

Gardiner Chamber of Commerce

216 Park Street
PO Box 81
Gardiner MT 59030-0081

Phone: 406.848.7971
E-mail: executivedirector@gardinerchamber.com



The Gardiner Chamber of Commerce serves our community through developing local tourism while endorsing stewardship of the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Meeting date: **Thursday, August 17th, 2023 from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM**

Location: Gardiner Chamber of Commerce 216 Park St. Gardiner, MT & [Virtual via Zoom](#)

Purpose: Regularly Scheduled Monthly Board of Directors Meeting

Agenda:

1. Chamber Business

1.1 Roll Call & Introductions

Chelsea Deweese, Amanda Hagerty, Mike Keller, Brian Koski, Debbie Mackey, Sarah Ondrus, Mike Skelton, and Trina Smith

Unexcused Absence: Billie Taylor

1.2 Approval of Prior Month's Meeting Minutes

Keller motioned to approve the minutes from July 2023. Ondrus seconded. 7 in favor/ 0 opposed/ 0 abstentions. Motion approved.

2. Guest - Mike Tranel – Yellowstone National Park Deputy Superintendent

Deputy Superintendent Tranel discussed and answered questions regarding infrastructure, roads, and visitation in Yellowstone National Park.

Roads

- The remaining major road project is the Lamar Canyon and work will continue through the end of the season. There are currently delays in the Lamar Canyon.
- The Northeast Entrance Road will be improved in the future. The flood repairs are now the strongest sections. The rest of the road will be widened and repaved eventually, but that's a few years out.
- The stretch between Mammoth and Tower is getting minor repairs for potholes and rough spots.
- Chip sealing from Canyon to Norris will continue through August.
- Lewis River Bridge construction will continue through this summer and into next summer. There will be some delays there.
- West Thumb to Old Faithful will be done this season.
- Madison River Bridge is getting some repairs. Bridges in Yellowstone, like throughout the nation, are aging and need work.

Questions and Comments:

- Ondrus commented that through town some of the trucks headed for Yellowstone are going dangerously fast. Skelton mentioned talking with the county regarding the blind turns in town – where parked vehicles block the view of traffic.
- Skelton: *What will the new Yellowstone River Picnic Area look like?*
Tranel: It will be similar to Buffalo Paddock on Dunraven and the trailheads will remain.
- Skelton commented on the outstanding progress on construction throughout the park.
- Mackey: *Do the gravel trucks going through town and into Yellowstone need to be covered?* She was struck in the face by debris from an oncoming, uncovered gravel truck in the opposite lane.
Tranel: Yes. He'll pass on the info during the regular operations meetings. He's noticed some improvement and he himself had to replace a windshield recently.

Infrastructure/Roads

- Mammoth now has a functional wastewater system and work is continuing on it. The ultimate goal is to connect to the Gardiner treatment plant with the final North Entrance Road realignment.
- There will be three alternatives for the final North Entrance Road realignment with a public comment period in the future. The first 2 options allow restoration of the Gardner River Canyon habitat.
 1. Widen and improve the existing route (the new North Entrance Road, aka the "Old Gardiner Road").
 2. Reconnect the Old Gardiner Road to the bridge at Boiling River, using the southern section of the old North Entrance Road that survived the flood.(strongest contender)
 3. Run an elevated bridge/road through the Gardner Canyon.
- Laurel dorm at Old Faithful was updated.

Visitation & More

- For July 2023, there was a 4% increase over July 2019. There is a 7% increase in visitation year to date compared to 2019. 2019 is the best year for comparison.
- The Bison Environmental Impact Statement is out for public comment, as well as the native fishery restoration project.
- Tranel appreciates the Gardiner Chamber and Visitor Center getting accurate park information out to visitors.

Housing

- The park is in the midst of spending 80 million dollars on park housing and the project is about 50% done.
- Park staffing relies on available, affordable housing and the success of the Gardiner schools. What happens in Gardiner impacts Yellowstone National Park Service and the recruitment and retention of park staff. Staff housing cannot be limited to just the park, but there is a need to work with the gateway communities.

Questions and Comments:

- Deweese: *Is there a plan for more restroom facilities on the Northern Range?*
Tranel: Yes, where are the gaps?
Skelton: Hitching post is too crowded and there are long lines for the restrooms. We lost the restrooms at Pebble Creek. The major construction at Yellowstone River Picnic area means some people miss those ones. Other restrooms are hard to find. Some go all the way to Cooke City for restrooms.
Deweese: Hitching Post is dangerous in terms of parking. The area between Fisherman pullout and Hitching Post could use a new restroom.
Tranel will mention this issue in an operational meeting coming up.
- Skelton: *Which campgrounds are currently closed?*
Tranel: Pebble Creek Campground, Norris Campground, and Mammoth. Mammoth is closed due to wastewater issues. Improvements are coming and it will possibly be open end of summer. Some of the farthest campsites won't open due to strain on the system. Contractors are camping there at the moment, so that's what visitors may be seeing that makes them think the campground is open.

- Haggerty: *Will Fort Yellowstone be open for touring during the construction next year?*
Tranel: Yes, it may have detours. They are not planning to close the entire area.
- Ondrus: *Is the Firehole Canyon closed?*
Tranel: No, it is open. The Firehole Lake Drive is closed. Thermal features are causing issues with the road. Gravel may be the better option there in the future.
- Skelton: *The trail into the back of Porcelain Basin has been closed over a year, what's going on?*
Tranel: I'm not sure, I'll find out.

3. Committee Updates

3.1 Tim Schumacher – USFS

Schumacher discussed the open house at the OTO Ranch. The open house was Saturday, August 19, 9am-4pm. Traffic went up to the ranch on the hour and left the ranch on the half hour.

Forest Service is losing a lot of seasonal staff as students are going back to school.

Slip and Slide is closed to the public due to the project but they will try to open it up in September to hunters.

The Buffalo Creek trout decision has been signed. Next summer they will get rid of non-native fish and introduce native fish.

Cinnabar boat ramp was washed out in the flood. Agreements will be signed in the next few months and construction will start next spring.

The McConnell boat ramp will have the NEPA assessment next summer 2024, and construction the following year in 2025.

Questions/Comments:

Deweese: *What happened with the Cinnabar boat ramp?*

Schumacher: It was washed out completely and will likely be moved to a new location. It doesn't seem feasible to rebuild a ramp in the same location.

Ondrus: *McConnell access will open in 2025?*

Schumacher: We're not certain it will open that year, but the Forest Service will keep in mind local businesses and their access needs.

Tranel gave an update for the trail to Porcelain Basin – the trail is “thermally flooded” with hot water on the trail.

3.2 Terese Petcoff – Director's Report

New Member – Yellowstone Gateway Museum joined the Chamber. That organization does the Historic Gardiner Walking Tours

Apple (and Google) Maps – Google has been resolved. Apple has been slightly resolved. The good thing is that the pre-flood North Entrance Road on Apple now does not display as closed off which is what led to the most confusion. Apple support encourages the more edits submitted the better, via phone only not computer. She encourages others to do it as well.

Mural in the Chamber– It was painted by Eric Junker out of LA. He completed it over two days the weekend of July 29 – 30.

YNP Stats – Document with updated YNP stats YOY with other entrances was shared

Lodging Tax Collections – The Q2 lodging Tax Collections for the State of MT have now officially been released. At this point, they've exceeded all collections from last year.

Petcoff asked the Board their opinions on getting rid of the blue and white tent that is currently used for Brewfest. Discussion was had.

Skelton: *How did we acquire the tent?*

Petcoff: Not sure.

Skelton: We don't need the liability.

Skelton asked the Board if there was a motion to get rid of the blue and white tent.

Deweese moves to dispose of the blue and white tent. Mackey seconds. 7 in favor/ 0 opposed/ 0 abstentions. Motion approved.

At the September meeting, Petcoff informed the board that there will be two will be two guests.

1. Dean Williamson, Economic Development Director for District IX (9), with the HRDC. The HRDC has completed a community needs assessment for Gardiner (as well as White Sulphur Springs and Cooke City) and would like to share what they have found from the study and answer any questions that arise.
2. Tentatively, Morgan Jacobsen, Communication & Education Program Manager with MT FWP Region 3. Petcoff reached out to them requesting they share more information with our Board on the Montana Conservation License that was new to this year, beginning in July. Petcoff provided the Board with a FAQs printed off and a few posters.

