

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – July 5, 2011**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, July 5, 2011 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Dean Bullis, Lianne Mattar and Phil Pickett, Ex-officio members Nicole Norman and Scott Hildebran, and Executive Director Tracy Brown.

Vice-Chair 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 – June 7 & June 30, 2011

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the June 7 & June 30, 2011 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Bullis and seconded by Member Pickett to approve the June 7 & June 30, 2011 meeting minutes as presented. Unanimously approved.

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 May 2011. She stated that occupancy tax revenues were up approximately 14.53% (or \$80,170) compared to the same eleven-month period of FY 2009-10. For the month of May 2011, occupancy tax revenue was up 10.00% (or \$4,065) from May 2010, with one entity not reporting. **(Attachment #1)**

Ms. Norman stated that the recently approved closeout budget amendment had not been incorporated into the financial statement. But with the recent amendment, overall expenditures for the year were mostly in line with projections. Board members shared that June 2011 occupancy numbers for their establishments were relatively flat compared to June 2010 numbers.

With no further questions/comments, Chairman Tarbutton moved to the Operations Activity Report.

Operations Activity Report

Executive Director Brown stated that the Authority had recently received his bi-weekly update on the Operations and Visitor Center activities. He advised that he would answer questions on any items from the report, if needed.

Mr. Brown then reviewed the proposed Media Schedule for FY 2011-12. He stated that approximately \$100,000 was designated for media, which includes earmarks of \$10,000 for Blowing Rock Winterfest and \$10,000 for the Blue Ridge Wine Festival. Of the \$80,000, \$15,000 is designated for High Country Host Co-ops.

Some of the publications include –*Triad Living, Atlanta Magazine, Our State, Oprah, Garden and Gun Magazine, Outside Living, Charlotte Living, Blue Ridge Outdoors*. The media plan also uses Google adwords, E-blasts, travels guides and some radio.

Chair Tarbutton updated the Authority on the cooperative effort led by the High County Host for joint advertising. The group is made up of area TDA's and Chamber of Commerce's, attractions and private businesses. All combined, the groups leverage more than \$250,000 in cooperative buys that minimize duplication, meetings and time as well as provide greater exposure for the area.

Mr. Brown reminded the Authority that Heidi Lusk, owner of The Meridian Agency, continues as our marketing agent.

Mr. Brown also informed the Authority that the TDA has completed the development of a mobile application for Blowing Rock tourism information for use with smartphones.

Chair Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his update.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

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

- Project updates on the Town Streetscape and Downtown paving were given (Park Avenue and the Maple Street Parking Lot being paved and Phase II of the Streetscape being completed).
- Blowing Rock Historical Society President will update the Retail Strategy Committee on the possibility of a Downtown National Registry Historical Designation District at their August meeting.

Member Pickett asked if the Chamber of Commerce had finalized plans for the use of tent anchors for the Wine Festival and use of the Maple Street Parking lot. Mr. Hildebran responded that the Chamber is receiving contractor quotes on the cost and would probably approach Town Council at some date in the near future.

With no further comments, Chair Tarbutton then moved to the next item.

Update of TDA Strategic Plan

Chair Tarbutton advised that in February the TDA integrated several new goals into the 2011 TDA Strategic Plan Update. These included –

- 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).

At the June 30 TDA worksession, he requested members to bring their top three goals for the FY 2011-12 Budget year for the Authority to review and discuss for possible additional integration into the TDA Strategic Plan Update.

After some discussion, the Authority agreed to the following –

- 1) Work with the Blowing Rock Lodging Group to improve coordination, communications and participation by hoteliers in the development of packaging/specials to increase occupancy.
- 2) Incorporate use of website address on TDA visitor signage and continue cooperative relationship with Tanger Outlet with TDA kiosk location.
- 3) Continue to pursue the goals established in February.

Other

Chair Tarbutton asked if there any additional items for discussion. The Authority then discussed the recent Blowing Rock 4th of July Festival weekend and activities. Most agreed attendance for the activities were near record levels resulting in sound lodging and retail numbers.

The Authority suggested a greater variety in the music genres for bands in Memorial Park during this festival to greater reflect the visitor preferences.

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 4:45 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - Occupancy Tax Report