

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – February 9, 2009**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Monday, February 9, 2009 at 3:00 p.m. in a special meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Lynn Drury, Phil Pickett, Keith Tester, Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran, TDA-Appointee Rob Dyer, Executive Director Tracy Brown, and Assistant Director Amanda Fife.

Dave Tomsy and Mark Bastin, of JDM Strategies were also present.

Call to Order

Chairperson Kent Tarbutton called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance.

Oath of Office

Chairperson Tarbutton introduced newly appointed Authority Member Rob Dyer and administered the oath of office. (**Attachment #1**)

Approval of Minutes – November 24, 2008

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the November 24, 2008 meeting minutes. After a few revisions, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Tester to approve the November 24, 2008 meeting minutes as corrected. Unanimously approved.

Financial Report

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2008-09 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through December 2008. He stated that revenues were down approximately 12.18% (or \$62,000) compared to the same six-month period of 2007. He also advised that expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

The Authority then discussed the overall economic climate and the impact on tourism nationally and locally. In response to the economic downturn, Executive Director Brown has been reviewing the budget to look for efficiencies and items that can be trimmed or delayed. Mr. Hildebran stated that the Town had delayed the resurfacing of the Broyhill parking area which would eliminate the \$30,000 allocated from the TDA to the Town in infrastructure funding. This reduction could equate to \$90,000 in occupancy taxes based on 1/3rd – Infrastructure and 2/3rd – Marketing/Promotion budgeting.

The TDA Board agreed to review the economic situation again in April and make any budget adjustments, as needed.

Election of Vice-Chair

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained a motion for the election of a Vice-Chairperson for the Tourism Development Authority. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Tester to appoint Member Lynn Drury as Vice-Chairperson of the TDA. Motion unanimously approved.

Marketing Strategy Proposal - WC&T (JDM Strategies)

Dave Tomsy (formerly with WC&T) distributed a press release that announced that the WC&T advertising agency had become JDM Strategies. (**Attachment #2**)

Mr. Tomsy discussed his three year public relations consulting relationship with the TDA and that JDM wanted to present some possible new directions related to marketing. He introduced Mark Bastin (Chief Operating Officer) with JDM to review proposed creative concepts, rationale and media strategies.

Mr. Bastin stated the objectives are - to increase Average Daily Rates, to increase occupancy, and to increase length of stays. The recommended target audience is - females, ages 36+, college degree or greater, household income of \$100,000+ and travelers with a geographic emphasis on Charlotte, NC Triad (Greensboro, Winston-Salem and High Point) and the NC Triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill). He suggested using print, internet and radio media platforms. He advised his strategies included – new creative in a larger format, a focused media, a review of all current trade relationships, building measurability and to build in added value on media components.

- Four (4) Creative Concepts (**Attachment #3**)
- Creative Concepts & Rationale (**Attachment #4**)
- Proposed Media Strategies (**Attachment #5**)

Mr. Bastin discussed a proposed budget similar to the current marketing budget at a cost of approximately \$100,000. He further suggested a focus on marketing in the January/February/March months and less of a focus on co-op advertising.

Vice Chair Drury and Member Pickett expressed concerns with a marketing focus in winter months due to the lack of activities and harshness of weather. The Board suggested a marketing focus on weekday stays during the season or on strengthening the months of May and September might be more plausible.

Member Tester stated that a focus on the Charlotte, the Triad and the Triangle markets was appropriate but wouldn't lengthen stays due to the relatively short drive. Member Dyer echoed those sentiments and stated that the short distance made a weekend trip for a change of scenery very viable.

Chair Tarbutton also stated that the proposed budget excluded typical overhead costs ranging from 7½-15% depending on the media platform utilized.

Mr. Tomsy and Mr. Bastin responded that the overall strategy could be tweaked to meet the needs of Blowing Rock and that the creative shells could be updated seasonally. They also maintained that the proposed new media platforms and recommended placements would have positive results.

The Authority thanked Mr. Tomsy and Mr. Bastin for their presentation and that they would discuss the proposal in the near future. Mr. Tomsy and Mr. Bastin departed the meeting.

Downtown Retail Strategy Report

Member Tester updated the Authority on the status of the Downtown Retail Strategy since the November meeting. He stated that he had met with the Chamber of Commerce and that the Chamber had developed a participation outline which suggested a steering committee of the following groups – the Town, the Planning Board, the TDA and the Chamber of Commerce.

He also informed the Authority that the Town Council had discussed the Study at their Planning Retreat and their consensus was –

- Proceed with Year-1 Implementation Sequence of Blowing Rock Retail Strategy and support the Steering Committee Concept – but suggest consideration of an additional residential representative on Committee.
- Schedule a kick-off meeting with the various parties – Town, Planning Board, TDA and Chamber of Commerce – to discuss the implementation process and lead roles.

The Authority discussed the makeup of the Steering Committee – Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Mayor Pro-tem Keith Tester, Town Manager Scott Hildebran, TDA Chair Kent Tarbutton, TDA Vice-Chair Lynn Drury, TDA Executive Director Tracy Brown, Planning Board Chair Jim West, Planning Board Vice-Chair Sue Sweeting, Chamber President Rita Davis, Chamber Vice-President Nancy Santay, and Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin.

After a short discussion and based on the favorable response by the Town Council and Chamber of Commerce, it was the consensus of the Authority to endorse this proposed approach and to schedule the kick-off meeting for later in the month.

Master Signage Plan Update

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran presented a conceptual design of new signage to be placed at the intersections of Main Street and Sunset Street and Morris Street informing visitors that there are businesses located off of Main Street. (**Attachment #6**) He advised that the signage would be ordered once permission for installation and indemnification agreements were drafted that met the satisfaction of property owners.

He also stated that an additional information directory kiosk was scheduled to be placed at the new American Legion Parking Facility this spring.

The Authority expressed their anticipation for the proposed installations.

Public Restrooms

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran updated the Authority on the status of the renovation of the Memorial Park Restrooms currently underway. He commented that they are scheduled for completion within the next week. The project includes installation of new automated toilet fixtures, sinks and hand dryers as well as repainting. Also, the ventilation system is being upgraded.

Mr. Hildebran also stated public restrooms are included at the proposed Robbins Pool Complex and at the proposed Blowing Rock Art & History Museum parking facility.

Proposed Meeting

At this time, the Authority discussed their desire for receiving a marketing proposal from current creative designer Heidi Lusk of the Meridian Agency.

The Board expressed mixed opinions regarding the proposal from JDM Strategies – liked proposed platforms (internet) and utilization of Crown of the Blue Ridge, but disliked proposed months of marketing focus (January-March) and potential cost of services.

After a brief discussion, the Authority agreed to schedule a special meeting for Monday, March 9, 2009 at 3:00 p.m. to hear a marketing strategy proposal from Ms. Lusk of the Meridian Agency.

Thank You

Authority members expressed gratitude to TDA Member Tester, who announced he is stepping down from the Authority after his term concludes in March. The Authority thanked Mr. Tester for his valuable contributions and service to the Board, which he had served on since its inception in March 2004.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Tester to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Tarbutton adjourned the meeting at 4:45 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

- #1 – Oath of Office – Rob Dyer**
- #2 – Press Release JDM Strategies**
- #3 – Creative Concepts**

- #4 – Creative Concepts & Rationale**
- #5 – Proposed Media Strategies**
- #6 – Signage Plan – Side Street Directional**