

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – May 1, 2012**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, May 1, 2012 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Rob Dyer, Dean Bullis, Doug Matheson and Lianne Mattar, Ex-officio members Nicole Norman and Scott Hildebran and Executive Director Tracy Brown.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – April 3, 2012

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the April 3, 2012 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Mattar and seconded by Member Bullis to approve the April 3, 2012 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

Financial Report

Ex-Officio Member Norman briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2011-12 Occupancy Tax collections fiscal year-to-date through March 2012. She stated occupancy tax collections for March 2012 came in \$2,290 or 10.54% above March 2011 totals. FY 2011-12 totals to date now only trail FY 2010-11 totals (through March) by \$5,855 or 1.05%. (**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 an upcoming payment from NCDOT for reimbursement of moving expenses related to their Visitor Center purchase. Mr. Hildebran advised the paperwork had been completed and anticipated a \$4-5,000 payment.

The Board briefly discussed outstanding occupancy tax from earlier years and was advised that their collection was not likely due to the corporation closure. It was also noted the uncollectable amount was nominal.

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

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 April indicators up – walk-ups, website, brochure distribution, etc.
- Mr. Brown participated in 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. Chair Tarbutton commented that he attended the High Country stopover and Mr. Brown’s participation provided a great opportunity for Blowing Rock to be in the spotlight.
- A Wine Festival report would be delivered at the June meeting.
- Mr. Brown will be attending an upcoming meeting of the Parkway Association in Gatlinburg, TN.
- 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 as well as ads in *Oprah Magazine*, *Better Homes & Gardens*, a 15-page spread in the May issue of *US Airways Magazine* which includes Green Park Inn, West Glow Spa and Timberlake Inn at Chetola. Other upcoming items - an implied endorsement in *AAA GO Magazine*, ads in *Blue Ridge Magazine*, *Blue Ridge Parkway Directory*, *Outside Magazine* and the use of SMS texting and QR Codes on flyers.

Chairperson Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

High Country Host

Chair Tarbutton updated the Authority on the cooperative effort led by the High Country Host for joint advertising/marketing and stated it was a vehicle to market the area. 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. They typically buy general ads which highlight attractions, beauty, skiing, golfing, outdoor recreation, etc.

He briefly discussed a recent strategic meeting in which discussions were held on the ever-changing marketing trends and technology as well as the evolving traveler trends.

Chair Tarbutton reminded the Authority of the upcoming High Country Host Annual Meeting to be held On June 14, 2012 from 1:30-6:00 p.m. and that it will provide participants with educational assistance in marketing, packaging, social media, etc.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

Ex-officio Member Hildebran reported that the next Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee meeting would be held in late May. Chair Tarbutton stated that at that time the Committee would discuss their annual goals/accomplishments as to the Retail Study.

FY 2012-13 TDA Budget

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran, Ex-Officio Member Norman and Executive Director Brown reviewed a draft copy of the proposed FY 2012-13 TDA Budget. (**Attachment #2**)

The FY 2012-13 proposed budget totals \$687,480 which is up nominally from the current \$685,480 budget, with overall occupancy taxes estimated at 684,980, the same as the current budget year.

Mr. Brown stated the budget line-items are relatively flat and that the 2012-13 Media Plan was in development at this time and would be a component of the proposed budget.

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 Tuesday, June 5, 2012 at 2:00 p.m. at Town Hall prior to their regular meeting at 3:30 p.m. Chair Tarbutton requested the Authority review the proposed budget and be ready to discuss it at the worksession. He also requested that Executive Director Brown develop a plan for several routes and obtain some costs estimates for a visitor shuttle operation that the Board could discuss at their worksession. The Board also agreed to review the terms of the funding commitment on the event planner position shared with the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Hildebran reminded the Authority that the public hearing on the proposed budget is scheduled for June 5 at 3:30 p.m.

Other

Chair Tarbutton stated at the recent joint meeting with the Town Council two items were raised – short term rental and paid parking. He advised that last month the TDA agreed to draft a letter to the Town Council expressing TDA opposition to paid parking in downtown Blowing Rock, but took no action regarding short term rental.

He asked if the TDA wanted to take a formal position on short term rental. The Authority discussed that the Town Comprehensive Plan Update is in the planning stages. The new survey will include questions regarding short-term rental. The Authority felt that the upcoming town survey would provide guidance on the issue.

The Authority agreed that the issue was controversial. Discussion and comments included - major neighborhood concerns such as noise & trash, not allowed since 1994 and if allowed may change neighborhood dynamics and affect tourism negatively, may impact hotels/motels by taking guests away and into private homes, might increase occupancy tax and provide revenues for marketing/projects, local residents historically have opposed short-term rental, it's a political decision.

After some discussion, the Authority agreed that no position would be taken at this time pending the Comprehensive Plan survey.

Adjournment

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

Authority of the upcoming Budget Worksession on Tuesday, June 5, 2012 at 2:00 p.m. at Town Hall prior to their regular meeting at 3:30 p.m. and then adjourned the meeting at 5:20 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - Occupancy Report

#2 - Proposed FY 2012-13 TDA Budget