

**Town of Blowing Rock  
Tourism Development Authority  
Minutes – April 7, 2010**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Wednesday, April 7, 2010 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Vice-Chair Lynn Drury, Authority member Phil Pickett, Ex-officio members Nicole Norman and Scott Hildebran, and Executive Director Tracy Brown.

Authority members Rob Dyer and Dean Bullis were out of town.

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes – November 18, 2009 and March 8, 2010**

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the November 18, 2009 and March 8, 2010 meeting minutes. Motion by Vice-Chair Drury and seconded by Member Pickett to approve the November 18, 2009 and March 8, 2010 meeting minutes as written. Unanimously approved.

**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 February 2010. She stated that occupancy tax revenues were down approximately 11.64% (or \$61,090) compared to the same eight-month period of 2009. For the month of February 2010, occupancy tax revenue was down 11.11% (or \$3,105) from February 2009. Expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

Mrs. Norman advised that should the decline in occupancy taxes continue the TDA would realize a total reduction of \$151,000 (or 12%) in budgeted occupancy taxes revenue compared to last fiscal year. She also mentioned other declines in revenue: loss of interest income (\$4,000) and loss of BRAHM rental income (\$2,590).

The TDA also reviewed potential fund balance appropriations that may be needed to balance the current year budget. Mrs. Norman reminded the Authority that a \$30,000 unspent contingency appropriation was available as well to assist in covering the revenue shortfall and the town would absorb 1/3 of the occupancy tax reduction (estimated at \$50,000).

The Authority then reviewed the overall economic climate and the impact on tourism nationally and locally.

Chairperson Tarbutton requested that Executive Director Brown review the budget to look for efficiencies and items that can be trimmed or delayed and further discussion

would be held at the May meeting. The TDA Board agreed to review the economic situation again in May and make budget adjustments, as needed.

Both Chairman Tarbutton and Member Pickett advised that April and May occupancy reservations looked more favorable than last year.

Executive Director Brown stated the conversion of the old Days Inn to Holiday Inn Express should also improve occupancy.

Audience member Earle Horne suggested the TDA and Town Council reconsider the short term rental policy.

### **Operations Activity Report**

The Authority briefly reviewed the Operations Activity Report on Visitor Center activities - web site usage, telephone and email requests, walk-in traffic, etc.

Executive Director Brown advised that he provided an Operations Activity Report to the Authority during his last bi-weekly report and that the report summarized most of the current Visitor Center activities.

Mr. Brown then discussed –

- Visitor Center – next FY budget request will include funding for exterior painting and parking lot patching/markings.
- Visitor Center indicators, reflecting the economy, are somewhat down, however emails inquiries are up.
- TDA has allocated \$28,000 in marketing this quarter - \$10,000 - Wine Festival, \$10,000 – WinterFest and \$8,500 – General.
- TDA produced three email blasts to consumers and the weekly Tattler to constituents.
- Hosted several travel writers.
- Dave Tomsy (JDM Strategies) conducted a PR/Media seminar for local hoteliers/retailers last month, produced press releases on Wine Festival, Winterfest, NC Prettiest Town, Spring/Summer Getaway and assisted with earned media.
- Dave Tomsy has assisted in obtaining commitments from several influential judges for the Wine Festival - Donna Florio, Marcia Langhenry, Moreton Neal, Jane Garvey, Susan Dosier, Natalie Brown, Kathy Newbern/JS Fletcher, Beth Collier, Lynn and Cele Seldon.
- New event signage created for the town entrance signs to promote the Trout Derby, Wine Festival and NC Prettiest Town designation.
- Days Inn converting to Holiday Inn Express this weekend.

### *Other*

Mr. Brown briefed the Authority on the Boone TDA transferring media marketing responsibilities from the Boone Chamber of Commerce to the Watauga County TDA. As a result, the Boone TDA had terminated their contract with the Boone Chamber of Commerce.

Chairperson Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

### **Downtown Retail Strategy Report**

Mr. Hildebran advised that the Retail Strategy had not met since the last TDA meeting, so no update was warranted at this time. The next Retail Strategy meeting is scheduled for April 28<sup>th</sup>.

### **Marketing Research Services**

Executive Director Brown advised that two proposals were received for marketing research services, with one from Crown Communications and one from Smith Advertising. The research would evaluate the Blowing Rock image and language and determine if the image/language appeal to our desired audience.

Mr. Brown informed the Board that he had inadvertently failed to send the Smith Advertising proposal, but would forward it to the Authority as soon as possible.

The Authority briefly discussed the sampling techniques and possible merits of online internet surveys and/or focus groups. They agreed to discuss the issue further at the May meeting.

The Authority stated their selection would depend on experience, cost and references. Due to budgetary concerns, any award would be deferred to next fiscal year.

Audience member Earle Horne inquired about the TDA advertising markets.

Chair Tarbutton and Executive Director Brown stated that due to economic conditions and research that the TDA focused primarily on the Raleigh/Greensboro/Charlotte markets. Mr. Brown commented that these markets have approximately 1,000,000 residents that transition and/or relocate every few years and that provides a great base to tap into. Further, travelers are staying closer to home.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Vice Chair Drury to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Tarbutton adjourned the meeting at 4:35 p.m.

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Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary