**Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS)**

**Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)**

**Statewide Committee of Blind Vendors**

**June 04, 2024**  **meeting**

**DRAFT minutes**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson called the meeting to order at 3:02 pm.**

**Committee Members Present: Chairman Mr. Keith Haley; Vice Chairman** **Mr. Rich Braccia; Mr. David Pelaggi;; Mr. Karan Punjabi; Alternate: Ms. Shelly McDermott**

**Members Non-Present: Ms. Sovey Ramirez, Mr. Angel Torres; Ms. Brandy Altergott**

**Agency Staff Present:** **Mr. Tyrell Sampson, BEP Program Supervisor; Mr. David Walsh, Mr. Nick Faenza, Mr. Joel Garcia, Ms. Jessie Towle, and Ms. Tracy Morin; Ms. Ashley Morgan; Ms. Lisa Drew**

**Others Present: Mr. Adam Fairbanks, Ms. Yolanda Doak, Mr. Phillip Magalnick, Mr. Kevin Doyle**

**Old Business**

**Minutes of the Last Meetings for Action – March 5th, 2024, March 28, 2024**

**MOTION: Mr. David Pelaggi motioned to approve the minutes for the last two meetings: March 5, 2024, and March 28, 2024. Vice Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia seconded the motion.**

**Vote: Yes – 5, No – 0, Abstained – 0**

**Budget Update**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson updated the current budget, which is around $2.9 million. Despite recent spending to enhance the program, the budget remains strong and stable.** **Recent expenditures have been focused on improving the program's offerings and maintaining quality service across various locations.** **With the summer months approaching, there is optimism about increased earnings. This is expected particularly in transient and seasonal locations, which typically see higher activity during this time.** **While the increased revenue may not directly impact the program budget (as it's considered pass-through funds), it benefits operators by enhancing their earnings potential.** **The update highlights that despite ongoing investments, the program is on track with its financial goals and continues to focus on delivering quality services and appealing locations to consumers.**

**Schedule C & Retirement Contribution**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated he would like to bring to your attention the need for an update in the current regulation language to reflect a later due date than the actual state and federal due date, which has already passed. Despite receiving our schedule C, he would like to remind everyone about this necessary update.**

**During his discussion with the Office of State Comptrollers regarding retirement contributions, he explained that they inquired about any new participants in the program after July 31st, 2017, as this falls under a Tier 4 retirement plan. He sought to clarify whether participation in the retirement plan is mandatory for participants in our program. Upon consulting their legal team, it was confirmed that participation is indeed a requirement. Although not all individuals may choose to contribute to retirement, being part of the retirement plan is mandatory.**

**Therefore, when submitting your schedule C, whether with or without a payment, it is imperative to indicate acknowledgment of the retirement contribution. He is obligated to forward your schedule C to the Office of State Comptrollers for their monitoring. This is crucial for complying with the mandated requirement. By having documentation of all schedule Cs on file, including those without payment, the Office of State Comptrollers can accurately assess any instances of non-compliance and calculate the corresponding dues, penalties, and fees for late filing.**

**Since the operators were unaware of these requirements, he will need to collaborate with the Office of State Comptrollers to ensure that all schedule Cs are on file, irrespective of payment, to facilitate the monitoring process and uphold compliance.**

**Randolph Sheppard Regulations**

**The current deadline established by state and federal authorities for tax filing on April 15th does not allow adequate time to gather and submit the requisite tax documentation to the Comptrollers. Extending the deadline to May 15th would allow for a more reasonable window for processing and submission, accommodating the needs of all parties involved. A proposed alteration in the language by the agency to modify the regulations has been requested. Vice Chair Mr. Richard Braccia has acknowledged the necessity of an amendment and has undertaken a review from his end and the committee should move to the next steps in the process.**

**MOTION: Chairman Mr. Keith Haley motioned to move the regulations to the next step in the process and it was seconded by Mr. David Pelaggi.**

**Vote: Yes – 5, No – 0, Abstained – 0**

**New Business**

**South Benson Marina Facility update**

The current opportunity presents more than just another takeover concession. It represents a significant shift as we venture into uncharted territory for our program—operating a Marina, a new endeavor BEP (Business Enterprise program).

