

Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes - October 2, 2012

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, October 2, 2012 at 3:36 p.m. in a regular meeting at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Vice-Chair Rob Dyer, Authority members Doug Matheson, Dean Bullis and Lianne Mattar, Ex-officio member Nicole Norman and Executive Director Tracy Brown.

Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran was out of town and unable to attend the meeting.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes- July 3, 2012

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained approval of the July 3, 2012 meeting minutes. Motion by member Dyer and seconded by member Bullis to approve the minutes as written. Unanimously approved.

Financial Report

Ex-officio member Norman briefly reviewed the FY 2012-2013 Occupancy Tax collections to date. She stated that collections for the month of August 2012 compared to August 2011 were up by 4.18% or \$3,759.09, while collections fiscal year-to-date for FY 2012-2013 compared to FY 2011-2012, were down 3.82% or \$7,998.82. She also noted that a chart to be distributed later in the meeting shows calendar year to date collection for 2012 to be up 4.26% or \$18,516 in comparison to the first quarter of calendar year 2011. (**Attachment #1**)

The financial statements were then reviewed, with Ms. Norman informing the Authority that the financial software was 99% recovered and as a result a financial report was available for the meeting. She commended Executive Director Brown for keeping expenditures for the most part in line while not having an expense update in several months due to the hard drive failure. Ms. Norman reported that at 25% into the fiscal year revenue and expenditures were in line with budget expectations. Chair Tarbutton inquired about several line items. Ms. Norman noted that items such as postage & property/liability insurance were above budget expectations at this time. Due to the fact that an annual lump sum payment is made for property/liability & works compensation insurance, that line appeared above budget. Executive Director Brown also explained that bulk mailings had been the cause of the postage line item to be up at this time.

Mr. Brown expressed his intent to end the postage machine lease agreement with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce when able and instead pay for postage and lease portion with the

Town in an effort to save in postage expense due to the lower lease price with the Town. Ms. Norman further noted on the revenue side, the miscellaneous revenue line appeared high due to the early year payment from the NCDOT for moving that would be moved back to fiscal year 2011-2012 through an audit entry. She stated once the revenue was corrected, that line too would fall closer to budget expectations.

With no further questions/comments, Chair 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 following:

- Press releases for: Art in the Park 50th Anniversary, BRAHM Art & Antique Show, Hyett Palma Retail Study Update, Mayview Madness & Fall in Blowing Rock
- Travel Writers entertained & articles procured: Kathy Newbern & JS Fletcher (July 4th, Raleigh Examiner and Luxury Travel & South Park Magazine), Lynn & Cele Seldon (AAA Go Magazine), Bill Leslie of WRALTV 5 (summer in Blowing Rock), Katie Talks Carolina (Lodging, shopping, Blue Ridge Parkway, BRAHM & area attractions), Fox TV 18 (One Tank Trips), Southern Living (getaway travel), Road Iron Magazine (Motor Cycling on the Blue Ridge Parkway), Charlotte Magazine, VISA Black Card Magazine (Best Winter Village), Metro Magazine (Bravo Awards, Best Place to Own a Second Home), Southern Living Giveaway-Sights of the South (Blue Ridge Mountains)
- 1st Quarter Ads: Billboards in Raleigh, Greensboro & Charlotte, Breathe Magazine, Smoky Mountain Living Magazine, NC Travel Guide, Constant Contact e-mail blasts, Charlotte Magazine, Blue Ridge Outdoors, High Country Cooperative, Print Distribution Brochure placement, BRAHM Art & Antique Show support & Beach Music Show support
- Continued to work with: Blue Ridge Parkway Association, Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, NC Division of Tourism, NC High Country Host & area TDA's and Chambers
- Visitor Center number's September 2012/1st Quarter 2012: telephone 251/826, e-mail 136/694, walk-in traffic 1,571/7,771, Visitor Center brochure distribution 6,559/10,709, Visitor Guides 7,102/14,672 & web visits 12,277/156,010

Mr. Brown then informed the board that Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell would be presenting several slides of information on the TDA at the upcoming State of the Town function on October 4, 2012 at 5:00 p.m. at the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum. He advised Ms. Lugenbell would cover items such as an occupancy tax collection comparison, advertising support, public relations accolades and statewide partnerships of the Authority. Chairperson Tarbutton advised he would only briefly be able to attend the function due to a prior engagement.
(Attachment #2)

High Country Host - Update

Chair Tarbutton then gave a brief update on the High Country Host, informing the Authority that the Host had appointed a new Director and made several operational changes including bringing social media operations in house. He further explained the group was making headway in leading the effort towards cooperative marketing for the area.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

Chair Tarbutton and Executive Director Brown then gave a brief update on the Retail Strategy Committee and their most recent meeting held the prior week. Mr. Brown informed the Authority a press release had gone out in an effort to bring the public up to speed on accomplishments related to the Hyett Palma Downtown Retail Strategy study recommendations.

Other

Chair Tarbutton reminded the group that the annual planning retreat was forthcoming and asked the group to think about ways we can infuse tourism in the area and also to look at any ideas for getting the best return on our dollar when placing/allocating funds.

Chair Tarbutton then mentioned the State of North Carolina Division of Tourism quarterly occupancy figures had been released and Blowing Rock was somewhat below the beach communities and the county. Executive Director Brown stated his desire to speak with the State on how the figures were calculated to see if there may be a change that has occurred that may skew the figures due to the fact that our indicators show our collections running in unison with the areas mentioned. The Authority agreed with the need to get further data on the figures presented by the state.

Mr. Brown reported that North Carolina is ranked twenty-seventh (27th) in the nation in marketing funding and sixth (6th) in the nation in visitation, indicating that the state is doing well with what we are spending.

Authority member Mattar expressed that she felt the \$5,000 allocated towards the Music Moves Mountains event was well spent. Chair Tarbutton informed 700 tickets were planned to be sold and the event actually produced the sale of 1,000 tickets, however because of this being its debut year, expenses were off causing the event not to generate as great a return as possible. The group discussed that very few rooms were sold from the event due to its location. Member Doug Matheson felt that an event on Main St. such as the street dance held during the Blue Ridge Parkway Associations Anniversary would generate more occupancy. The Authority agreed that an in-town event would have a greater impact on occupancy. It was said that an event on Main St. would be appealing to residents and visitors alike since part of the advantage Blowing Rock has is its downtown walk-ability. The group agreed that the success of the annual Symphony at

Chetola and regular Music on the Lawn events at the Best Cellar/Inn at Ragged Garden were good indicators of the need for such an event.

The group then discussed the upcoming retreat and agreed it would be beneficial to research a professional consultant who could attend the meeting and discuss such an event for Blowing Rock with the group. It was the consensus of the Authority for Executive Director Brown and Ex-officio Member Hildebran to retain an advisor to visit the Town and attend the retreat to further discuss the issue. The Authority agreed to schedule the Annual Planning Retreat for the last week in November, with the in-town location to be determined.

Chair Tarbutton then advised that he and Authority member Dyer had recently met with Blowing Rock Police Chief Eric Brown. Mr. Tarbutton prefaced the discussion by letting the group know he and member Dyer had received several comments regarding an alleged negative perception of the Blowing Rock Police Department and its effect on tourism. Mr. Tarbutton advised after the meeting with the Chief, the conclusion was that it was not a tourism issue. He further stated the public wanted a feeling of Mayberry from the Police Department and that more public relations should be done to heighten this. Member Matheson commented that Town Council had also reviewed several videos and reported that after viewing the actual stops or allowing those making the complaints to view the stops, the complaints were normally resolved. He also mentioned the importance of the department being community friendly and visible on the streets. He noted this was something the department was currently making improvements on. Authority member Dyer commented Chief Brown was very receptive to the meeting with himself and Chair Tarbutton.

Adjournment

There being no further comment, motion by Member Mattar, second by member Dyer to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Meeting adjourned at 4:52 p.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

Nicole Norman, Ex-officio Member

Attachments

#1 – Occupancy Tax Report

#2 – Executive Director’s Quarterly Report