

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

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Monday, November 21, 2011 at 9:00 a.m. in a regular meeting held at Chetola Resort (Equestrian Room). Present were Chair Kent Tarbutton, Vice-Chair Rob Dyer, Authority members Dean Bullis, Phil Pickett, Lianne Mattar and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Nicole Norman. Executive Director Tracy Brown was also present.

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes – October 4, 2011**

Chair Tarbutton entertained the approval of the October 4, 2011 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Mattar to approve the October 4, 2011 meeting minutes as presented. Unanimously approved.

**FY 2010-11 Annual Audit Report**

Chair Tarbutton then introduced TDA Auditor Jason Carpenter of Combs, Tennant & Carpenter, P.C. to review the FY 2010-11 audit.

Auditor Carpenter stated that the report came with a clean opinion and that the audit complies with the Governmental Accounting Standards Board 34 requirements. Mr. Carpenter stated that the TDA ended the fiscal year with \$222,168 in net assets compared with \$223,740 in FY 2009-10. The year-end unassigned fund balance totals \$148,456 compared to \$142,976 in FY 2009-10. Mr. Carpenter commended staff on their accounting efforts during the year to bring the budget into balance in light of the current economic conditions.

He stated that should any member have questions about anything in the audit after their review, to please give him a call.

After a brief discussion, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Dyer to accept the FY 2010-11 Annual Audit Report as presented. Unanimously approved.

**(Attachment #1)**

The Authority thanked Auditor Carpenter for his audit report and he departed the meeting.

Chair Tarbutton then entertained approval of the FY 2011-12 Audit Contract with Combs, Tennant & Carpenter, P.C. for Authority consideration. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Dyer to adopt a FY 2011-12 Audit Contract with Combs, Tennant & Carpenter, P.C. for \$3,500 (same price as FY 2009-10 and FY 2010-11) as presented. Unanimously approved. **(Attachment #2)**

### **Marketing Efforts/Event Activities**

At this time, Chair Tarbutton posed the question to the Authority - "as you look at the TDA Marketing Efforts/Event Activities, what should we do differently or explore?"

Thoughts/Suggestions included -

- Expand use of Social Media – blogging/texting/Facebook
- Take advantage of the Blowing Rock draws – village atmosphere and beauty
- Direct more efforts at Groups Sales. Targeting Groups w/in 2-3 hour drive
- Create “Up and Down Packages” (March & May) – Come Up to BR with Prices Down for lodging, restaurants and retail – Target groups, i.e. Teachers, AAA, Credit Union, AARP, Homeschoolers
- Expand educational opportunities for technology for hotels – work w/ Chamber and High Country Host
- Continually work to enhance communication among hoteliers
- Continue to collaborate with current attractions – BRAHM, Hayes Center, Ski Mountain, etc.

Member Dyer departed the meeting due to another commitment.

- Try to expand the Outdoor Recreation market – Bicycling, running, hiking, birding (Lora Elder, Zap Fitness, etc.)
- Investigate a hotel shuttle service to ASU football games (Air Haven Shuttle Service in Boone, AppalCart, ASU transportation, etc.) to encourage Blowing Rock overnight stays.
- Expand in-town shuttle service during peak season weekends and during high traffic events.
- Consider Main Street Events – keep in mind US 321 widening, closure issues and logistics
- Create a Music Festival Weekend – various venues and music genres
- Increase collaboration with Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show. (Also, consider shuttle service during event.)
- Collaborate with Parkway

After an extended discussion, the Authority discussed examining the various suggestions and scheduling meetings with the appropriate entities to ascertain their viability. Mr. Brown agreed to conduct background research on the suggestions and forward any information collected on the items to the Authority.

Chair Tarbutton thanked the members for their input and welcomed their participation with any follow-up as the suggestions are reviewed.

### **Financial Report**

Chair Tarbutton introduced Finance Officer Nicole Norman and requested she review the FY 2011-12 Occupancy Tax collections and Financial Statements to date.

Finance Officer Norman reviewed the FY 2011-12 Occupancy Tax collections fiscal year-to-date through October 2011. She stated that occupancy tax revenues for July-October were down approximately 0.17% (or \$635) compared to the same period in 2010. For the month of October 2011, occupancy tax revenue was down 3.96% (or \$4,375) compared to October 2010.

Ex-Officio Member Norman then briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement stating that revenues and expenses were in line with projections for the period. She noted that moving-related expenses and a required actuarial study for the FY 2011-12 Audit were a few unanticipated expenses, but otherwise all was in-line.

The Authority briefly discussed the effects of Cliff Dwellers Inn and Maple Lodge closure on the occupancy tax numbers. It was noted that Cliff Dwellers was undergoing a \$225,000 renovation and was in the process of gradual reopening.

### **Operations Activity Report**

Executive Director Brown highlighted ongoing items regarding Visitor Center Operations.

