

Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance

September 16, 2009, 3:00

Members Present:

Dru Heldman, Debbie Smith, Linda Canterbury, Dean Kanipe, Scott Swickle, Andy Bunch, Brigitte Walters, Susie Painter, Terry Wilson, Jenny Moore.

General Info:

Scott reported on the progress of the Chamber of Commerce's plans for the upcoming Oktoberfest being held October 2, 3, and 4. Joe Sam Queen will serve as Master of Ceremonies. Representatives from Sheehan's Auction will be appraising items during an Old Fort-style Antiques Road Show, and other events and activities during Oktoberfest include music, duck race, Poster Contest, Pie Eating Contest, Pony Rides, Bouncing Inflatables as well as many vendors.

Dean announced that McDowell tech has a "How to start a business" class that meets at the Marion depot for 8 weeks. 25 have enrolled in that class.

Dru announced that he has seen an increase in his art gallery sales for August and September.

Standing Committees:

- Economic Development

The consumer, retail, and zip code surveys are ready for distribution. The consumer survey is now online and working great. Dean will print up info cards letting people know about the survey, how people can find it on the website, where hard copies have been placed around town, and they will be available to distribute at the Sundae Social. Instead of offering a \$250 prize, it will be changed to 5 - \$50 prizes. Andy will develop "Old Fort Bucks" with a value of \$10 each. A list of participating businesses will be printed on the back and business owners will be able to go to the Town Hall to redeem them in cash for face value.

A discussion regarding approaching the Town Aldermen to ask for a vote to allow Beer and Wine sales in local eating establishments was held. A majority of the members indicated that they felt that it would be economically beneficial and hopefully would encourage more customers to choose local establishments instead of going out of town or county. Most of the members felt that this was a valid cause and presenting it to the Aldermen as the OFMHA would carry more impact as a group instead of individuals. Members not present received an email requesting their input. Those responses will be copied without indication of sender and compiled for the committee to consider. These responses will be confidential.

The general censuses was to wait until after the elections to make such a proposal since we have missed the deadline for requesting to be put on the Aldermen's next meeting and also it is too late to have anything placed on the town ballot since they have already been

printed. Also waiting to have the survey results will help support this issue as well as other statistics available from other communities. This issue will be tabled until a future date.

- Heritage and Preservation

Ann Swann has an interest in applying for Old Fort to become listed on the National Historic Registry as a Historical District. This designation would impact this community favorably. (Local Businesses would enjoy a tax break.) Ann is willing to take this on without charge. She will have travel, printing and other miscellaneous incidental expenses. There has been \$2500 allocated for the STEP grant and OFMHA voted to follow through and move forward on this matter.

- Design and Beautification

Request for Proposals for signage have been received. The Design Committee will meet to look at these proposals more thoroughly at their next meeting. Currently, the DOT is saying that we may not utilize the area where the current sign is located. Further investigation is needed to find out where the first sign can be relocated or if we can just “renovate” the current sign.

The new bench for Bradley Park is ready for pickup as are the 18 Olive Jar planters. The bench will be picked up on Friday (Sept. 18) before the Ice Cream Social and the planters will be picked up next week. The jars will need to be painted (sealed) before planting. There needs to be a committee meeting to determine the best placement of the new planters.

- Ice Cream Social

The committee will meet again Thursday, Sept. 17 to finalize all plans. Posters have been created, “tickets” have been made to send to the Elementary school for distribution, membership forms have been copied, rack cards have been copied and received. All food and paper products have been purchased, ice cream, syrup and whipped cream have been ordered and are in. The only details left are to plan how to set up the Depot in the event of rain. Thanks go to Susie for her thorough planning.

Next meeting October 21.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Smith

Secretary, OFMHA

The comments listed below were responses from our member survey following the Sept. 16 meeting. We appreciate all who replied and expressed an opinion as to whether or not to approach the Town regarding beer and wine sales in town eating establishments. After further discussion, the officers decided to table this issue. Comments were edited only to protect the respondent's privacy.

1. Please put me down as a supporter of OFMHA's initiative. The economic survival of our town depends on the survival of Old Fort's businesses. Clearing the obstacles that keep our town's businesses from being able to compete with businesses in other towns is imperative to keeping Old Fort healthy from an economic standpoint. Without thriving local businesses, the local economy suffers and all of us then suffer as a result. It's time to level the playing field by allowing Old Fort's eating establishments to be on equal ground with their competitors in meeting the expectations of visitors to the area.

2. my vote = yes, I agree, having beer and wine available in restaurants is more attractive to visitors and I do plan to attend the ice cream social and will be happy to pitch in with whatever needs to be done.

3. I would like to add my voice in support of allowing beer/wine sales in the town limits of Old Fort. This would be a significant benefit to both tourism appeal and financial income to the merchants. With the resulting increase in business, there would also be the need for these businesses to hire more employees.
In short, this is a benefit to tourism, economics and jobs. This is not a religion issue.

