

**TOWN OF BLOWING ROCK
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
ANNUAL RETREAT – December 2, 2019**

The Tourism Development Authority (TDA) held their annual retreat on Monday, December 2, 2019 beginning at 9:00 a.m. The retreat was held at Town Hall located at 1036 Main Street Blowing Rock. Present were Chairman Dean Bullis, Vice-Chair Jim Steele, Members Greg Tarbutton, Kevin Walker and Lance Campbell. Others present were Ex-officio Members Nicole Norman and Shane Fox, TDA Executive Director Tracy Brown, Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell, and Town Clerk Hilari Hubner, who recorded the minutes.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Bullis called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Member Campbell made a motion to approve the September 3, 2019 regular meeting minutes as written, seconded by Member Walker. Unanimously approved.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT/BUDGET REVIEW

• **FY 2019 Audit Report**

Jason Carpenter from Combs, Tennant and Carpenter reviewed the fiscal year 2019 Audit. Mr. Carpenter advised the TDA received the highest level of audit opinion and the TDA had a positive addition of \$67,459 to fund balance. Mr. Carpenter reviewed the audit with the Board and asked for questions. With no questions Mr. Carpenter thanked the TDA Board for allowing Combs, Tennant and Carpenter to serve as their audit firm for FY 2019. **FY 2019 Audit Contract - Attachment A**

• **FY 2020 Audit Contract**

The Board briefly discussed the audit contract. Member Campbell made a motion to accept the 2020 audit contract from Combs, Tennant and Carpenter in the amount of \$4,500, seconded by Member Walker. Unanimously approved. **FY 2020 - Attachment B**

FY 2019 REVIEW & FUTURE PLANNING

• **Occupancy Tax Collections & Financial Statement Review**

Ex-officio Member Nicole Norman stated occupancy tax collections July through October 2019 were up 11.6% or \$59,358. She noted for October itself Occupancy tax collections were up \$11,281 or 7%. Ms. Norman further reviewed expenditures to date with the Board.

• **Budget Amendment**

Budget Amendment – amendment consisting of a budget allocation from insurance proceeds (\$3,507) received to pay for damages sustained to the parking space counter on the American Legion parking facility during a lightning storm this past summer. Vice-Chair Steele made a

motion to approve as presented, seconded by Member Walker. Unanimously approved. **Budget Amendment – Attachment C**

- **Marketing Efforts**

Executive Director Tracy Brown reviewed the second quarter operations report via PowerPoint. **Second Quarter - Attachment D**

Chairman Bullis advised resident and current President of the Civic Association, Tim Gupton, would like to address the board. Mr. Gupton thanked the board for allowing him to speak and advised he had recently sent Mr. Brown and Town Manager Shane Fox a report from the City of Charleston. Mr. Gupton explained Charleston recently had discussions about sustainable tourism in which the Mayor had convened a community group to try to address managing tourism concerns for both the industry and the community. Mr. Gupton stated he found this interesting and sent it on as president of the Civic Association. Mr. Gupton further stated he also looked at it from the standpoint of being a full-time resident, on the Blue Ridge Conservancy Board, committed to outdoor preservation and the Middle Fork Greenway. He further stated in living in the Triangle he watched the competition among the towns vs region and advised one of the biggest assets here is having a High-Country region that includes Boone. Residents of Blowing Rock can go to Boone, get what they need and leave which he felt was a huge asset. Mr. Gupton explained he sent the document on as a request to in 2020 have a conversation about sustainable tourism as the Town is obviously been successful in the lodging numbers and with the volume of people in Town. He further explained the Civic Association plans to make two (2) recommendations to Council at the December 10th meeting. First request is to encourage Council to engage in conversation with the TDA and community about sustainable tourism. To get ahead and some sort of management plan to balance out the impact of tourism on local communities to keep problems other areas have from happening here. Second is to recommend that Council address the congestion issue in town with a combo of parking and traffic management from the impact of tourism. Mr. Gupton advised his intent wasn't for that to be a negative statement, just felt it was something that really needed to be focused on as there is a real congestion issue in Town during busy times.

Mr. Brown advised he appreciated the thoughts and felt there were things that could be discussed that could help in some areas. Mr. Brown further stated that busy weekends in fall and around the Thanksgiving holiday are part of the landscape in mountain communities during the fall/leaf peeping times. He explained that discussions have been had with different departments regarding having any scheduled events in Town during those key holiday weekends and known busy times; examples – 4th of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving weekend etc.

Mayor Sellers spoke from the audience and advised he can remember the days when the “streets rolled up” after Labor Day and he felt like it's a good problem to have. But agreed it's something to look at.

