

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – October 6, 2009**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, October 6, 2009 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Rob Dyer and Phil Pickett, Ex-officio members Nicole Norman and Scott Hildebran. Executive Director Tracy Brown and Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell were also in attendance.

Vice-Chair Lynn Drury and Authority member Dean Bullis were absent due to other commitments.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – July 7, 2009

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the July 7, 2009 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Dyer to approve the July 7, 2009 meeting minutes as presented. Unanimously approved.

Financial Report

Chairperson Tarbutton requested Ex-officio Member Norman provide an update on occupancy tax collections. Ex-Officio Member Norman briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2009-10 Occupancy Tax collections fiscal year-to-date through August 2009. She stated that occupancy tax revenues for July and August were down approximately 17.73% (or \$38,260) compared to the same two-month period in 2008. For the month of August 2009, occupancy tax revenue was down 24.54% (or \$26,155) compared to April 2008. Expenditures for the year were in line with projections. **(Attachment #1)**

Executive Director Brown pointed out that August 2008 included the Labor Day weekend and a portion of the Horse Show which boosted those occupancy totals.

Member Pickett mentioned the impact of the Green Park Inn bankruptcy on the occupancy revenue. Mr. Hildebran noted that the Green Park Inn closure (80+ rooms) and the Holiday Lodge on-going renovation (averaging 30 rooms) had decreased the total available rooms for rental which impacts occupancy.

Chair Tarbutton and Member Pickett both stated that the October occupancy numbers for their establishments were looking better than the last several months. Member Dyer concurred.

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

Operations Activity Report

Executive Director Brown briefly highlighted several items from the Operations Activity Report. (**Attachment #2**)

Mr. Brown discussed –

- Visitor Center participating as a Fall Leaf Color Reporting Station (thanks to Amanda Lugenbell) providing photos and updates to media around the Southeast.
- U.S. Travel Outlook reported that the Southeast US is down 15% this year.
- Replaced office computer.
- New website look to be unveiled soon.
- New Updated Visitor Guide almost ready.
- TDA hosted travel writers from the UK with the State of NC tourism.
- Blowing Rock articles to appear – Constance Richards of Asheville, NC (G Magazine) and Pama Mitchell of Cincinnati, OH (Atlanta Journal Constitution).
- The September 26th Cycle NC event went well.

Mr. Brown then presented the new Bob Timberlake Signature Experience video ad to the Authority. Additional signature experience videos will be developed in the coming months for display on the TDA website, etc. All the members thanked Mr. Brown for his work on this ad campaign and expressed gratitude to Bob Timberlake.

Chairperson Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

Ex-officio Member Hildebran reported that the Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee continues to meet monthly to work on elements of the study. The October meeting will include additional discussion on the possibility of a Downtown National Registry Historical Designation with Ginny Stevens and a guest of the N.C. Preservation Office and an update on public art by BRAHM Director JoAnn Mitchell.

Chair Tarbutton stated that the steering committee had discussed the proposed Town Center District that was under consideration by the Town.

Master Signage Plan

Ex-officio Member Hildebran reported that the directional signs for Sunset Drive and Morris Street had been installed and businesses along both streets have seen increased walking traffic. He also stated that an information kiosk for the American Legion parking structure had been installed.

In addition, Mr. Hildebran advised that the Valley Boulevard directional signs had been modified to now allow display of event signage. The Visitor Center sign also had the same modification. Executive Director Tracy Brown stated that the Chamber of Commerce had utilized the new display area for an “Art in the Park – Today” sign.

Other – Art in the Park

Chairperson Tarbutton stated that the Chamber of Commerce had requested TDA support for the Art in the Park event. Mr. Tarbutton mentioned that the Chamber was evaluating possible locations for Art in the Park for the Town Council to consider.

After some discussion, motion by Member Dyer and seconded by Member Pickett to express support for the Art in the Park event based on the positive economic impact to hotels and businesses in the community and that parking impact be considered in determining a location. Unanimously approved.

Other - Image/Marketing

Chairperson Tarbutton stated that as the Authority moves forward in their image/marketing campaign that they consider the “value” element of the Blowing Rock experience. The Authority concurred and emphasized that “value” was not “discount”.

Executive Director Brown briefly discussed a comparison of lodging rates/amenities between Boone and Blowing Rock and how the Blowing Rock location and experience sells Blowing Rock.

The Authority agreed to continue to work on the campaign message as it evolves.

Closed Session

Upon motion of Member Dyer and seconded by Member Pickett, the Authority convened at 4:05 p.m. in closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. 143.318.11 (a)(6) for discussion of personnel issues. Motion unanimously approved.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the closed session was adjourned at 4:15 p.m. and the Authority reconvened in open session.

Employment Agreement Extension

Member Pickett motioned and Member Dyer seconded to extend the employment agreement of Executive Director Tracy Brown by three years, until November 27, 2012 at his current salary and to review compensation annually as outlined in the agreement. Unanimously approved.

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 4:20 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - Financial Report

#1 - Operations Report