

## **Meeting Minutes - Elected Committee of Managers (E C M)**

The **October 23, 2021** E C M fourth quarter meeting was conducted through the E C M conference call line due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Instructions to access the conference call line were distributed as follows:**

Conference number: 1-832-917-1510 access code: 172170 (after the voice prompt press \*)

Press 5\* to be recognized for questions or comments (This will let the conference manager know you have raised your hand and you will be recognized by the E C M Chairman.)

Press 4\* to mute or unmute

NOTE: conference call was recorded

Attendees were urged to register the phone number they would be calling in with in advance with Mr. Tommy Crawford by calling him at 254-654-0119 or calling Mr. Tom Chepey at 210-789-3191. This helps the E C M recognize who is attending the meeting and helps to make communications more efficient.

### **Call to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chairman Sparks**

**Invocation presented by Mr. Laydell Rogers**

**Chairman Sparks gave an update concerning manager Mr. Travis Warren and his spouse as they battle COVID-19.**

## **Roll call of E C M, Guests and State Licensing Agency (S L A) Staff**

Mrs. Kim Chepey read a list of audience members names on the call and named each of the E C M Representatives that were present.

**Chairman Sparks gave a welcome back to Ms. Cecilia Wilson upon her return to the E C M, representing her district.**

## **Approval of Minutes for July 30, 2021 Meeting**

Chairman Sparks announced approval of the E C M meeting minutes for the last quarter.

## **Business Enterprises of Texas (B E T) Staff Attending**

Lizet Hinojosa, B E T Director

## **Director's Report**

B E T Director Lizet Hinojosa's presentation of the Director's Report is as follows:

### Facilities Information

B E T closed out the 4th quarter with 111 facilities. No new facilities have opened during 4th quarter; no facilities closed during the 4th quarter (June – Aug 31, 2021).

We have 2 pending facilities, again, those are as follows:

1. 1601 N. Congress Facility (or Capital Mall), projected opening date of Spring 2022
2. 1801 Congress, projected date of Spring of 2022

There were 20 facilities that received upgraded vending or kitchen equipment during the 4th quarter.

At the end of the 4th Quarter, we had 99 assigned managers and 4 unassigned managers.

During the 4th Quarter (June - Aug) there were 172 business visitations completed.

Value of equipment ordered and delivered in support of businesses year to date is \$498,559.00

The number of employees whose disability is blindness in B E T Businesses: 10

Number of employees with other disabilities in B E T businesses: 156

Number of employees with no disability in B E T: 1431

### **30 Minutes for Q and A after Director's Report**

Director Hinojosa addressed a question that was posed by Mr. Tom Chepey concerning a request for a short synopsis on the scope of the two new facilities in downtown Austin – 1601 North Congress and 1801 South Congress.

Ms. Tamara Nowell requested a brief elaboration concerning the labor portion of the Director's Report.

Ms. Aloha Cook asked for further details/clarification on the business model for 1601 North Congress; does this encompass one facility or two facilities?

Director Hinojosa provided a detailed response for each inquiry.

**Director Hinojosa presented the Financial portion of the program.**

Ms. Hinojosa reminded everyone of the spreadsheet that was forwarded to all; she gave a detailed review and reminded everyone that these reports are available in the drop box.

Chairman Sparks announced that the E C M Finance Committee along with B E T Director Hinojosa, have met with upper T W C management to discuss the S L A's budget; these meetings will be ongoing.

Chairman Sparks requested an update from Director Hinojosa concerning the outcome of meetings that have taken place with the General Services Administration (G S A). These meetings have been geared towards updates concerning G S A's strategy for employees working remotely due to the pandemic's continuation and how that impacts the current S L A business model and B E T managers operating G S A sites.

Before moving on the Chairman's Report, Mr. Sparks announced that an appeal will be submitted in writing to the S L A and the B E T Director with the request of including the E C M and its representatives that are affected by any future changes at facilities, announcements of prospective new B E T facilities and any facility remodels therefore, the E C M considers this request essential to provide their members an outcome that will cultivate active participation and enhance a positive relationship which in turn would benefit the program.

Ms. Aloha Cook had questions regarding the budget and questioned having matching funds to the set-aside fee, getting

away from having two facilities in one building – asked if that thought process would change existing facilities or only for future locations. Lastly, she asked if the S L A has ever considered ordering “stackers”, which is a particular beverage type style vending machine.

Mr. Zach Davis gave his input as he has experience with the two manager scenario stationed at one facility; Mr. Davis commended the Director about this new transition. Mr. Davis also questioned the change in the business model at the Disability Determination Services (D D S) that is currently underway during the remodel to the facility.

