

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – June 1, 2010**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, June 1, 2010 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, and Executive Director Tracy Brown.

Call to Order

Chairperson Kent Tarbutton called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. He stated due to several Chamber representatives in the audience he would deviate from the printed agenda in order to accommodate their schedule.

Presentation – Chamber Event Planner Funding Request

Chairperson Tarbutton called upon Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin for his presentation.

Mr. Hardin distributed a funding request to the Board for a part-time event planner. (**Attachment #1**) He advised that since 2004 the Chamber of Commerce had taken on a larger role for event planning, including Blue Ridge Wine & Food Festival, 2007 Mitford Days, 2010 Blue Ridge Heritage Days, Symphony at Chetola, Art in the Park, Concert in the Park, Blowing Rock Farmers Market, Blowing Rock Winterfest and Tuesday Night Auctions. With over 60 event days per year as well as hours for planning and preparation, these events were exceeding the resources of Chamber staff and volunteers. Further, he advised that in order to grow the events, establish new events, and refresh current events that a dedicated event planner position was justified.

Mr. Hardin advised that 95% of the Chamber of Commerce members were in a tourism related business and that events were important to the Chamber membership as well as the local economy. As such, the Chamber proposes a part-time Event Planner position (30 hours per week) at a cost of \$28,000, with the Chamber and TDA splitting the costs at \$14,000 each. He further requested a three year funding commitment from the TDA, at which time the Chamber may possibly absorb the position. Mr. Hardin also advised that the Chamber Board approved the request on May 5, 2010.

Vice-Chair Drury asked who managed Winterfest and could they use their proceeds to fund a portion of the position? Mr. Hardin responded that current Winterfest Chairperson Bob Miller was moving from the area and that in the future operational changes could be considered.

Member Dyer asked if a person had been selected for the position or would the position be advertised? Mr. Hardin responded that the Chamber had a person in mind, but would more than likely advertise the position.

Member Pickett asked if the events make money could they help offset the costs of the position? Mr. Hardin responded that over time (within the 3 year commitment) that would be the goal.

After some discussion, Chair Tarbutton thanked the Chamber for their presentation. He stated the Authority would take no action today on the request, but would consider the request at the July TDA meeting.

It was the consensus of the Authority to hold a year-end budget closeout meeting on June 28 at 9:00 a.m. and to further discuss the Chamber request at that time. Chair Tarbutton encouraged Authority members to bring any questions about the request to the meeting. Member Bullis advised that he may be traveling on June 28th, but could be available by telephone at that time.

Approval of Minutes – May 4 & 20, 2010

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the May 4 & 20, 2010 meeting minutes. Motion by Vice-Chair Drury and seconded by Member Dyer to approve the May 4 & 20, 2010 meeting minutes as presented. Unanimously approved.

FY 2010-11 TDA Budget – Public Hearing

Chairperson Tarbutton stated that the TDA would now open the public hearing on the proposed FY 2010-2011 Budget, which totals \$683,125. This proposed budget is down 13% from the approved FY 2009-10 Budget of \$780,925.

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

Chairperson Tarbutton then entertained questions or comments regarding the proposed FY 2010-11 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 Pickett to approve the FY 2010-2011 TDA Budget as recommended. Unanimously approved. **(Attachment #2)**

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 2010. She stated that occupancy tax revenues in 2010 were down approximately 11.02% (or \$63,270) compared to the same ten-month period in 2009. For the month of April 2010, occupancy tax revenue was up 10.12% (or \$2,795) compared to April 2009. Expenditures for the year were mostly in line with projections. **(Attachment #3)**

Board members shared that May occupancy numbers were looking fair, and that more customers are making last minute reservations which made projections difficult.

Executive Director Brown stated that Boone experienced only a 3% increase in occupancy tax revenue in April compared to our 11% increase. He further stated that the upcoming Shriners Ceremonial this weekend should boost occupancy numbers.

Member Dyer requested, with the FY 2010-11 Budget approved, that the Authority consider possible avenues for funding the Chamber request, should the Board determine to move forward at the July meeting. The Board briefly discussed several information items needed from the Chamber prior to consideration of the Event Planner funding request. It was consensus that the following items be provided – a proposed job description for the event planner, a balance sheet for all events subject to the need for the position, and information on the events that the TDA provides marketing support.

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 {+4%}, walk in traffic {+11%} and web visits {+2%}.
- Hosted ReAnn Scott with *Living' Out Loud Magazine* from Charlotte.
- Updated Visitor Guide being printed.
- Ad Placement Plan includes – Shriners *Desert Dust*, *Cary Magazine*, *Charlotte Living*, *WNC Magazine*, *Our State* and *Budget Travel*.
- Oasis Shriners hosting ceremonial in Blowing Rock this weekend. Parade to be held on Saturday, June 5 at 2:00 p.m.
- *Oprah Magazine* mailers in the next several weeks.

Chair Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his update.

Marketing Research Services

Executive Director Brown updated the Authority on the Smith Advertising proposal. After some discussion, the Authority requested the proposal be revised to include focus groups in both Charlotte and Raleigh (10 or more participants), and eliminate the brand message selection, design and deployment items. The Board agreed to amend the proposal cost to up to \$10,000.

Mr. Brown agreed to follow-up with Smith Advertising and report back to the Authority at the July meeting.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated that the Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee met in May. The Committee received updates on various downtown projects and initiatives. Also, a brief discussion was held regarding establishment of 2010 priorities for the HyattPalma Study.

During the June meeting, the Retail Strategy Committee will receive updates from the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum and Blowing Rock Historical Society.

Other

Member Pickett inquired regarding upcoming parade times moving from 2:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m. and their possible effect on lodging occupancy. Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated that the comments received for the time change were due to weather-related concerns with the July 4th parade and Appalachian State University Football traffic concerns with the Thanksgiving parade.

Authority members suggestions ranged from a possibility of an 11:00 a.m. start to evening start for the Christmas parade.

The issue will be further discussed at an upcoming Blowing Rock Lodging meeting.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Bullis to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Tarbutton adjourned the meeting at 5:00 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

- #1 - Chamber of Commerce Event Planner Request**
- #2 - FY 2010-11 TDA Budget**
- #3 - Financial & Occupancy Report**