

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – November 13, 2013**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Wednesday, November 13, 2013 at 9:00 a.m. in a special meeting held in the conference room of the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum. Present were Chair Kent Tarbutton, Vice-Chair Rob Dyer, Authority members Dean Bullis, Doug Matheson, Lianne Mattar and Ex-officio members Scott Fogleman and Nicole Norman. Executive Director Tracy Brown and Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell were also present.

Call to Order

Vice-Chair Rob Dyer called the meeting to order and welcomed the members.

Approval of Minutes – October 1, 2013

Vice-Chair Dyer entertained the approval of the October 1, 2013 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Mattar and seconded by Member Matheson to approve the October 1, 2013 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

FY 2012 Annual Audit Report

Vice-Chair Dyer then introduced TDA Auditor Jason Carpenter of Combs, Tennant & Carpenter, P.C. to review the FY 2013 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 \$305,431 in net assets compared with \$249,751 in FY 2012. The year-end unassigned fund balance totals \$220,380 compared to \$157,676 in FY 2012.

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 Bullis and seconded by Member Matheson to accept the FY 2013 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 entered the meeting at 9:30 a.m.

FY 2014 Audit Contract

Chair Tarbutton then entertained approval of the FY 2014 Audit Contract with Combs, Tennant & Carpenter, P.C. for Authority consideration. Motion by Member Dyer and seconded by Member Mattar to adopt a FY 2014 Audit Contract with Combs, Tennant &

Carpenter, P.C. for \$3,750 (same as FY 2013) as presented. Unanimously approved. **(Attachment #2)**

Financial Report

Chair Tarbutton introduced Finance Officer Nicole Norman and requested her to review the FY 2014 Budget to date.

Ex-officio member Norman briefly reviewed the FY 2014 Occupancy Tax collections to date. She stated that collections for the month of September 2013 compared to September 2012 were down by 4.50% or \$3,260, while collections fiscal year-to-date for FY 2014 compared to FY 2013 were up 2.02% or \$5,517.

Ms. Norman reported that at approximately 35% into the fiscal year revenue and expenditures were in line with budget expectations. She advised that some line items were above budget expectations at this time, however none of the line items were of concern at this time, due to the fact that many represented one time or annual lump sum payments made, such as for property/liability & workers compensation insurance, that would cause the line items to appear 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.

Visitor Center Operations

Executive Director Brown highlighted ongoing items regarding Visitor Center Operations.

- Visitor Center Activity for Oct: 3,546 Walk-ins, 643 Calls, 2,827 Visitor Guides Distributed

Marketing Efforts/ Operations Activity Report

Executive Director Brown briefly highlighted several marketing related items.

- Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Tour Operators will be spending one day and night in Blowing Rock.
- Collaboration with the Chamber on WinterFest and winter season advertising placement.
- Collaboration
 - Continue to work with High Country Host and co-op and Mountain Journey project.
 - Continue to serve on Blue Ridge Parkway Association Board.
 - Continue to work with BRP, National Park Service, NC Division of Tourism, and local Chamber's.
- Website – Revamp with winter shell.
- Collateral is complete for the year with the exception of the Town Calendar.

Chair Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

Infrastructure Support

The Authority discussed the need for garbage cans at the parking facility as well as parking signs directing to the facilities.

The Authority then discussed the Town entrances and their importance when the road was complete to continue to draw visitors to the downtown. Ex-officio Member Fogleman advised the Authority that the Chamber has offered to co-ordinate a group from Appalachian State University that would like to research and provide options for the design of the three downtown entrances.

Chair Tarbutton inquired how much the NC Department of Transportation would contribute to the entrances and how much the Town will need to contribute.

**The Authority recessed the meeting for lunch at Storie Street Grill at 12:00 p.m.
The Authority returned to session and reconvened the meeting at 1:15 p.m.**

Brainstorming on Area Activities

Chair Tarbutton distributed to the Authority a list of potential and current Blowing Rock Activities (**Attachment #3**) for the group to review. Several items on the list were briefly discussed as well as the need for a similar list to be distributed to all lodging properties. It was suggested that the group continue to add to the list. Blowing Rock's local theatre was discussed and their need for year-round space and their partnering with the Chamber of Commerce to find.

Several items were added to the list including: Evening music, outside dining (making the Town look alive), street events with consideration to be given by the Town to allow merchants to use sidewalks to sell their products during such events, better variety of shops in Blowing Rock.

The need for shops downtown to remain open later was discussed with the group inquiring what West Jefferson was doing to encourage their downtown merchants to stay open later. Executive Director Brown agreed to speak with West Jefferson on the issue.

