

MEETING NOTES

September 24, 2008

Virginia City Nevada City

Historic Site Development Plan

In attendance:

Paul Reichert, Jeff McDonald, Bill Peterson, John Ellingson, Gary Forney, Roger Williams, Joseph "Billy" Doyle, John Hamilton, Linda Hamilton, George Means, Toni James, Barbie Durham, Nancy Allen, Allyson Adams, Colin Mathews, Jerry Jarvis, Jim Jarvis, Duane Thexton, Ellis Thompson, Klaus Macklensen, Jenny Buddenberg – National Trust for Historic Preservation, Tom Poultnier(sp?) – Oxford, England, Jim Foley – Foley Group, Nathan Blanding – A&E Architects.

The following key Items were discussed:

- 1) In previous meeting notes it was stated that the Town of Virginia City is "currently somewhat constrained" due to existing infrastructure network. Upon further research of this issue it should be noted that the March 2004 Virginia City Growth Policy thoroughly researched all aspects of the Town's infrastructure and made recommendations for improvements. The great majority of the recommendations have been completed by the Town. Due to these improvements it should be noted that very little infrastructure constraints exist within the Town in regard to the MHC owned properties.
- 2) In previous meeting notes it was stated that the Town lacked any type of grocery store. This is incorrect and it should be noted that Ranks Store provides a small selection of groceries. The majority of residents felt that this is currently adequate for the Town.
- 3) In previous meeting notes it was stated that the number of modern hotel rooms was limited and that this severely limited the amount of time visitors spend in the Town. The current hotel operator disputed this comment and it should be noted that they believe that the majority of visitors do not want modern hotel rooms; -- rather they would like historically accurate hotel rooms, even if they lack queen size beds, showers, internet and phone service or television. This is based on current inquiries about rooms over the phone and customer comments. While these comments may be accurate, the existing occupancy for the 3 month season is only 50%. Given that the attraction is in the greater Yellowstone area, the occupancy would be expected to be in the 85% to 95% range given the limited 3 month season. This could be due to several complex issues which may include; substandard service or lack of properly trained staff, lack of marketing, lack of interest in the historic attractions, stores and restaurants, poor visitor orientation or visitor facilities, lack of rooms appropriate for families and other visitor groups requiring higher end accommodations, or lack of accommodations for special events and conferences.
- 4) In previous meeting notes it was stated that the majority of visitors are drive by in nature and stay for a relatively short time. It should be noted that this statement was disputed by one person in part due to the last in-depth visitor survey being completed in 1999. While this data is 9 years old it has most likely not changed in any significant manner and many key data points and observations should be noted from the information.

At that time about 65,000 vehicles passed through Virginia and Nevada Cities during July, August and September. Of this number it was thought that 53% were potential visitors. Of these potential visitor groups 12% did not stop, 44% spent less than 1 hour in the NV/VC towns, 11% spent 1 to 4 hours in NV/VC, and 33% spent 4 hours or more in NC/VC. 35% were from other Montana cities and towns, 60% were from other U.S. States, 2% were from Canada and 4% were from other foreign countries. Approximately 6% of the total traffic volume through VC/NV spends a night in

one of the towns; however, survey results showed that 11% were aware of the accommodations. Ballpark statistics for current overnight stays were provided by the VC/NV operators which noted that 75% of the overnights stays are for 1 night, some are for a 2 night stay and very few are for over a two night stay. According to the operators estimates that the 60 existing rooms are at 50% occupancy for the three month time period; approximately 2760 room nights are typically utilized of the possible 5520 available. Other visitor indicators include the gate receipts at Nevada City which have been in the 2500 range per season.