Ms. Ashley Edwards offered her feedback regarding changes/upgrades to facilities; she wants the S L A to consider uniformity – getting away from the “hodgepodge of equipment” as she addressed the sustainability of equipment that pertains to the aesthetics of the facility when considering the décor/fabrics, as an example, the tables and chairs.

### **Chairman’s Report**

Chairman Sparks presented his Chairman’s Report as follows while commenting that Mr. Terry Smith and Mr. Nicky Gacos were invited however due to previous obligations, both were unable to attend this meeting. Chairman Sparks is hopeful to catch up with Mr. Smith and Mr. Gacos soon to cover national level information. He then expressed his thoughts as to no expectations that more assistance funds may be expected. Chairman Sparks urged the E C M and audience members to participate in the National Association of Blind Merchants (N A B M) membership drive that is currently underway. Chairman Sparks gave an update about the success in securing the subscription service to the National

Federation of the Blind's Entrepreneurs Initiative (N F B E I) which is a service offered by the National Association of Blind Merchants. The N A B M launched the program on January 1, 2012 and offers many facets that involve the provisions of training and technical assistance. Mr. Sparks went on to remind everyone that the vote for the Retirement, Health Insurance, Vacation and Sick Leave (R H I V S) payout has been posted and votes will be tabulated for option one or two; urged managers to submit their vote by responding to the email.

Chairman Sparks asked the Co-Chair, Mr. Tom Chepey, to provide an update concerning the inventory assistance initiative.

Mr. Chepey gave a summary of the amount of money that was capped to cover losses of inventory for 2020. He commented that his spouse worked tirelessly with B E T staff member, Joe Gonzalez, with creating a spreadsheet to support the dollar amount of monies that will be allotted to each manager for use to purchase replacement inventory from a vendor of their choice. Co-Chair Chepey provided the details of how this better 2.0 version of the inventory assistance plan will work.

Chairman Sparks asked for Mr. Zach Davis to provide an update concerning the temporary Manager Annual Performance Reviews (M A P R's). Mr. Davis commented on the work that has been done while giving those on the call the details of what the significance of an M A P R is, as a document that assesses a manager's sales, profit percentages, whether the manager submits their reports on time, if they are doing business enhancements, etc., This number/score is an important factor in making the determination of assigning a facility. This project's objective was to have continuity

between all districts as the B E T Business Consultants were instrumental in working through this project with the E C M.

Chairman Sparks gave an announcement of a demonstration that will be performed on December 1<sup>st</sup> by Square, a Point of Sale (P O S) systems company; more information to follow. Mr. Sparks addressed the benefits of attending this type of demonstration as having a POS device will prove to be vital for the success of micro markets.

Before transitioning into the district reports, Mr. Sparks gave credit to Director Hinojosa for her dedication to the improvements of the program and the S L A.

## **District Reports**

Each representative provided a report on events occurring in their district. Chairman Sparks reminded everyone to adhere to a 2-minute time frame per each representative's report. However, the individual committee reports may adhere to a 5-minute limit.

### **District 1 – Chairman Mike Sparks and Tamara Nowell**

Ms. Nowell reports contacting managers but not hearing back from most. She reiterates the information concerning the remodel/business model changes at D D S.

Chairman Sparks notes the passing of manager Mr. Jaime Garza and the status of his facility being up for temporary assignment.

### **District 2 – Zachary Davis and Larry Watson**

Mr. Davis said that he has not been approached with any new issues; cited working with manager Nure Kebirtimo and B E T

Business Consultant, Ebonie Arradondo, in setting up a conference to discuss a situation with Nure's micro market. Mr. Davis talked about a problem with a broken/unfunctional cash register at Mr. Steve Saltzman's facility that has been resolved by the S L A ordering a new machine. Mr. Davis recapped his involvement with the drafting of the temporary M A P R form and concluded his report.

Mr. Watson gave a brief report as only one issue was brought to his attention. Mr. Watson discussed a problem with an insubstantial hand truck/dolly that was delivered to manager Mr. Jose Sanchez leading manager Sanchez to reject its delivery; other equipment issues seem to plague Mr. Sanchez. Mr. Watson concludes his report by commenting that nothing else has been referred to him and that his time has been taken up by work with the M A P R revision.

### **District 3 – Ashley Edwards and Cecilia Wilson**

Ms. Edwards reports not receiving any responses from the text messages she sent out; most cafés except for her facility are still closed. However, vending routes are maintaining some form of normalcy. Ms. Edwards mentioned that much attention and focus has been given to working with G S A concerning late manager Greg Stavinoha's facility at 1919 Smith Street where she has undertaken the task of keeping all of the vending machines stocked with food, snacks, and beverages. Ms. Edwards concludes her report by commenting that all managers are eagerly awaiting a return to business albeit under a new normal.

