

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – April 3, 2012**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, April 3, 2012 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairman Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Lianne Mattar and Dean Bullis, Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran and Nicole Norman, and Executive Director Tracy Brown. TDA-Appointee Doug Matheson was also in attendance.

Vice-Chair Rob Dyer was absent.

Call to Order

Chairman Tarbutton called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance. He advised Member Dyer had a last minute interruption and was unable to attend.

Oath of Office

At this time, Town Clerk Sharon Greene performed the swearing in of Doug Matheson to his 3-year term on the Tourism Development Authority. (**Attachment #1**)

Chairman Tarbutton and the Authority welcomed Mr. Matheson. The Board thanked retiring Member Phillip Pickett for his years of public service.

Approval of Minutes – November 21, 2011 and March 19, 2012 Joint Meeting

Chairman Tarbutton entertained the approval of the November 21, 2011 and March 19, 2012 Joint Meeting minutes. Motion by Member Mattar and seconded by Member Bullis to approve the November 21, 2011 and March 19, 2012 Joint Meeting minutes as written. Unanimously approved.

Operations Activity Report

Executive Director Brown briefly highlighted several items from the Operations Activity Report.

Mr. Brown discussed –

- The Visitor Center relocation to the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum (BRAHM) continues to go well, with Visitor Center quarterly indicators up – walk-ups, website, brochure distribution, etc.
- The 321 road work has generated some concern by seasonal residents and a few others and has prompted a letter or two to town hall along with a letter to the editor at the Charlotte Observer. Staff created a generic response to that type of sentiment that we can tweak to address specific complaints.
- Mr. Brown advised that he will be a guest speaker at an ASU Hospitality Management class in the next week.
- Starting April 12th, Mr. Brown will be on a 10 day trip with the Blue Ridge Parkway Association and the annual AAA FAM tour, taking about 20 AAA travel counselors on a FAM tour up the entire Parkway, stopping in gateway towns every day and

taking in the sights. The trip should be good for Blowing Rock and allow us to really put a spotlight on our region of the Parkway.

- Cele and Lynn Seldon have assisted in promoting the Wine Festival and have been regular attendees of the festival for several years.
- Our designation of a “Prettiest Winter Town” continues to get attention along with the Trout Derby.
- Carol Timblin and others who visited during our last Winter FAM Tour have gotten more Blowing Rock stories posted.
- Staff worked to get added to the NC Retirement page through the Division of Tourism.
- Upcoming co-ops/marketing – a series of billboards that we will run for the next several months as a part of the High Country co-op in the Greensboro and Charlotte markets, Atlanta Magazine, print ads for the Blue Ridge Wine Festival, a couple of radio spots for the Wine Festival running in Greensboro and Charlotte, an advertorial that ran in Lake Norman Magazine promoting Wine Fest and a piece that will be running in May/June in US Airways Magazine.

Chairperson Tarbutton commended Mr. Brown for his efforts.

Financial Report & Operations Report

Chairperson Tarbutton requested Ex-officio Member Norman to provide an update on the financial statement and occupancy tax collections. Ex-Officio Member Norman briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement stating that revenues and expenses were in line with projections for the period. She noted that one-time expenses such as workers comp and liability insurance were paid early in the fiscal year causing these expenses to appear out of line.

Finance Officer Norman then reviewed the FY 2011-12 Occupancy Tax collections for the fiscal year-to-date through February 2012. She stated that occupancy tax revenues for February were up approximately 11.54% (or \$3,175) compared to the same month in 2011. For the year-to-date through February, occupancy tax revenue was down 1.52% (or \$8,145) compared to the same period in FY 2010-11. (**Attachment #2**)

Chair Tarbutton reminded the Authority that the Maple Lodge would be reopening soon and that all properties would then be open.

Executive Director Brown also stated the TDA expected some reimbursement monies from the NC Department of Transportation due to relocation, at a sum of at least \$4,100.

It was also announced that the Oasis Shriners had selected Blowing Rock for their 2013, 2014 and 2015 Ceremonial in addition to their June 2012 event. All agreed that the event provided a positive bump to local occupancy.

High Country Host

Chair Tarbutton updated the Authority on the cooperative effort led by the High Country Host for joint advertising/marketing. 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-\$300,000 in cooperative buys that minimize duplication, meetings and time as well as provide greater exposure for the area. Their upcoming annual meeting will provide participants with educational assistance in marketing, packaging, social media, etc.

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. Recent results include:

- Work on the Downtown Streetscape Phase III (St. Mary's to Storie Street) drainage is underway. Work on the overall project will begin after July 1 of this year.
- NCDOT will begin repaving Main Street in mid-April, with the work scheduled at night.
- The Town is still seeking donations for the Robbins Pool Picnic Shelter. The Watauga High School Vocational class is constructing the shelter as a project at no cost to the Town.
- The Main Street benches have been placed with sooner than expected warm temperatures.
- Town Clean-up Day will be held on Saturday, April 21st at 9:00 a.m.
- The BRAHM Parking kiosk recently had a roof installed to match all of the other information kiosks located throughout downtown.
- Downtown Parking Enforcement will begin in late May.
- The Town Comprehensive Plan Update is in the planning stages. A new survey will be distributed later this summer. Questions will include thoughts on 28-day rental.

Chair Tarbutton followed-up with questions on two items –short term rental and paid parking. He advised that the Town Council broached the subject during their recent joint meeting and he asked what the next steps were the next steps. Mr. Hildebran responded that the upcoming town survey may provide some guidance on the issue.

Chair Tarbutton also asked the Authority about their thoughts on paid parking since the TDA had supported the funding of new parking facilities and the Hyett-Palma Retail Study had recommended free parking. Executive Director Brown advised that our mountain town competition did not charge for parking. Member Bullis stated that any additional charges for customers in this economy would hurt retail business. Member Mattar agreed. Chair Tarbutton stated that occupancy tax funds were already paying for parking and guests staying at lodging would then in essence be paying twice. He suggested that the Authority, as the Town's tourism advocate, inform Town Council of their opinion.

After some discussion on the possible use of shuttles and trolleys, motion by Member Bullis and seconded by Member Mattar to draft a letter to the Town Council expressing opposition to paid parking in downtown Blowing Rock. Unanimously approved.

The Board also noted that the warmer temperatures seemed to have increased foot traffic on Main Street. They also discussed the impact gas prices may have on the season.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Bullis and seconded by Member Matheson to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, May 2012 at 3:30 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachment #1 – Matheson Oath of Office
Attachment #2 – Occupancy Tax Report