

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – February 21, 2011**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Monday, February 21, 2011 at 3:30 p.m. in a special meeting at Town Hall. Present were Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Dean Bullis, Phil Pickett, Rob Dyer and Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran. Executive Director Tracy Brown was also present. Vice-Chair Lynn Drury was out of state but participated via telephone.

Ex-officio member Nicole Norman was absent due to maternity leave.

Call to Order

Chairperson Kent Tarbutton called the meeting to order and welcomed the members.

Visitor Center

Chair Tarbutton began by stating that the NC Department of Transportation, due to the pending US 321 Widening Project, had purchased the Visitor Center property from the Town of Blowing Rock. As such, the TDA needed to determine a future location of the Visitor Center and/or TDA operations.

Mr. Hildebran stated once formally notified by NCDOT to vacate the premises, the TDA would have 90 days to leave the property (probably the end of May or June 2011).

Mr. Tarbutton advised that the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce, a tenant of the Visitor Center, was meeting this afternoon to discuss their future possibilities as well – Chamber relocation, buy or lease of facilities, consideration of requesting the TDA to contract Visitor Center operations with the Chamber and other operational issues.

After some discussion, the Authority agreed, that due to upcoming construction on the US 321 Bypass, they desired a downtown location. Also, they agreed that leasing space at this time would be preferable to buying property and provide the TDA with more flexibility when considering future options.

As a follow-up to their November 2010 meeting, the Authority briefly reviewed the various options explored by the TDA over the past few months - the old Robbins House (Park Avenue), White Pictorial Museum (Memorial Park), Ice House (Maple Street), Boone/Watauga TDA & High Country Host effort, Edgewood Cottage (Main Street), Blowing Rock Art & History Museum (Main Street), Scotchman (Valley Boulevard), Tanawha Building (Valley Boulevard), Rug Company (Main Street), High Country Cabinets (Valley Boulevard), Liz Claiborne (Valley Boulevard), Mongelluzzi Building (Valley Boulevard), etc. Issues such as access, ADA compliance, parking, restrooms and costs were mentioned.

Based on this background, Mr. Hildebran advised that the TDA approached the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum (BRAHM) regarding any interest in sharing space in the

new museum located on the south end of Main Street. As such, BRAHM drafted a proposed lease for TDA consideration (**Attachment #1**).

The proposed lease would be for a three-year term at \$3,250 per month or \$39,000 per year. Included in that amount is \$250 per month or \$3,000 per year which would cover building restroom cleaning/maintenance. The TDA would lease a designated 600 square feet and have shared access to an additional 4,200 square feet. The rent would include utilities, maintenance, etc. The TDA would be entitled to renew the lease for an additional year (4th year) and either party could terminate the lease with a 90 day written notice.

Executive Director Tracy Brown informed the Authority that BRAHM had also met with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce about leasing space in the new museum as well.

Mr. Hildebran also advised that the Town Council had granted BRAHM the authority to lease space to the TDA, the Chamber of Commerce and to a third party to run a gift shop. Further, Town Attorney Allen Moseley had reviewed the draft lease under consideration and made revisions as required.

With abundant parking, new public restrooms (in the museum and at the parking structure), state of the art facilities, and the potential collaborative opportunities among the TDA, BRAHM and the Chamber of Commerce, the Authority agreed that the BRAHM lease was their best location option.

Motion by Member Pickett, seconded by Member Dyer, to - 1) inform BRAHM that the proposed lease was their preferred option, 2) grant the Chamber of Commerce an additional week to provide the TDA with additional proposals/options, and 3) schedule a meeting on Monday, February 28, 2011 at 11:00 a.m. to finalize a decision and consider adoption of the proposed lease. Unanimously approved.

Vice-Chair Drury departed the meeting (via telephone) at this time.

Financial Report

Chair Tarbutton introduced Ex-officio Member Scott Hildebran to review the FY 2010-11 Occupancy Tax collections to date.

Mr. Hildebran reviewed the FY 2010-11 Occupancy Tax collections fiscal year-to-date through January 2011. He stated that occupancy tax revenues for July-January were up approximately 15.61% (or \$68,505) compared to the same period in 2009-10, with two entities not yet reporting for January. For the month of January 2011, occupancy tax revenue was up 4.30% (or \$1,344) compared to January 2010, with two entities not yet reporting for January.

Update of TDA Strategic Plan

Chair Tarbutton advised that several weeks ago he forwarded several proposed goals for review and discussion for possible integration into the 2011 TDA Strategic Plan Update.

He stated that goals for consideration included –

- Selection of a Visitor Center Location (*discussed earlier in the meeting*)
- Occupancy Tax Collections growth
- Consolidation of efforts regarding Weekends/After Hours Call Center and Fulfillment
- Development of Electronic Travel Smartphone Applications for “Things to do” and Tourism Amenities in the area
- Pay for Performance Program for Director Compensation

After some discussion, the Authority agreed to the following –

- Establish a 2011 goal of 10% growth in Occupancy Tax Collections.
- Continue dialogue with other tourism entities for possible consolidation of efforts regarding Weekends/After Hours Call Center and Fulfillment.
- Continue to pursue Development of Electronic Travel Smartphone Applications for “Things to do” and Tourism Amenities in the area (and utilization of QR Codes).

Executive Director Brown departed the meeting at this time.

- Continue to investigate a Pay for Performance Program for Director Compensation.

Chairperson Tarbutton stated that he would follow-up on these items and report back at the April TDA meeting.

Special Meeting

Chair Tarbutton reminded the Authority of the special meeting scheduled for 11:00 a.m. on Monday, February 28, 2011 at Town Hall to finalize a visitor center location.

In addition, the TDA annual joint meeting with Town Council will be held on Monday, February 28, 2011 at 5:00 p.m. at Town Hall.

Adjournment

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

Kent Tarbutton, Chair

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 – Draft BRAHM-TDA Lease