Ms. Wilson begins her report by thanking Chairman Sparks for appointing her to the temporary position of E C M member for district 3. She goes on to reference working with B E T Business

Consultant, Anjonette Pryor, concerning the M A P R's. Ms. Wilson comments on additional work and collaboration with Ms. Ashley Edwards concerning issues that pop up throughout district 3. Ms. Wilson addressed issues that are a work in progress with her facility. However, mentioned a positive working relationship with the S L A. Ms. Wilson wrapped up her report by acknowledging her health challenges and thanked everyone for their uplifting support.

#### **District 4 – Dave Corbett and Jerry House**

Mr. Jerry House was not available on the phone line.

Mr. Corbett talked about his communication email to managers although getting only one response back concerning an inquiry as to who would temporarily manage the facility that would be available once Mr. Clayton Hell relinquishes his facility. Mr. Corbett talked about his personal experience managing his facility during a pandemic as being a mixed bag of “hot and cold” business days. As he concludes his report, Mr. Corbett announced how much Mr. Clayton Hell was admired and would be sorely missed throughout district 4.

#### **District 5 – Travis Warren and Tommy Crawford**

Mr. Travis Warren was not available on the phone line.

Mr. Tommy Crawford confirmed speaking with manager Dylan Williams concerning Mr. Travis Warren's hospitalization and shared that Mr. Warren is making progress as he is no longer in intensive care. Mr. Crawford gave positive feedback concerning the newly hired B E T Business Consultant, Julia Rodriguez. He goes on to comment about the new facility within district 5 that is currently being reviewed as to whether this facility will be

advertised as its own or if it will be combined with another existing facility. Mr. Crawford transitioned into discussing the complaints that have been brought forward from more than one manager having to do with late repair reimbursements. Mr. Crawford expressed the importance of managers getting timely reimbursements but did acknowledge that Director Hinojosa is aware and B E T Central Office is working through this issue. Another complaint Mr. Crawford touched on other complaints having to do with the ongoing Coca-Cola issues that managers have been dealing with resulting in Coca-Cola extracting their machines from lower sales performing facilities. Mr. Crawford informs everyone about his discussion with Director Hinojosa as to the S L A's willingness to purchase beverage vending machines therefore eliminating the struggle with Coca-Cola's high rental fees on machines. Mr. Crawford concludes his report by sharing his experience with the two Fort Bliss contracts during the inception of his management; he commented on the recent successful outcome of negotiating to one contract that manages all facilities at Fort Bliss.

### **District 6 – Tom Chepey and Aloha Cook**

Ms. Aloha Cook discussed progress with contacting the vending managers and shared responses from some. Ms. Cook conveyed when managers have issues, they do not hesitate to pick-up their telephones to express their concerns with Ms. Cook. One constant issue from vending is the process of having to schedule visitations which may be affecting some of their sales; Ms. Cook is hopeful that this prison policy may be changing soon. Other inquiries revolved upon card readers as to which managers would be acquiring these devices that the S L A ordered. Ms. Cook gave an update concerning the status of her facility with closing one section

but opening a “Christmas Annex”. Ms. Cook concludes her report by thanking all managers.

Mr. Tom Chepey reports on the two managers that have had operational businesses as of last year. However, those had very low sales. Mr. Chepey talked about the prospects of the open facility called the Texas Army National Guard. Co-Chair Chepey said that managers that are beginning to get back into their facilities are having to make the decision to think “outside of the box” with their day to day operation; the contributing factor to that decision is getting and selling the highest quality products which leave a lasting impression to those customers and guarantee their return purchases. Mr. Chepey went on to share an example from a manager that lost their coffee/tea supplier along with their machines; he expressed his desire and availability to help in situations like that by finding alternatives and facilitating that quest. Mr. Chepey concludes his report by reminding managers that he and Ms. Cook are always available and willing to help.

### **Sub Committees Reports:**

#### **Rules and By-Laws Sub Committee – Chairman Mike Sparks**

Chairman Sparks reports that the Rules are finished. However, the committee is working on a couple of “tweaks” which will be drafted and presented to the committee’s attorney for review. Chairman Sparks comments that Director Hinojosa is willing to collaborate with the E C M on the Rules. Further details to follow concerning a Rules workshops between the S L A and the E C M.