Mr. Kevin Doyle introduced himself and presented. He thanked everyone for welcoming him into the program and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work with Mr. Tyrell Sampson and meet all the participants virtually.

He shared his business progress. He stated that the primary business was initially a bait shop, but the gas sales have been successful. Since April, he has sold nearly 4000 gallons of gas. He is expanding the business by introducing coffee and delicious baked goods made by his wife. He mentioned that local moms, whose children attend nearby schools, are starting to visit the shop.

**Pilot Vending Route Overview**
**Mr. Sampson stated the pilot vending route is coming to an end. We encountered turbulence but gained valuable insight and identified opportunities to sustain the budget.
He has been monitoring the reports from those who participated in this vending route. He has identified concerns about the vending machines, which is good as they allow for corrective action. This benefits you all by providing additional opportunities, but it also benefits the program and our partnerships. With additional eyes on these assets, we are able to respond quicker and faster to issues that may have otherwise gone unaddressed for a longer period of time.

Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated the turbulence in this pilot program was the delay in getting many of the operator's payments. Chairman Haley reached out by email. He was supposed to respond to that by addressing the concerns that some of you brought to Chairman Haley's attention regarding the delay in payment. Not only was it a concern, he would say on your behalf, but it also was a concern of his. But you know, the more payments you all receive, the greater profitability will be. For his RSA report, when he is concerned that your payments are delayed, he has equal amounts of concern because operators only get three payments a year. It does not identify that you know you all are making additional funds, greater additional funds as you are making it, but it is just not. It does not assist in the reporting end like the monies there.**

**Micro-Market Teaming - Transfer and Promotion Process update**

Mr. Sampson and Chairman Haley held a discussion about the need to develop a policy regarding seniority and opportunities within the program. They discussed recognition of the complexity in writing this policy to ensure fairness between operators with different levels of involvement (from those with multiple micro markets to those with fewer or none). They emphasize the importance of complete committee inclusion in these discussions. They propose tabling the discussion for 30 days and scheduling a special meeting to gather all committee members' thoughts. The goal is to have a thorough discussion where all committee members can voice their opinions and work towards a consensus on the policy.

There's a brief discussion about whether to involve the entire BEP (Business Enterprise Program) or keep it strictly within the committee. It's clarified that while committee meetings are open to all operators, decisions are primarily made by the elected committee members.

They discuss the importance of informing all operators about the discussions and decisions being made that affect them. The scope of the policy under discussion extends beyond just micro markets to potential partnerships and opportunities within the program. They clarify that larger venues like cafeterias or new locations won't fall under the current discussion but will adhere to existing regulations.

Chairman Haley assures that information about the special meeting will be disseminated to all committee members. They encourage preparation with questions, concerns, and ideas to facilitate productive discussions and decision-making.

**CTECH Schools -Vending Machine’s update**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson stated about a week and a half ago, Commissioner Porter had a constructive conversation with CTECH leadership regarding our concerns about the placement of vending machines without prior consultation with our program. He is pleased to report that the Commissioner's dialogue was positively received. In her email, she mentioned, "They listened intently to our concerns and they, like us, would like to find a positive path forward as a next step a result, a follow-up meeting is being arranged, which will include Commissioner Porter and Ms. Tracy Morin from our team, along with their Food Director Mr. Paul Lewis, to discuss logistical details further.**

**From Commissioner Porter's email, there is openness to our proposed solution of utilizing the school's existing machines for their fresh food concept while allowing us to continue vending snacks and beverages through their machines. This approach appears to address the concerns we raised initially.**

**Before the Commissioner's intervention, it was evident within the school system that there was a recognition of the financial impact on our program due to the new vending arrangement. Our previous agreement allowed for a clear commission structure from our vending machines, supporting various aspects, including the food service operation.**

**Moving forward, it appears we are on track for a favorable resolution that aligns with our interests. He is optimistic that this will be a positive step forward, putting past issues behind us and preserving our strong partnership with the schools. It is crucial for us to maintain a business environment where both parties benefit as initially agreed upon.**