It is evident that the majority NC/VC visitors stay less than 1 day in the towns and those that do stay overnight seldom stay for more than one night. The 1999 Visitor survey noted several visitor profile elements that are probable reasons for these relatively short visitations. The majority of visitor groups visited VC/NV on their way to other places; they were generally repeat visitors if from Montana and first time visitors if they were from other places. They visit for pleasure, and to learn about Montana history and the historic VC/NC structures. They typically consisted of 2 to 5 visitors per group and are most typically couples or families. About 12% of the visitor groups had a disabled member. Satisfaction with the historic attractions was high, but most noted that maintenance of facilities and variety of entertainment could be improved upon. Most visitors noted that they had to acquire information on VC/NC by word of mouth rather than marketing materials and advertising. Survey data showed that 76% of Montanans, but only 36% of Out-of-State respondents were aware of the overnight accommodations. In addition, the survey data indicated that visitors staying overnight in VC/NC were aware of the overnight accommodations prior to arrival.

In regard to visitor satisfaction, the highest rankings were for quality and amount of historical information, cleanliness and behavior of the people. Lowest rankings were for quality of accommodations, maintenance of facilities, variety of entertainment and opportunities to shop and eat. When survey respondents were asked what they would suggest for improvements they thought that continued restoration of buildings, more variety in food, shops, entertainment, building access, interpretive information, better cleaner restrooms and limited future development were all important. When ask for ways to make the NC/VC attractions more enjoyable for longer stays they responded that more campgrounds, more RV parks, more overnight accommodations, more entertainment, more visitor information of attractions, history and events; and more restaurants and shops would be important items.

- 5) In previous meeting notes it was stated that MDT plows snow up against historic structures. It was noted in the meeting that the MHC should be shoveling sidewalks as required by Town code which will address this issue.
- 6) In previous meeting notes it was stated that the fire fighting plan had limitations, however, it should be noted that the Town of VC currently has 500,000 gallons of water stored for fire fighting.
- 7) Previous meeting notes discussed the resort tax prior to the State purchase. It should be noted that 15% came to the City via resort tax prior to State purchase. Now concessionaires pay a beneficial use tax on rented properties.
- 8) The house on the east of town on Daylight Creek is the Sarah Bickford house which has historic significance.
- 9) A 2nd RV site for employees could be southwest of Virginia City.
- 10) The County may need more land for future expansion of facilities.
- 11) We need to quantify what is a historically significant or insignificant building.

- 12) Three city parks should be noted on the plan including Boot Hill, North Park and the ball field. Future uses for Boot Hill could be passive recreation and picnicking, North Park is Montana's oldest park site and also the site of the old capital. It could be utilized for large special events and camping.
- 13) The Virginia City Seasonal Walk (volks trail) starts at the Stonehouse B&B and traverse the majority of Virginia City, Nevada City and the corridor between the two towns.
- 14) Non contributing buildings may be utilized for new uses or adaptive reuse with fewer limitations than the historically contributing buildings.
- 15) MHC may need new retail operations in VC and NC.
- 16) Redoing the RR U turn for small train in NC could help simplify operations.
- 17) A pocket Park is needed next to the photo shop on Wallace Street, could make a great interpretive location for a BOVEY memorial site.
- 18) Daylight Creek needs to be redesigned/rerouted around the brewery to protect the historic structures in the area.
- 19) The County will need to assist with MDOT on highway related projects such as storm water on Wallace Street and the Conservation District work on Alder Gulch.
- 20) Questions were raised as to if there are any buildings are beyond repair and therefore non-contributing? Would sale of these be appropriate?
- 21) The garbage transfer site is in a bad location. The owner has expressed interest to swap land to put the MHC in ownership of that site. Other comments were made that the County may want to relocate the transfer site.
- 22) George will provide mapping for the Heritage trail system.
- 23) Several land ownership issues were brought up for the corridor between VC and NC. Additional mapping from the State will be required to clarify these issues.
- 24) We will provide enlarged photographs to MHC for their discussion on what parcels/buildings to keep or sell.
- 25) We will research the classifications of parcels/buildings from the National Historic Landmark updated nomination which are 1) primary contributing, 2) secondary contributing and 3) non-contributing. Jim McDonald will get this information from SHPO.