Ex-officio Shane Fox advised that Parks and Recreation have people booking weddings two and three years in advance. This past year from April 1st through December 31st there were only approximately three (3) weekends without a wedding booked in one of the Town venues. He

explained the weddings are just one piece, but there are lots of other events as well. Staff has begun discussions on what needs to be addressed. One idea would be to have a Town Council and the TDA Board to have more of a work session meeting to have more open discussions and perhaps policy's and procedures that need to be discussed. Mr. Fox advised now is the best time to have better discussions and have a better plan on going forward.

The Board took a 15-minute recess.

- **Update from Chamber of Commerce**

Executive Director Charles Hardin reviewed the Chamber events; Winterfest, Savor, Art in the Park, Symphony by the Lake and Farmers Market. Mr. Hardin advised the board has decided to discontinue the Savor event. He explained that the event had a good twelve year (12) run, but the target market has changed for that type of event. Mr. Hardin further advised the Chamber will be developing a new event for the 2021 year that will be based on activities to "Savor" in Blowing Rock. **Chamber Update – Attachment E**

Mr. Hardin briefed the Board on the Leadership group project to raise funds for a restroom facility at Blowing Rock School. Mr. Hardin advised the playground at the school is not only used for the school children, but also used for visitors. He explained with an already shortage of restrooms in Town and visitors using this area to park on the weekends this would be a beneficial to the Town. Mr. Hardin advised the Leadership group would like to request the Board consider donating \$40,000 toward the project. **Leadership Project Summary for Blowing Rock School Bathroom Facility – Attachment F**

Jim Pitts, President of the Chamber Board, discussed with the Board conceptual design for the Village Foundation's Gateway project. Mr. Hardin originally presented the concept to the Board at the September 3rd meeting. Mr. Pitts advised the estimated budget for the project is \$400,000 with a contingency bumping it to approximately \$450,000. Mr. Pitts advised currently waiting on a need to be met before taking the project before Council. Mr. Pitts and Mr. Hardin discussed with the Board funding options. The TDA Board allocated funds for a gateway project which were transferred to the Town side. Some funding was used for design with the remaining balance of \$261,830 earmarked for gateway funds. Mr. Pitts further stated the project would be a 2021 project. Mr. Hardin explained the purpose was for the Chamber and the Village Foundation to update the Board on the progress of the project and update the Board on the actual cost.

- **Middle Fork Greenway**

Mr. Fox advised he recently met with Wendy Patoprsty with the Middle Fork Greenway to get an update on the project. Phase one has been funded for a while and now working through the details particularly the permitting process. Currently working on obtaining one permit that recently came to light, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act permit issued from the Southeastern Archaeological Center through the National Park Service. He explained once everything is completed with applying for the permit the turn around time for the actual permit issuance is unknown. Once this piece is obtained then phase one can move forward toward completion. Mr. Fox stated this is a process that nobody was aware of going into the process.

Mr. Fox further stated the EFLAP Grant portion is the largest portion of the project and the construction completion date for that piece is December 2021.

- **Infrastructure Support Review**

Ms. Norman reviewed with the Board annual expenditures used for infrastructure support to the Town. Some of the items discussed were landscape/beautification, Christmas decorations, Memorial Park maintenance/clean-up, Town center beautification trash cans/general maintenance, Memorial Park Playground (new for this FY), Town streetlights, downtown shuttle, BRAHM parking facility, Middle Fork Greenway & Blue Ridge Parkway support and electronic parking space counter. Chairman Bullis advised he has received numerous complaints, particularly during warm days, about the smell of the trash cans located downtown. He asked if there was any way to clean the trash cans on a regular basis to help with the problem. Mr. Fox advised discussions had been had with the appropriate staff and will continue to be had to come up with the best solution for the problem.

Other

None

EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 12:35 p.m. Vice-Chair Steele made a motion to go into closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 (6), seconded by Member Campbell. At 12:55 p.m. Vice-Chair Steele made a motion to return to open session, seconded by Member Tarbutton. Unanimously approved. Member Tarbutton made a motion to give Mr. Brown a \$5,000 bonus and recommendation for Executive Director Brown to give Mrs. Lugenbell a \$1,800 raise in pay, seconded by Member Campbell. Unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss Member Campbell made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:05 p.m., seconded by Vice-Chair Steele. Unanimously approved.

TDA Chairman, Dean Bullis

Town Clerk, Hilari Hubner

Attachments

FY 2019 Audit – Attachment A

FY 2020 Audit Contract - Attachment B

Budget Amendment - Attachment C

Second Quarter Update – Attachment D

Chamber of Commerce Report – Attachment E

Leadership Project Summary for Blowing Rock School Bathroom Facility – Attachment F