chamber Academy

Kori Hippe told the council about the Chamber Academy classes. She showed the council where to find upcoming classes and said that Chamber Academy is a success because of the members. Hippe encouraged council members to attend or send employees or colleagues.

She also spoke about MBtraining.com which has training resources.

VI. Member-to-Member Business Expo Follow-Up

Kema Faulk told the council about the 2016 Member-to-Member Business expo which had 125 exhibitors, 7 of which were restaurants.

She said the attendance this year was low and likely was due to having the event on a Wednesday. Typically, it is held on a Thursday. She said the tentative date for next year is Jan. 12 which will put it back on a Thursday evening.

a. Input from Committee

Lee Zulanch said he completed the survey last year. He said as a restaurant he over prepped for the attendance. He said the theme was great, the energy in the room was great. He said the only negative was need to initial papers for people to enter into a raffle. He said it defeated the purpose.

Jeffrey Wisniewski agreed. He said he understood the concept is to get people to visit all the booths, but they don't care. He said he personally had people interrupt conversations by people who were only interested in what was free.

Gettig suggested maybe next year we draw business cards like a regular raffle where the person must be present to win.

Zulanch also said that he was able to make contact with a couple businesses who might be interested in using his bakery as a wholesaler and that if either of those pan out it would make the event worth it. He said he supports the event.

Wisniewski asked how the number of vendors compared to last year.

Faulk said it was up by 15 businesses.

Wisniewski said he felt there were more vendors than attendees. He also said 4 p.m. is too early to start.

Sarah Morrow said she would continue starting it before 5 p.m. because she has children and knows people who have similar schedules. She suggested starting at 4:30 p.m. to accommodate people who need to pick up kids.

Zulanch asked about opening it to the public.

Greene said it was tried once and did not go well.

Zulanch asked if the event was always combined with a business after hours and expo. He said he was surprised the afterhours element didn't draw the crowd.

Gettig said she think the attendance boils down to the date being a Wednesday. She says it is a notoriously difficult day.

VII. Upcoming Events for Members

Faulk told the council about the Oyster Roast (Feb. 20), Youth Leadership Academy (March 7), Can-Am Days (March 14-18), Legislative Reception (April 13), Volunteer of the Year, Annual Meeting (April 26).

VIII. Membership Survey

Greene showed the council the draft of the annual survey for 2016 and the results from the 2015 survey. She asked for input on questions that should be included. She said last year there were 569 responses and she would like more in 2016. This year's survey will be released on April 1 and will remain open for a month.

Greene said we take this survey and develop programs and events based on the responses.

IX. Committee Ideas for Projects

Schuessler talked about internships. She said she's not sure people know about the opportunities with students at local colleges.

Hippe said we have some resources available online. Greene said we might be able to better connect members to these resources and how the process works.

Morrow also said an intern has been helpful for her business.

Morrow spoke about fraud and liability insurance that people aren't aware of in regard to protecting digital assets and protection from hackers. Could be a class idea.

Zulanch asked if the chamber had any clout that the chamber could get the world's greatest rate so members could be exposed through features in The Sun News.

Gettig said there is a member spotlight in the Grand Strander given to a member who attends Chamber Access. Dignity gives gift certificate for new members.

Hippe said we can forward your press releases to media contacts to help you get it out.

Zulanch explained he was featured on WPDE's morning news for Taste of Surfside Beach. He said they didn't sell 5 passports last month, but sold 5 after being on air. He said he would love to be sponsored by the chamber in television spots or the newspaper. He said any member that does get advertising, it would affect their business.

Schuessler said she was surprised at how many people showed up for a ribbon cutting. She asked if something similar could be done for anniversaries or Grand Openings.

Gettig said we encourage our members to let us know if they're celebrating an anniversary and that it doesn't always have to be a typical ribbon cutting.

Amanda Blomquist said the problem is talking about advertising and asking for it for free, the news outlets will say no. She said what we did last year that was really well received and that she thinks we hope to do again are classes that told members to write a good press release and how to get the media interested in what they're doing.

Zulanch said he wonders if we could go to The Sun News asking them to feature a member because that exposure would make them more likely to be an advertiser in the future.

Greene said the closest thing we have to what Zulanch is referencing is probably Shop Our Members – an annual campaign during the holiday season meant to get locals to shop at our members.

Josh Williams said one option may be to cultivate a local public email list. He said we would have to be careful about how aggressive we promote, but it would be a great way to push out events or offers.

Wes Standish said that's a good idea to take the out-of-market model and apply it to the in-market.

Other business –

Zulanch encouraged the members to check out and participate in Taste of Surfside Beach which runs through March 15.

Blomquist reminded members to send in nominations for Annual Meeting.

Elizabeth Howland said Miller Motte is having a career fair March 11 from 11 a.m. – 3 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 4:47 p.m.