

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – June 2, 2009**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, June 2, 2009 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Vice-Chair Lynn Drury, Authority members Dean Bullis, Phil Pickett and Rob Dyer, Ex-officio members Nicole Norman and Scott Hildebran, Executive Director Tracy Brown and Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – May 5, 2009

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the May 5, 2009 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Dyer to approve the May 5, 2009 meeting minutes as presented. Unanimously approved.

FY 2009-10 TDA Budget – Public Hearing

Chairperson Tarbutton stated that the TDA would be holding a public hearing on the proposed FY 2009-2010 Budget. He then opened the public hearing for comments on the proposed budget, which totals \$780,925. This amount is down from the approved FY 2008-09 Budget of \$801,940.

Hearing no comments, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Drury to close the public hearing. Unanimously approved.

Chairperson Tarbutton then entertained questions or comments regarding the proposed FY 2009-10 Budget. He stated the budget had not changed since their meeting last month and that the Authority thanked Finance Officer Nicole Norman and Executive Director Tracy Brown for their efforts.

With no further discussion, motion by Member Drury, seconded by Member Bullis to approve the FY 2009-2010 TDA Budget as recommended. Unanimously approved. **(Attachment #1)**

Financial Report

Ex-Officio Member Norman briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2009-10 Occupancy Tax collections fiscal year-to-date through April 2009. She stated that occupancy tax revenues were down approximately 13.74% (or \$91,431) compared to the same ten-month period in 2008. For the month of April 2009, occupancy tax revenue was down 9.47% (or \$3,432) compared to April 2008. It was also pointed out that interest income was running well below budget. Expenditures for the year were in line with projections. **(Attachment #2)**

Chair Tarbutton stated that a fund balance appropriation would most likely be needed to cover the projected budget shortfall. Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated a brief Special Meeting prior to June 30 would be needed for the Authority to make final budget adjustments. The Authority agreed to set up a meeting prior to year-end to make any required adjustments.

Member Pickett stated that the May occupancy numbers were better than April. Chair Tarbutton stated that the June bookings were up at Chetola Resort and that the upcoming Shriners Ceremonial should help as well. Member Dyer concurred – regarding Inn at Ragged Garden.

Executive Director Brown stated the Oasis Shriners have suggested the 2010 and 2011 ceremonial will be held in Blowing Rock – with an estimated overall financial impact of \$500,000 per ceremonial.

With no further questions/comments, Chairman Tarbutton moved to the Operations Activity Report.

Operations Activity Report

Executive Director Brown briefly reviewed his bi-weekly update on the Operations and Visitor Center activities - web site usage, telephone and email requests, walk-in traffic, etc.

Mr. Brown then discussed –

- Visitor Center indicators are steady – inquiries {+13% }, and walk in traffic {-14% }.
- Discussed top referrals to Blowing Rock – highest being *Southern Living* and *Better Homes and Garden*.
- New Updated Visitor Guide ready and being delivered.
- Visitor map is updated and being distributed.
- Ad Placement Plan includes – Visit NC, *AAA Go Magazine*, and *Western NC Magazine*.
- Working on Ad buys, and seeking added values (trade-outs and giveaways, advertorials).
- Working with AAA and Tanger joint marketing effort.
- Working with Blue Ridge Parkway 75th Anniversary and getting Blowing Rock on their new website.
- Reviewing a funding request (\$4,000) for BRP 75th Anniversary and possibly submitting a TDA proposal to the Appalachian Regional Commission for funding of "gateway" communities adjacent to the Parkway related to the Parkway's 75th anniversary celebration. Applicants can request up to \$40,000.
- WC&T assisted with obtaining recent article in *Atlanta Journal Constitution* on Chetola Resort (via Lynn and Cele Seldon) and Blowing Rock participation with the Visit NC Sweepstakes.
- Oasis Shriners hosting ceremonial in Blowing Rock this weekend. Parade to be held on Saturday, June 6 at 2:00 p.m.

- Cycle NC beginning their 2009 mountains to the coast ride in Blowing Rock on September 26. Over 1,000 riders will be in town. Both hotels and restaurants should benefit from the event. TDA will assist with goody bags, transportation and some entertainment. Requesting Town Council approval at the June 9th meeting.

Chairperson Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report. Member Drury thanked Mr. Brown for his outstanding day to day leadership of the TDA.

High Country Cooperative Marketing

TDA Executive Director Brown updated the Authority on the High Country Cooperative Marketing effort. He stated the proposed marketing had been refocused to North Carolina and that a familiarity tour of the Orlando, Florida market was being discussed as well.

Mr. Brown emphasized that they are still trying to develop a fair process – pay to play (the more you pay, the more copy), etc. He stated that Blowing Rock would have a large presence on the Visit NC website – including pages focused on places, events and travel offers. The adopted budget includes around \$32,000 toward this cooperative marketing effort.

Chair Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his update.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

Vice-Chair Drury stated that the Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee met in May and discussed the following items:

- Ginny Stevens, with the Blowing Rock Historical Society, reviewed the possibility of a Downtown Historical Designation District (both the National Registry and Local District). It was the consensus that additional information on the concept was needed. Also, the Committee suggested that a representative from the state historic preservation office attend a future Committee meeting. Mrs. Stevens requested the need for additional volunteers to assist in this effort.
- Joann Mitchell, with the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum, discussed their willingness to assist with a public art plan for downtown.
- Charles Hardin, with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce, updated the Committee on a new effort to focus on downtown retailers and a Secret Shopper Program.

Other

Member Pickett inquired if the Shriners Parade logistics had been finalized regarding the need for additional street width for their routine. Mr. Brown responded that the additional area needed had been coordinated with and approved by Blowing Rock Police Chief Eric Brown.

The Authority commented on the new American Legion Parking Facility and how nice the structure has turned out. Mr. Hildebran stated that a formal ribbon-cutting would be scheduled in the near future.

Executive Director Brown reminded the Authority members of the Oasis Shriners opening ceremony on Friday, June 5 at Chetola Resort at 7:00 p.m. and encouraged their attendance.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Dyer to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Tarbutton adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - FY 2009-10 TDA Budget

#2 - Occupancy Report