4. I am opposed to the attempt (and it would fail) to bring such a divisive question before the board just before an election. The election is especially important to the Alliance because it gives us the possibility of having a board more open to change with regard to our efforts to improve the town. I sense Dru is behind this move, and I can guarantee that Wayne (the main obstacle to our efforts in economic development) will jump on it with both feet and we will lose any chance to put one or two new members on that might be more receptive to our attempts in a number of areas. This has been brought to the fore at least twice in the last 25 years and I do not believe the Alliance should in any way connect itself in this effort. We would be smeared with a connotation that we do not need at this time. While many newcomers outside town might welcome it, the voting public in town is what we need to consider at present. The Alliance would be considered a threat to Old Fort's well being, and while Marion passed it, it is my considered opinion it would be a major mistake for us to become embroiled in such a question.

5. I support our committee's support on this issue.

6. Yes, I am in favor of serving beer or wine in our local eateries.

7. We support beer and/or wine being served in restaurants in Old Fort.

8. YES

9. I believe that the future of this town depends upon progress. The majority of the people in this country consume alcoholic beverages. To not allow it's consumption only keeps that majority of people away from our town. Our businesses are small and need the support of customers to thrive.

10. While this might be an issue of the Old Fort Chamber of Commerce, it not, in my opinion, an issue for the Old Fort Mountain Heritage Alliance.

11. Here's my two cents. The Alliance is a "committee of the town of Old Fort" operating under their guidance and approval. As such, I do not believe the committee should make this request.

The town residents have the right to make this request and to vote on it. I support their right to do so.

If an organization was interested in making this request, the chamber may consider it.

However, I do know that in the Marion process on this same topic, the McDowell Chamber made the statement that they supported the residents' rights to the process and vote on the issue.

Whomever decides to ask the town aldermen to add the issue to the ballot, must be a resident of Old Fort. I do not believe it is appropriate for the Alliance to do so.

12. I support the Alliance in this decision.

13. I think having beer and wine sales available to our restaurants and grocery stores would definitely help our economy. I think the survey is a way of showing how the real public feels on this and other issues. By taking this survey, people can let their ideas be known. I am glad to see that it has been given so much exposure.

As far as OFMHA presenting the beer & wine sales as an agenda item to the aldermen, I am afraid it will do us more harm than good. It will be voted on by town residents, it doesn't matter if your furniture factory, greenhouse company, school or church wanted to support or not support this, it comes down to the individual residential vote.

I really want to see OFMHA increase its membership and I am afraid that by going to the aldermen and telling them that we would like to have a beer and wine vote, we would be hurting our ability to gain more members.

I want Old Fort to grow and prosper, and we need members! We have projects we need to work on, and we do not have enough help! I am afraid if we are not careful, we will have people running away from us instead of joining with us. Let's not be too hasty in giving people a sense that we are all one thing, when we are all very diverse in our politics, religion and beliefs.

14. I can understand that beer and wine sales are a great way to help downtown to grow and allow our restaurants to be more profitable. I am impressed with your online straw poll but no alderman running for election will support your request. No mayoral candidate will support your request. The two factions that exist on the board at this time will support no resolution for this. A poll run on the internet has as much validity in Old Fort as an internet poll in Afghanistan. We are in the Bible belt's last strong holds here with all the ignorance and intolerance that comes with this. We are in a struggle to remove the last vestiges of a group that has controlled this town for the last forty years and did such a terrible job. This election is threatening to end this. The election will be close and there is no way anyone in office with half a brain will allow this issue to cloud the election that may finally take out the old brain dead change hating leadership in this town and alcohol sales are not important enough to waste this chance. You will be better served asking at another time. I would go as far as saying Monday you might as well ask the sun to change its times that it comes up I am sure it would be at least as successful. This is not a right or wrong thing it is a political reality. I know you guys will go Monday and be very disappointed in the response. I would suggest that it would be expedient to wait until the new alderman come in after the election because you will hurt the chances of the new candidates by even mentioning this at the meeting. I admire what OFMH has accomplished but the understanding of the political aspects of this town seems to be lacking. I support all of your efforts but timing and the reality of the situation here need to be considered.

15. Overwhelmingly, those present at yesterday's OFMHA meeting were in favor of this topic being presented as an alliance agenda item. There were several regular attendees that were not present and we felt it fair to pass this out to the group for an email vote. Alliance members can reply to the message sent by Debra and personal opinions will be kept confidential unless any of you wants to share your opinion as Carol has which is perfectly fine. Thank you - Carol! Whatever the group decides is what the group should do. I did find out today that not being on the official published agenda will preclude the alderman from being able to vote on this topic. I think that we may need to take some more time and gather real facts as to the impact this could have and plan to prepare an analytical presentation that will be more educational and matter of fact in nature then based on gut feelings and personal opinions. We should keep this a civil debate in which we find the best solution for the greatest majority and these findings should be presented to the alderman the same as any other topic: flower pots, welcome signs or beer & wine sales. As a committee with the responsibility and privilege of directing and impacting Old Fort's future

development we cannot pick and choose the easy topics. We must face each issue and use our best efforts to find the solutions.

16. it is my opinion that this issue would best be served not by OFMHA but rather the Old Fort Chamber of Commerce. If you are asking the "Faith Community" to support the goals of OFMHA on Sunday you would be wise to weigh just how many of those who were both present and overwhelmingly were in favor of your proposal actually lived in our town.