

Town of Blowing Rock

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – June 3, 2008

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, June 3, 2008 at 8:30 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernie Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Lynn Drury, Phil Pickett, Keith Tester and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Nicole Norman. TDA Executive Director Tracy Brown was also present.

Call to Order

Chairperson Keele called the meeting to order and welcomed the members and guests.

Approval of Minutes – May 12 & 28, 2008

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the May 12 & 28, 2008 meeting minutes. Motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Drury to approve the May 12 & 28, 2008 minutes. Unanimously approved.

FY 2008-09 TDA Budget – Public Hearing

Chairperson Keele stated that the TDA would be holding a public hearing on the proposed FY 2008-2009. Chairman Keele then opened the public hearing for comments from citizens stating that the proposed FY 2008-09 TDA budget totals \$801,940.

Hearing no comments, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to close the public hearing. Unanimously approved.

Chairperson Keele then entertained questions or comments regarding the proposed FY 2008-09 Budget. Member Drury requested two clarifications related to the proposed budget – 1) Is funding included for the Downtown Retail Study? and 2) Is the cost of living increase projected at 5%? Mr. Hildebran responded that the initial funding of the Retail Study would be considered in a FY 2007-08 budget amendment in an upcoming agenda item. He also stated the 5% cost of living increase modeled the proposed town budget. Member Drury suggested that next year an additional comparative line be added with actual budget/prior year data to provide better overall budget review. All concurred with the suggestion.

With no further discussion, motion by Member Drury, seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to approve the FY 2008-2009 TDA Budget as recommended. Unanimously approved.
(Attachment #1)

Financial Report

Chairperson Keele introduced Finance Officer Nicole Norman to review the FY 2007-08 budget to date.

Finance Officer Norman then reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2007-08 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through April 2008. She stated that April revenues, totaling a gross of \$28,857.56, were down approximately 19% compared to April 2007. Ms. Norman also advised two entities had failed to submit their taxes and one failed to submit a report. Collection enforcement action is underway.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton and Member Pickett stated that May occupancy was somewhat better than April at their lodging establishments. Mr. Tarbutton stated he had observed a decrease in tourism travel but an increase in group business travel. Chairperson Keele stated that he had noticed an increase in patron credit payments for dining and a decrease in total patron average dining expenses.

Member Drury suggested that the TDA monitor the demographics of visitors during the current downturn in the economy for use in future planning.

2007-08 Budget Amendment – Retail Study

Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated that in order to initiate the Downtown Retail Study by HyettPalma, a 60% deposit (\$15,000) is required to proceed with professional services. Mr. Hildebran recommended a budget amendment to cover deposit expenses be made from current year unreserved fund balance for \$15,000. The balance of \$10,000 would be funded during the FY 2008-09 Budget, upon completion of the study.

With no further discussion, motion by Member Tester, seconded by Member Drury to approve a budget amendment to cover initial Retail Study costs of \$15,000 as recommended. Unanimously approved. **(Attachment #2)**

Operations Activity Report

Chairperson Keele introduced Executive Director Brown to provide an Operations Activity Report update to the Authority. Mr. Brown advised most of the information was expressed during his last bi-weekly report.

Executive Director Brown discussed –

- Visitor Guide inquiries – Telephone calls, down 13%
 - Email Requests, down 19%
 - Walk-in Traffic, down 13%
 - Website Hits, up 30%
 - Visitor Guide requests, up 8%
- Unified marketing effort with Boone CVB & Watauga County TDA in the Raleigh area. The \$90,000 campaign includes TV, Print and Radio advertisement.
- Blue Ridge Country (July/August 2008) advertisement.
- Forbes Traveler (Lynn Seldon) article regarding food and wine festival in Blowing Rock.
- Press Release on upcoming Downtown Retail Study is ready for distribution.
- Tweetsie – TDA received a thank you for economic development support.

The Authority then briefly discussed a Chamber of Commerce informational meeting in reference to a potential culinary wine institute to be located in Blowing Rock. Director Brown advised that the meeting would involve Appalachian State University representatives and interested parties regarding the feasibility of a culinary school that merges wine and food. Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated the projected cost of the feasibility study is approximately \$25,000. The collaborative venture would potentially include ASU, Johnson & Wales, several foreign universities, and local investors and may be linked to the ASU viticulture program. Mr. Tarbutton invited all interested parties to attend.

Downtown Retail Market Study

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran informed the Authority that staff had received a start-up kit from HyettPalma to prepare for the upcoming study. He stated that he and Director Brown would begin gathering the requested information. The tentative date for visitation by HyettPalma is the last week in July.

Mr. Hildebran and Mr. Brown shared they would pass along additional information as the process moves forward.



Newspaper Racks/Master Signage Plan

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran advised that all of the new modular newspapers racks had been installed (Gossip Park, Post Office and Martin House). He then informed the Authority that the new information directory kiosks have been installed at both Memorial Park and the Maple Street Parking Lot and that a roof component would be installed on the Memorial Park kiosk in the next week. Two additional kiosks are planned in the approved FY 2008-09 Budget for placement at the new American Legion Parking Facility and the new Blowing Rock Art & History Museum.

Chairman Keele thanked everyone for the work on behalf of the Authority.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Pickett to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Bernie Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 – FY 2008-09 Annual Budget

#2 – 2007-08 Budget Amendment