**Cos Cob Train Station Greenwich, CT.  First Right of Refusal**

**This is a First Right of Refusal for the Cos Cob Train Station. The station is located in Greenwich, Connecticut. The location would be used to provide coffee service for the morning train passengers and the afternoon crowd returning from their travels. It is important to note that the location lacks a kitchen and has limited access to electrical outlets.**

**MOTION: Mr. David Pelaggi moved to waive the first right of refusal for the Cos Cob Train Station, which was seconded by Vice Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia.**

**NAMA 2024 Conference Overview**

**Mr. Tyrell Sampson shared key highlights from this year's NAMA conference, emphasizing its pivotal role in shaping the future of vending and staying ahead of industry trends.**  **Mr. Tyrell Sampson highlighted the networking opportunities at these conferences, where chairs, vice-chairs, and SLAs gather to exchange valuable operational insights. This collective sharing of experiences enriches the understanding of industry dynamics and fosters collaborative problem-solving.**

**Report on the discussion.**

**Strategic Importance of Conferences**:

* Attending conferences like NAMA is not just a routine but an opportunity to push boundaries and integrate cutting-edge technologies into their vending operations. It allows Operators to initiate and implement new concepts effectively.

**Staying Ahead of Industry Trends**:

* Reflecting on his experience at the CSAVR conference, Mr. Tyrell Sampson highlighted their proactive approach to staying ahead of industry trends. Many states are only now exploring innovations like micro markets, cafeteria transitions, and credit card readers, whereas their program has been a pioneer in these areas. This foresight helps maintain their competitive edge, strengthen partnerships, and increase profitability.

**Future Strategic Discussions**:

* Looking ahead, Mr. Tyrell Sampson expressed eagerness to discuss with Ms. Tracy Morin and their team how insights from NAMA can be strategically integrated into their program. They plan to explore innovations beyond food, considering the evolving landscape of vending technology.

**Operator Engagement and Implementation**:

Ms. Tracy Morin added that they would soon engage operators to delve deeper into specific highlights from the NAMA conference. This engagement aims to collaboratively explore opportunities to leverage these insights effectively moving forward.

Eye-Opening Experiences with Technology:

Mr. Tyrell Sampson emphasized the transformative nature of witnessing advanced vending technologies firsthand. He described it as an eye-opening experience that goes beyond merely hearing about innovations. Seeing how these technologies operate and understanding their implications for the industry's future was enlightening.

Advocating for Operator Support:

Reflecting on the benefits of conference attendance, Mr. Tyrell Sampson expressed support for providing stipends or similar support mechanisms for more operators to attend such events. He believes this initiative would not only benefit individuals by expanding their knowledge base but also enhance the overall program's effectiveness and innovation.

**Engaging Both Sides for Comprehensive Insight**:

* Mr. Tyrell Sampson noted that while not all states send representatives, those that do, like Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen, play a crucial role in representing their administrations and gaining diverse perspectives. This engagement ensures that insights gained from conferences are comprehensive and inclusive, bridging potential gaps in understanding between operators and administrative teams.

Introduction **of "Just Bake" Vending Machine discussed**:

* Mr. Tyrell Sampson and Ms. Tracy Morin first encountered the "just bake" vending machine in Chicago a few years ago. This innovative machine provides a hot grab-and-go experience. Recently, they successfully deployed one through their partner, Servomation, at the Willington rest area. This deployment signifies a significant advancement for our program in enhancing customer convenience.

Agency Matters

Mr. Tyrell Sampson gave a report on Agency Matters.

Mr. Tyrell Sampson gave a report on teleworking and a future proposal for a committee secretary. He added our staff is continuing with telework for another six-month term. There was a discussion about the need for a secretary specifically for the committee to alleviate the pressure on the existing clerical staff and ensure efficient meeting management. There was a call for volunteers to manage the meeting recordkeeping. The Committee will discuss this further at another meeting.

**Adjournment**

**Motion to adjourn Mr. David Pelaggi and seconded by Vice Chairman Mr. Rich Braccia at 4:30 pm**