- The Visitor Center relocation to the Blowing Art and History Museum (BRAHM) has gone well, with a few items still being completed.
- Staffing level is good, using fewer employees today than prior to the move to BRAHM.
- Bob Timberlake visited the Center and was happy with furnishings display.
- Advertising – \$18,563 - Beyond yearly placement such as NC Travel Guide, High Country Host Vacation Planner and Blue Ridge Parkway Directory, quarterly placements include:
  - a. BRAHM Arts and Antiques Show + Grand Opening-print, radio and TV
  - b. Better Homes and Gardens
  - c. Oprah
  - d. Atlanta Magazine
  - e. Our State Magazine
  - f. Google AdWords

- Collaboration –
  - a. Re-signed with the High Country Co-Op for \$15k.
  - b. Worked with NC Division of Tourism and HC Co-Op on sweepstakes in Good Housekeeping Magazine and VisitNC.com.
  - c. Worked with BRAHM on grand opening and Arts and Antiques Weekend.
  - d. Hayes Performing Arts Center and BRAHM both have great placement in the Visitor Guide and on the website.
  - e. Placing \$10k in media now for Winterfest through Marcia Greene and Winterfest Committee.
  - g. Continue to serve on HC Host Board and PR Committee.
  - h. Continue to serve on BRPA Board.
  - i. Continue to work with BRP, NPS, NC Division of Tourism (both VisitNC extranet and PR) and local Chamber's.
- Articles – directly related to our involvement, including *Raleigh Downtowner*, *GeoParent*, *AARP*, *Winston Salem Journal*, *Lake Norman Magazine*, *US Airways*, *Katie Talks Carolina*, *Asheville Citizen Times*, *Examiner – Luxury Travel*, and *Stark Insider*
- Website – Now Mobile and across all platforms
- Collateral
  - a. Visitor Guide and Maps updated
  - b. Kiosk maps and listings updated
  - d. Restaurant guides
  - e. Accommodations guide
  - f. Hiking maps
  - g. Through Visitor Center provide BRP driving maps and hiking guides
- Tracking
  - a. Continue to use specific URL's for specific ads, events and promotions.
  - b. Continue to use reader responses from regional media buys in publications like Oprah and Better Homes and Gardens.
- General Communication and PR
  - a. Tattler continues to be our weekly communication with constituents.
  - b. Press releases to general public focusing on industry news
  - c. Facebook

Chair Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

### **Infrastructure Support**

Ex-officio Member Hildebran provided an update on infrastructure-related TDA expenditures referring to the TDA Adopted FY 2011-12 Budget which outlined approved expenses.

### *Streets/Sidewalks*

He reported that Phase II of the Downtown Streetscape improvements was complete and that Phase III would begin next spring/summer. Phase II included the area located in front of Town Hall and the Library and at Memorial Park. As part of this phase, the NC Department of Transportation funded drainage improvements in front of Town Hall.

Phase III includes the area in front of St. Mary's Church.

### *Parking*

Ex-officio Member Hildebran advised that the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum Parking Facility was complete, adding 59 new parking spaces on the deck and 5 additional spaces adjacent to Edgewood Cottage.

### *Restrooms*

Mr. Hildebran mentioned that the new Blowing Rock Art and History Museum parking area included public restrooms and with the new Visitor Center location in the museum, those restrooms are open to the public as well.

### *Master Signage Plan*

Ex-officio Member Hildebran reported that an additional directional kiosk sign had been placed at Blowing Rock Art & History Museum Parking Facility to inform visitors of retail, dining and lodging in town. Kiosks are also located at the Maple Street Parking Lot, American Legion Parking Facility, Main Street and Tanger Outlet.

### *Other*

- The Boone-Blowing Rock Water Interconnection was also recently completed.
- The Town has taken over the American Legion Building.
- Appalachian Regional Healthcare has received a Certificate of Need from the State of NC for a new Blowing Rock facility on property adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway.

### **Downtown Retail Strategy - Update**

Ex-officio Member Hildebran reported that the Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee continues to meet bi-monthly to work on elements of the study. The next meeting is scheduled in January 2012. The group continues to collaborate on many of the issues discussed throughout the meeting and provides for improved communication flow.

### **Other Business**

Chairperson Tarbutton encouraged members to review the TDA Strategic Plan and be prepared at the April 2012 meeting with suggestions/recommendations for strategic goals for the upcoming year.

### **Next Meeting**

Chair Tarbutton reminded the Authority that the next regular meeting is scheduled for 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 3, 2012 and acknowledged the likely need for a special

meeting to further discuss future marketing/events once viability research is complete.

**Adjournment**

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Bullis to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chair Tarbutton adjourned the meeting at 11:25 a.m.

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Kent Tarbutton, Chair

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

**Attachments**

**#1 – FY 2010-11 Annual Audit Report**

**#2 – FY 2011-12 Audit Contract**