#### **Finance Sub Committee – Tommy Crawford**

Mr. Crawford cites that a lot has taken place. He gave the beginning balance on the Wells Fargo account as \$4,219.54 and listed

detailed transactions while sharing information of the recent fund raiser to benefit the family of late manager, Mr. Greg Stavinoha. After all transactions are posted, the account will end up with a balance of \$1,715.99. Mr. Crawford moved onto the PayPal account and cited a balance of \$13,161.66; with both accounts the E C M has available funds of \$14,877.65. Mr. Crawford responded to an inquiry by Director Hinojosa as to the set-up on both accounts as a non-profit under 501.C4 entity. Ms. Hinojosa shared information about an opportunity using Amazon Smile to identify a non-profit to receive donations based on a percentage of actual Amazon purchases from each Amazon customer that elects to use Amazon Smile.

### **Communications Sub Committee – Tommy Crawford**

Mr. Crawford informed everyone that he was a little behind in downloading files but has caught up; past meeting files have been uploaded. Mr. Crawford also addressed the success that the E C M gained with the establishment of its own teleconference phone line in 2020; has also upgraded this system which was covered by donations rather than the E C M covering the cost. Mr. Crawford discussed a future objective to purchase recording equipment/devices for use at in person meetings; he welcomed any recommendations on brand names for good quality recording equipment. Mr. Crawford reminded managers that are unable to attend E C M quarterly meetings or weekly E C M meetings as being able to reach out to their E C M representative to access any of the uploaded files; having this information handy may be beneficial in an educational standpoint to managers operating their facilities.

### **Forms Revision Sub Committee – Tom Chepey**

Mr. Chepey highlights the most recent form that was completed as the temporary M A P R. Mr. Chepey provided details on the committee's objective moving along in 2021 with other form revisions to be accomplished. He concludes his report by thanking Kim Chepey for her insight, hard work and time to this committee.

### **Annual Conference Sub Committee – Tom Chepey**

Mr. Chepey shared his views and aspirations for an in person annual conference to be held in 2022 and for the next quarterly meeting. He recommends getting together soon to discuss the details for future meetings.

### **Election Sub Committee – Larry Watson**

Mr. Watson reports a very active time with turnovers and looks at the upcoming by-district elections for 1, 3 and 5; he reminded everyone that this process is scheduled to begin in November 2021. Mr. Watson concludes his report by offering a note of gratitude to Ms. Aloha Cook as she has been very helpful to this committee.

### **Training of Potential Managers Sub Committee – Aloha Cook**

Ms. Cook reports on trainee Mr. Michael Chandler which many managers may know or have recollection of his father, Mr. Bill Chandler, who was in B E T. Ms. Cook gave a brief bio on Michael and acknowledged that he is doing very well. The E C M is navigating the exposure to other managers in the program for Michael to get well rounded experiences during his training. Ms. Cook conveyed a task that she has taken up by drafting a letter with important suggestions/recommendations of specific training modules like micro market training that should be incorporated into

the B E T training program. She gave other examples of curriculum that would be beneficial and mentioned that many recommendations have been obtained from previous trainees/managers. Ms. Cook addressed the need to lengthen the training time as four months does not provide enough time. This proposal that she is working on will be sent to Director Hinojosa and Joe Gonzalez. Ms. Cook wrapped up her committee report by sharing the names of two prospective trainees for the next class, they are Scott (Ms. Cook did not get a last name) and Darrel Razor.

### **G S A Sub Committee – Aloha Cook**

Chairman Sparks acknowledged that this topic has been discussed and was reviewed. He thanked Director Hinojosa with the opportunity granted to the E C M and managers to be able to attend meetings with G S A as this has proven to be very insightful.

### **New Facilities Opportunity Sub Committee – Sophia Sparks**

Ms. Sparks was not available on the phone line. However, Mr. Sparks gave a brief overview of this committee's objective as this committee is working with the E C M to consider more micro markets, coming up with recommendations on how to combine facilities and looking at suggestions pertaining to the federal vending facilities that may be available soon. Mr. Sparks noted lots of good work happening with this committee and once recommendations are put in writing, they will address these requests to Director Hinojosa's attention.

### **Vending Sub Committee – Dave Corbett**

Mr. Corbett shares commentary concerning a national level phone call that the B E T prison managers were invited to by the California Chair, Mr. Max Duarte. Mr. Corbett talked about a couple of focal points from that phone call that stood out – California has credit card readers in all prison vending machines and the B E P managers have control over pricing. Mr. Corbett goes on to provide details on how the California prison system initiated the conversation of placement/use for credit cards, not the California blind vendors/managers. Mr. Corbett said that he is going to approach the prison warden at his facility with respect to card readers. However, Mr. Corbett expressed that he does not think that Texas prison wardens will be as receptive to the idea. On a positive note, if they are, then this endeavor would change the B E T prison managers livelihood and their health for the better with not having to lug around and out bags of coins.

