

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – July 6, 2010**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, July 6, 2010 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Dean Bullis, Rob Dyer and Phil Pickett, Ex-officio members Nicole Norman and Scott Hildebran.

Vice-Chair Lynn Drury was out of the country.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – June 1 & June 28, 2010

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the June 1 & June 28, 2010 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Dyer to approve the June 1 & June 28, 2010 meeting minutes as presented. 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 May 2010. She stated that occupancy tax revenues in 2010 were down approximately 10.57% (or \$65,445) compared to the same eleven-month period in 2009. For the month of May 2010, occupancy tax revenue was down 4.60% (or \$1,975) compared to May 2009. **(Attachment #1)**

Ms. Norman stated that the recently approved closeout budget amendment had been incorporated into the financial statement. And, overall expenditures for the year were mostly in line with projections. Board members shared that June 2010 occupancy numbers for their establishments were improved somewhat over June 2009 numbers.

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 that was delivered to Authority members in the past week.

Mr. Brown then discussed –

- Visitor Center indicators are picking up – inquiries {+7%} and walk in traffic {+18%}. However, the web site tracking system is not operable at this time and should be functional later in the week.
- *Our State Magazine* is in town doing interviews for an upcoming November feature article on a behind the scenes look at Blowing Rock.

- 50,000 copies of the updated Visitor Guide have been received.
- July 4th Weekend was successful with record attendance.

Chair Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his update.

Marketing Research Services

Executive Director Brown updated the Authority on the Smith Advertising proposal. He advised that, per Board instructions, the proposal had been revised to include focus groups in both Charlotte (Southpark Marriott) and Raleigh (Crabtree Embassy Suites) with each focus group including 10 participants. Each participant will receive a \$75 gift card for their time.

Chairperson Tarbutton asked if Member Drury had reviewed the revised proposal. Executive Director Brown responded in the affirmative and stated that Ms. Drury was pleased with the revised proposal.

After a brief discussion, motion my Member Bullis and seconded by Member Pickett to authorize Executive Director Brown to execute the contract with Smith Advertising for \$10,000. Unanimously approved. (**Attachment #2**)

Chamber Event Planner Funding Request

Chairperson Tarbutton stated the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce last month had submitted a funding request to the TDA for a part-time event planner to be shared with the Chamber. At the request of the Authority, the Chamber provided a proposed job description for the event planner and balance sheets for all events subject to the need for the position.

Chair Tarbutton thanked the Chamber for the background information provided concerning the proposed part-time Event Planner position (30 hours per week) at a cost of \$28,000 (divided between both entities).

Member Pickett requested additional information regarding the revenues generated from events and their allocation to event planning. Chamber Executive Director Hardin briefly discussed Winterfest and how in time the events could cover the funding for event coordination.

The Authority discussed the proposed hiring process for the event coordinator position and supervision. Mr. Hardin stated the proposed job description placed those duties on the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce and that the hiring process could include TDA staff.

Ex-officio Member Hildebran suggested the TDA make quarterly lump sum payments for event coordination services and not enter into employee oversight. Chair Tarbutton agreed.

Executive Director Brown suggested that the TDA provide in-kind office space to the Chamber for the position to help offset some of the budgetary costs to the TDA. Chair

Tarbutton recommended \$3,000 a year or \$250 per month as a possible consideration.

Member Bullis requested that the Board not cut the budgeted advertising funds and minimize any part-time salaries reductions if possible in trying to fund the request.

After some discussion, it was consensus that the Authority participate in funding event coordination services for FY 2010-11. The funding would be obtained by reallocating **\$7,000** from Event support, **\$2,000** from Part-time Salaries, providing in-kind office space at **\$3,000** (\$250/month), taking advantage of funding the position for only the 11 month balance of the fiscal year resulting in a salary reduction of **\$1,200**, and with Executive Director Brown identifying **\$800** in funding from his current budget. Chairman Tarbutton stated the funding would have to be approved on a year to year basis.

Executive Director Brown stressed that the reallocation of money would reduce the available funds for event support and as a result the events would have to cover the costs for items such as staging, sound, tents, bands, etc. All concurred.

Member Dyer commented that the Chamber and TDA must invest in better planning and coordination of events in order to improve the quality of the events. In return, the events should generate more revenue. Chamber Executive Director Hardin agreed and stated that in time it was the goal for the Chamber of Commerce to absorb funding for the position from event revenues.

Chair Tarbutton stated that the free publicity generated from quality events produced a greater return than any paid advertisement the TDA could obtain.

At the conclusion of the discussion, motion by Member Bullis and seconded by Member Pickett to partner with the Chamber on event planner coordination services for FY 2010-11 contingent on the Chamber Board accepting the TDA in-lieu office space contribution as part of the funding. Unanimously approved.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

Mr. Hildebran stated that the Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee met in June and discussed the following items:

- Town Council will consider a Town Center Zoning District at their July Council meeting. The purpose of the district is to preserve the character of the downtown area.
- Blowing Rock Historical Society President will update the Retail Strategy Committee on the possibility of a Downtown National Registry Historical Designation District at their July meeting.

Chair Tarbutton thanked Mr. Hildebran for his update.

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 4:15 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - Occupancy Tax Report

#2 - Smith Advertising Proposal