

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – May 3, 2011**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, May 3, 2011 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Dean Bullis, Phil Pickett and Lianne Mattar, Ex-officio members Nicole Norman and Scott Hildebran and Executive Director Tracy Brown.

Member Rob Dyer was out of town.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – April 5, 2011

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the April 5, 2011 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Bullis to approve the April 5, 2011 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

Vice-Chair Selection

Chairperson Tarbutton advised that with the retirement of Lynn Drury from the Authority, that a new vice-chair was in order. After some discussion, motion by Member Bullis and seconded by Member Pickett to appoint Member Rob Dyer as vice-chair of the TDA. Unanimously approved.

Executive Director Brown texted Mr. Dyer during the meeting and he advised he would accept the appointment.

Financial Report

Ex-Officio Member Norman briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2010-11 Occupancy Tax collections fiscal year-to-date through March 2011. She stated that occupancy tax revenues were up approximately 15.86% (or \$76,220) compared to the same nine-month period of 2010. For the month of March 2011, occupancy tax revenue was up 30.00% (or \$5,020) from March 2010. (**Attachment #1**)

Ms. Norman then reviewed in detail the Revenue and Expenditures for the year and advised they were in line with projections. She reminded the Authority of two budget-related items from earlier in the fiscal year that would more than likely be covered by growth in occupancy revenues – Special Event funding inadvertently omitted out of the FY 2010-11 Budget and the funding for ½ the costs of an Event Planner in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce.

The Board briefly reviewed the outstanding occupancy tax penalties from FY 2008-09 and was advised that their collection was not likely due to the corporation closure.

Board members also shared that April occupancy numbers were looking positive.

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 distributed to Board members the previous week.

Mr. Brown then discussed –

- New signage welcoming Birders to Blowing Rock and the Proclamation by Mayor J.B. Lawrence making May Birder Month in the town.
- Hosted two (2) travel writers and a photographer. They came to the TDA through the NC Division of Tourism. Ronald D. Gerste of Washington, DC is on assignment for a German publication called *America Journal*. The other group is from the UK and led by Tim Hirshmann, who is the publisher of *The Culinary Guide of the UK*.
- Upcoming ads now are general in nature with a few exceptions like Return to Mitford.
- High Country Co-Op advertising campaign continues, with a new website landing page (work in progress) that will route visitors to a specific High Country Co-Op page.
- Although terrible weather and lower attendance, Wine Festival comments have been positive.
- Hosting a 30 person group from *Our State Magazine* that are taking part in a NC Road Trip. The group will be visiting Tweetsie, Cone Manor and Chetola for lunch and receiving a presentation by Phil Noblitt who wrote [A Mansion in the Mountains](#) on the Cones.
- Will be travelling to Fontana for a couple days next week to attend the Blue Ridge Parkway Association board meeting.
- Chamber of Commerce will be relocating from the Visitor Center to the old Robbins House due to the NC Department of Transportation US 321 widening project in early May.

Chairperson Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

FY 2011-12 TDA Budget

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran, Ex-Officio Member Norman and Executive Director Brown reviewed a draft copy of the proposed FY 2011-12 TDA Budget. (**Attachment #2**)

The FY 2011-12 proposed budget totals \$685,480, with \$684,980 from occupancy tax proceeds, slightly up from the FY 2010-11 adopted budget of \$683,125, with \$660,000 from occupancy tax proceeds. The proposed budget reflects the loss of rental income from the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce and the upcoming TDA move to the new Blowing Rock Art & History Museum in October of 2011.

The Board discussed that the recent renovation of the Holiday Inn Express and the reopening of the Green Park Inn had aided in improved occupancy taxes.

Mr. Hildebran briefly reviewed the town portion of the proposed budget with the Authority – i.e. signage, parking, landscaping/beautification in the downtown area.

The Board agreed to schedule a budget worksession for Thursday, May 19, 2011 at 2:00 p.m. Chair Tarbutton requested the Authority review the proposed budget and be ready to discuss it at the worksession.

Mr. Hildebran reminded the Authority that the public hearing on the proposed budget is scheduled for the June 7, 2011 TDA meeting at 3:30 p.m.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

Chair Tarbutton stated that the Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee met in April and welcomed Planning Board Vice-Chair Debbie diSanti to the committee. The Committee heard a presentation on the proposed Middle Fork Greenway from Blowing Rock to Boone and discussed the potential tourism benefit of the project. The Town of Blowing Rock recently adopted a resolution supporting the effort of the Middle Fork Greenway.

After a brief discussion, motion by Member Bullis and seconded by Member Mattar to request Executive Director Brown draft a letter of support for the Middle Fork Greenway Project. Motion unanimously approved.

Ex-officio Member Hildebran noted that Mr. Tarbutton was elected Chairperson of the Retail Strategy Committee.

Other

Chair Tarbutton updated the Authority on the current efforts to revamp the High Country Host and improve efficiencies for tourism partnerships. He discussed the possibility of the High Country Host Visitor Center relocation and closure due to State budget cuts and potential cost sharing arrangements that may include staffing, joint marketing, fulfillment, website, etc. He informed the Board of an upcoming meeting on June 23, 2011 of the Host to discuss future direction.

The Authority discussed the importance of collaboration efforts and the involvement with other area TDAs, especially with co-ops. All reaffirmed that the Blowing Rock TDA will continue to work cooperatively with other tourism promoting agencies when beneficial to Blowing Rock.

It was the consensus that the Authority will continue to monitor the issue.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Mattar to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Tarbutton reminded the

Authority of the upcoming Budget Worksession on Thursday, May 19, 2011 at 2:00 p.m.
at Town Hall and then adjourned the meeting at 4:40 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - Occupancy Report

#2 - Proposed FY 2011-12 TDA Budget