### **Set Date and Location for Next Meeting or Workshop -**

E C M members were asked to establish if an in-person or virtual meeting is preferred. If in person, then what is the preferred location.

Various managers gave their opinion as to the preference of having an in person meeting. Mr. Crawford reminded everyone that the purchase of recording equipment for in-person meetings will need to take place soon.

Unanimous agreement for an in-person meeting to be held in Corpus Christi, Texas; date selected is January 22, 2022; details to follow.

## **Chairman Sparks Announced Special Guest Speaker – Mr. Michael Talley**

Chairman Sparks introduced Mr. Michael Talley as a guest speaker who is a vending manager and is the Elected Committee Chair from the state of Alabama's Business Enterprises Program (B E P). Mr. Talley warmly addressed the members on the call. He began his presentation by sharing a great tip for recording equipment that is cost effective, very blind friendly and works well in different environments and with different platforms. Mr. Talley transitioned into talking about his background; notably confirmed that he has 160 vending machines around the Birmingham area that supply snacks, drinks, sandwiches, and beverages. Mr. Talley affirmed that most of his route is within the private sector. However, he has less than 10 machines which are on government grounds. Mr. Talley offers details as to how he became a successful vendor and introduces a significant B E P Rule that has played a part in his success - an instrumental measure put into place in 2006 in Alabama was a Rule called the Vendor Secured Add-On Rule which granted the provision for a vendor/manager to go out and recruit/secure private sector business. Mr. Talley went on to discuss the details of how that Alabama Rule works in conjunction with established facilities managed by blind vendors that are in good B E P standing and are wanting to increase their profits which in turn has the added benefit of helping the program grow. Mr. Talley gave numerous examples of private sector businesses that he recruited and secured under this Rule as he explained why smaller type businesses are ideal as opposed to Pepsi and Coca-Cola having any interest in them because of their smaller profitability scale. Mr. Talley talked about his routes prior to COVID and during COVID and shared his optimism for business and

offices to come back once again after the pandemic while offering suggestions as to which types of vending machines work the best. He conveyed that he is not alone with his success as he points out that other B E P vendors in Alabama are also being successful in the private sector with securing smaller scale businesses such as automobile oil change shops/garages, car dealerships, etc. Mr. Talley concludes his presentation and says that he is open for questions.

Chairman Sparks posed the first question regarding what role does the Alabama S L A play and if there is a written process in place under the Alabama B E P Rules. Mr. Talley's response affirmed that the Vendor Secured Add-On Rule is in place under the Alabama B E P Rules and lays out what a vendor can or cannot do; they cannot go out to federal or state property as that is already geared towards the S L A. Mr. Talley goes into the details outlined under the Rule that reference the requirements towards a vendor, i.e., must be in good standing with the B E P, be current on their set-aside fees, etc.

Mr. Dave Corbett posed the next question as to whether the Alabama S L A purchases the beverage machines? Mr. Talley confirmed that yes, the Alabama B E P does purchase all the drink machines.

Chairman Sparks had an another question directed for Mr. Talley; he asked if a contract is drawn up to do business with the private sector companies? Mr. Talley's response was that he does not use a contract however, he does draft a permit that the company signs which allows him in conjunction with the Alabama S L A to do business.

## **Grab and Go Opportunities Leading to Success – Tom Chepey**

Mr. Tom Chepey gave his insight on the benefits of offering the grab and go/micro market business model or integrating into an existing facility. He talked about how it guarantees and gives customers many more choices as he listed examples of quality brands that catch customer's attention particularly if those brands can be linked to local companies rather than using the bigger named companies. Mr. Chepey shared his business mindset with how he incorporates grab and go quality food products, offers variety, deals with cost, and implements strategies to work with the best manufactures and brokers. He gave suggestions and the basis for serving and using the best quality paper goods such as the right type of coffee cup. Mr. Chepey noted the importance of managers taking time to do research and to conduct tastings to decide on what products to feature. As Mr. Chepey concludes his presentation, he urges managers to be open and to "think outside of the box". He reminds everyone the importance to reach out and seek other resources for help as he affirms his willingness to help and availability to all.

Chairman Sparks announced the opportunity for questions would be next; instructed anyone interested to press 5\* to be recognized for questions or comments.

Ms. Aloha Cook shared commentary to support the importance of using high quality products as suggested by Mr. Chepey.

No other questions or comments were presented.

Chairman Sparks thanked everyone in attendance and offered hope for future endeavors.

**Adjournment -**

Motion made to adjourn and seconded.