Authority member Doug Matheson discussed the Greenway Trail and Town Council's desire to see it extended into Town. He stated the trail was currently complete at Tweetsie Railroad. A Director was selected and a Boar was formed for fundraising efforts and easement co-ordination for extension of the trail. It was discussed that the TDA consider helping to fund and that it was a part of the Town's ten year plan. It was the consensus of the Authority to draft a resolution of support for the extension of the Trail and to offer their strong support of the effort.

Shuttle service research was then discussed with Executive Brown stating that one of the drawbacks of the service was the area to be served and the route time involved. It was

also anticipated that the volume of participants in the service would not be adequate to support the service being offered. Member Dyer suggested a golf cart service be utilized rather than a shuttle, stating they would not have to comply with the Taxi laws, but would need Town Council approval to operate. At this time both Chairman Tarbutton and Member Dyer recessed themselves from voting on the issue since they have both used services of the vendor that provides golf cart services in Town, Buddy Barker.

It was the consensus of the Authority to help facilitate the owner's discussions and collaboration with Town Council, the Chamber and TDA.

Strategic Plan - Update

Chairperson Tarbutton then led a discussion on the TDA Strategic Plan and any suggestions/recommendations for strategic goals for the upcoming year. (**Attachment #4**)

Strategic items discussed included:

- Provide an increased level of tourism promotion for the spring, fall and winter seasons and conduct market tests.
- Place more emphasis on establishing Blowing Rock as a destination of choice for business and focused activity groups and produce collateral for retreats and business travelers.
- Place more emphasis on tracking and demonstrate measurable growth in a) Winter, Spring, and Fall seasons and b) mid-week Summer season by utilizing Average Daily Rates, Occupancy, Internet and 800# hits.
- Make strong utilization of seasonal broad image advertising, internet and PR, with packages (hotel, retail, and attractions), coordination management and front line educational programs for "in-season" promotions.
- Operate a Visitor Center to provide visitor support and present Blowing Rock as a quality tourism destination.

Ex-officio Member Fogleman presented the question of measurement strategies to knowing if some of the goals set forth in the Strategic Plan were being met or if progress was being made. Chair Tarbutton responded that the TDA was unable to collect actual occupancy data due to the group being a public entity and the information provided by the establishments not being able to be kept confidential. He suggested the Chamber work to collect this data as they could hold the information confidential.

Member Bullis further commented that it would also be helpful to receive sales tax data from establishments in order to examine whether there is a correlation of overnight stays with retail sales.

Member Dyer agreed to approach the Chamber about their beginning to collect both occupancy and sales tax data to accomplish this.

Chairman Tarbutton briefly discussed the Parkway's branding and its benefits.

After some further discussion, the Authority agreed to continue to review the Strategic Plan.

Chair Tarbutton thanked the members for their input.

Authority member Dean Bullis exited the meeting at 2:00 p.m.

Downtown Retail Strategy - Update

At this time the board discussed the structure and objectives of the Retail Strategy group with Ex-officio Member Fogleman as he would be new to the group. After a brief discussion regarding this groups function, it was agreed for a meeting of the group to be co-ordinate in the coming month.

Other

Chair Tarbutton then moved to the next section of the agenda where he stated he had been spoken to by the Chamber in regard to the TDA's plans for their Visitor Center location in the future. Executive Director Brown then mentioned he had also received a letter (**Attachment #5**) to the Authority Board from BRAHM Executive Director Joann Mitchell in regard to the Authorities plans to renew their lease in the next year upon its expiration.

The group then discussed the future location needs for the visitor center including walkability, in Town vs. out of Town, the need for one or two centers, etc. Executive Director Brown stated the current arrangement was working well for both BRAHM and the TDA, with the Museum creating a nice presentation for guests such as visitors as well as travel writers. It was the consensus of the Authority for Executive Director Brown to discuss the current contact and its renewal terms with BRAHM Executive Director Mitchell.

The group briefly discussed business owner/employee parking that was occurring at the front of BRAHM and on Main St. for at times all day and that those parking areas should be used for Museum or Downtown visitors rather than business owners or their staff. Ex-officio Member Fogleman agreed to speak with the Town's Police Department in regard to the issue.

Next Meeting

Chair Tarbutton reminded the Authority that the next regular meeting is scheduled for 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 1, 2014.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Mattar and seconded by Member Matheson to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chair Tarbutton adjourned the meeting at 4:30 p.m.



Kent Parbutton, Chair



Scott Fogleman, Secretary

Attachments

- #1 – FY 2013 Annual Audit Report
- #2 – FY 2014 Audit Contract
- #3 – Blowing Rock Activities List
- #4 – Strategic Plan
- #5 – BRAHM Letter