

**Town of Blowing Rock  
Tourism Development Authority  
Minutes – May 7, 2013**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, May 7, 2013 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Rob Dyer, Doug Matheson and Lianne Mattar, Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran and Executive Director Tracy Brown.

Authority member Dean Bullis and Ex-officio member Nicole Norman were absent.

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes – April 2, 2013**

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the April 2, 2013 meeting minutes. Motion by Vice-Chair Dyer and seconded by Member Matheson to approve the April 2, 2013 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

**Financial Report**

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran, on behalf of Ex-Officio Member Norman, briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2012-13 Occupancy Tax collections fiscal year-to-date through March 2013. He stated occupancy tax collections for March 2013 came in \$5,855 or 24.38% above March 2012 totals. FY 2012-13 totals to date are above FY 2011-12 totals (through March) by \$29,060 or 5.28%. (**Attachment #1**)

Mr. Hildebran then reviewed the Revenue and Expenditures for the year and advised they were in line with projections. He reminded the Authority of an upcoming need for a budget amendment to cover revenue/expense for both the Wine Festival website domain and advertising with the Chamber of Commerce.

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

**FY 2012-13 TDA Budget**

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran and Executive Director Brown briefly reviewed a draft copy of the proposed FY 2013-14 TDA Budget. (**Attachment #2**)

The FY 2013-14 proposed budget totals \$695,390 which is up from the current \$687,480 budget, with overall occupancy taxes estimated at \$693,890.

Mr. Brown stated the budget line-items are relatively flat and the 2013-14 Media Plan was in development at this time and would be a component of the proposed budget.

Member Mattar asked for additional information about the town administrative fee for the occupancy tax. Mr. Hildebran responded that State statutes outlined the collection costs percentage – 3% of the first five hundred thousand dollars of gross proceeds and then 1% of the remaining gross receipts.

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 Wednesday May 29, 2013 at 3:00 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.

Mr. Hildebran reminded the Authority that the public hearing on the proposed budget is scheduled for Tuesday, June 4, 2013 at 3:30 p.m.

### **Operations Activity Report**

Executive Director Brown distributed an update of activities and briefly highlighted several items. (**Attachment #3**)

Mr. Brown discussed –

#### Visitor Center

- April numbers are as follows:
- Telephone Inquiries - 280
- Walk-In Traffic - 1,281
- Brochures Distributed - 1,177
- Website Visits - 21,619
- Wine Fest Website Visits - 5,064

#### Website

- Continue to maintain and update the blowingrock.com website, which includes a mobile site. Worked with the Chamber to secure the URL for blowingrockwinterfest.com when someone from China bought the domain when the license lapsed. Had not budgeted for the expense. Budget amendment needed as mentioned earlier in meeting.
- Continue to maintain Blowing Rock business listings on visitnc.com.

#### Marketing

- Highlights that we worked on during May include:
  - Sent our email blasts to 5,500 subscribers from Jan-April promoting events and outdoor winter activities.
  - Ran ads and e-blasts with Meeting Professionals International in North Carolina to promote Blowing Rock for meeting destinations.
  - Ran ad with Small Market Meetings and Association Executives of North Carolina to promote Blowing Rock.
  - Assisted the Salisbury NC Chamber of Commerce in securing a retreat for this fall at Meadowbrook.

- Placed media for both Winterfest and Winefest.
- Assisted with public relations for Trout Derby.
- Worked with NC Division of Tourism on NC Beer Month.

#### Cooperative

- Continued to work with High Country Host marketing committee on co-op ad placement, as have budgeted \$15,000 for FY 2013-14.

#### Other

- Participated in a 9 day trip with the Blue Ridge Parkway Association and the annual AAA FAM tour, taking about 30 AAA travel counselors on a FAM tour up the entire Parkway, stopping in gateway towns every day and taking in the sights.
- Upcoming co-op available with US Airways Magazine in July 2013.
- The Town received an award for the “Best Main Street in NC” from the NC American Planning Association.

The Authority commended Mr. Brown for his participation with this activity which provides a great opportunity for Blowing Rock to be in the spotlight.

Chairperson Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

#### **High Country Host**

Chair Tarbutton reminded the Authority of the High Country Host Annual Meeting to be held later in the afternoon (5:30 p.m.) at the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum, which would provide participants with updates on current Host plans for marketing, packaging, social media, partnerships, etc. He encouraged Authority members to attend the meeting.

Mr. Tarbutton also advised that he would be concluding his term as President of the Host after two years and that he wished the Host the very best.

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

Ex-officio Member Hildebran reported that the next Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee meeting would be held on May 22 at 2:00 p.m.

#### **Other**

Chair Tarbutton stated that the Chamber of Commerce has inquired about continuing an Events Coordinator position cost-sharing agreement for another year. He advised that the position was created several years ago to enhance the quality of events and make them “more polished”. The TDA agreed to pay a portion of the cost of the position for three years and the term of the agreement ends at the conclusion of the fiscal year.

Chamber President John Aldridge updated the Authority by stating that the Chamber was conducting surveys to determine the economic impacts of their events. Questions to determine from the surveys - are the events resulting “in heads in beds” or providing additional revenue for

retailers? Are attendees already here for events or are they coming to the area for the events? Mr. Aldridge continued by saying that events do add to the visitor experience.

At this time, Mr. Aldridge requested the TDA to consider the cost-sharing arrangement for the coordinator position for an additional year.

Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin followed up by stating that most of the events coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce lose money except for Art in the park, once you allocate costs of general and administration expense. He further stated that the TDA provides \$14,000 toward the funding of the position as well as marketing for the events.

Chair Tarbutton reminded the Chamber of the concerns expressed years ago about allocating event proceeds to non-profits, without reserving monies for future year event start-up costs. Mr. Hardin stated that he recalled that conversation and that today non-profits receive funds for in-lieu services provided by the non-profits to the events.

Mr. Aldridge stated that the Chamber has also begun soliciting sponsors for underwriting events, such as Auto Trader for the Wine Fest, etc.

Chairperson Tarbutton requested that the Chamber provide the results of their event surveys to the Authority once completed. Mr. Aldridge agreed.

Executive Director Brown advised that the proposed budget included a \$14,000 allocation for the events coordinator position.

Mr. Aldridge also once again thanked Vice-Chair Dyer and Executive Director Brown for attending the Chamber Board meetings and working to improve communications between the groups.

After some discussion, the Authority agreed to further discuss the events position at their upcoming budget work session, but that \$14,000 had been included in the draft budget to continue the partnership for another year.

Chair Tarbutton thanked the Chamber for attending the meeting.

### **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 Wednesday, May 29, 2013 at 3:00 p.m. at Town Hall and then adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.

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Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

## **Attachments**

**#1 - Occupancy Report**

**#2 - Proposed FY 2013-14 TDA Budget**

**#3 - Activity Report**