Deweese thanked Petcoff for the tenacity in the maps issue.

3.3 Maria Koppelberger – Operations Manager's Report

VIC

Visitors enjoyed the Lighting of the Teepees for a second year. We recommended folks visit the Yellowstone Revealed art installation at Madison last week and the Tribal Heritage Center at Old Faithful.

Hours – We'll remain open on Saturdays through Labor Day, so September 2nd is the last Saturday. Weekday staff will remain through the end of September.

Property and Facilities

Restrooms - We're having more issues with the restrooms, specifically the men's restroom and family restroom. A plumber came out last Friday and fixed the urinal, men's bathroom sink, and family restroom toilet. He recommends a new toilet in the family restroom because the current one is poorly designed and does not allow enough water to come down with the flush. He recommends a newer-style toilet to prevent the issue in the future. To help with clogs in sinks and toilets, Chamber staff will do regular cleans with Drano.

Finally, the hot water heater has a bad element, and he recommends replacing that. We only get about a gallon of hot water at a time.

Rodeo Grounds – We have offered free parking to members for business vehicles to open up more parking here in town. So far no one has taken us up on the free business vehicle parking. Paid parking is available to anyone – visitors, locals, non-member businesses.

Fireplace – Getting the fireplace cleaned with Yellowstone Chimney sometime in September. We're working out the exact date. Let me know if you'd like to connect with that chimney cleaner.

Mackey: *September is historically the busiest month for my business. Have we always closed on Saturdays in September?*

Petcoff: Yes. We could look at closing on Saturdays in June and moving that funding to Saturdays in September.

Skelton: In my experience, day of the week doesn't matter. We can check the daily visitation. I don't know of any complaints about not being open on Saturdays in September. I'll leave that up to Terese and Maria.

Skelton commented that the men's restroom urinal may need to be replaced with a toilet. The toilet in the family restroom is original, from before the remodeling, and may need replacing. The metal stall doors rattle extremely loudly. Visitors aren't necessarily slamming them, they're just loud. Staff will look at changing out the latches to make it quieter.

4. Outstanding Business

Ondrus noted that the Rodeo Grounds Committee has not yet met but will meet.

Skelton mentioned that we're waiting on the rodeo survey to find out how much commerce the rodeo generates. He has looked back through Chamber meeting minutes to 2015, noting that even then there was a question of how much commerce the 2-day rodeo brings to the town. At that time, the conclusion was "not much".

Several board members spoke to the amount of reservations they get during the rodeo. Others suggested that rooms will be filled in peak season no matter what.

The survey will help guide further discussion on this matter. With increases in taxes, insurance costs, and zero rent paid by the rodeo club, the Chamber is losing money on the property.

5. New Business

Skelton noted that Keller is terming out this coming January. We'll be looking for another board member. Ondrus, Smith, and Taylor are all up for another term this January. The terms of Directors are 2 years, and Directors are eligible for 3 consecutive terms.

We need to confirm interest with those three. Ondrus commented that she is interested in another term.

Smith asked if the term limits include only consecutive terms?

Skelton – Yes, the limit of 3, 2-year terms is limited to consecutive terms. Directors can come back and serve more terms.

Skelton noted that we are charged for "Gardiner Street Lightning" on our taxes, so we will complain again to the county regarding the missing streetlights.

GRAD asks are coming up and we'll look at an inverter.

Our CD is maturing next week, with a great interest rate, and we'll probably roll that over.

Mackey asked, on behalf of interested businesses, about signage on the south side of town that would direct people to the north side of town. Several board members mentioned that those businesses should contact the Montana Signs for help.

Smith reminded local businesses not to tell visitors to go to Tom Miner for bear watching. The roads are horrible!

6. Public Comment

None

Ondrus motioned to adjourn the meeting. Smith seconded. 7 in favor/ 0 opposed/ 0 abstentions. Motion approved.

Date of Next Meeting: September 21, 2023, 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM