

**Town of Blowing Rock
Tourism Development Authority
Minutes – July 1, 2014**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, July 1, 2014 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Authority Chairman Kent Tarbutton, Vice-Chair Rob Dyer and members Dean Bullis and Doug Matheson, Ex-officio members Scott Fogleman and Nicole Norman, and Executive Director Tracy Brown.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Kent Tarbutton called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: June 10, 2014

The minutes were motioned for approval as presented by member Dyer and seconded by member Bullis and unanimously approved.

MONTHLY REPORTS

1. Financial Report - Occupancy Tax Proceeds (Attachment #1)

Attachment #1 was reviewed by Finance Officer Nicole Norman who pointed out that May 2014 collections are up 9.57% or \$5,106 compared to May 2013 collections and Fiscal Year to date collection are up 5.95% or \$39,916. Ms. Norman further stated collections would close the year above prior year collections and exceed budget expectations for occupancy taxes. Total revenue is currently at 92%, pending June occupancy tax. Expenditures are in line with budget. Infrastructure quarterly payments to the Town are outstanding and will be paid prior to the closing of the books to bring those line items to 100% of budget. Chairman Tarbutton had questions regarding employee development being down compared to budget. Executive Director Brown then explained that the line item had been allocated additional funds this year due to his participation in Marketing and Public Relations for the Blue Ridge Parkway Association and not having traveled as much as anticipated due to scheduling conflicts and because some mileage remains outstanding. Equipment Lease Maintenance will also finish the year under budget due to a change in postage machine lease with the Chamber of Commerce. Postage is now run through the Town's machine and billed monthly to the TDA. There are also outstanding advertising invoices to be paid prior to the close of the year. Member Matheson made a motion to approve financial report attachment #1, seconded by Member Bullis. Unanimously Approved.

2. Operations Report - Executive Director (Attachment #2)

Executive Director Brown then reviewed in detail a power point presentation highlighting the following items as attached as attachment #2.

- Walk-ins up, visitor requests up, web site visits up 13% with 60% new visits
- Website word press platform update
- Annual Marketing Plan e-mailed out to the board, upon approval will be sent to constituents. The Plan is research-based and data-driven
- Examples of print material were displayed. Outlets that have performed well in the past such as Garden & Gun, Small Meeting Group and AENC Magazine will be utilized with advertising being placed in the Triad and Triangle markets
- New creative being worked on will include contracting with Blowing Rock locals
- Leveraging media partners and sampling in Greenville and Spartanburg South Carolina
- Sending out e-blasts working with social media outlets and added an interest page to website
- Updating public and media relations driving visitors to the website
- Blowing Rock named one of Six Best Locations to Have a Summer Home

Other

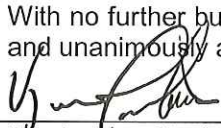
The group then discussed an e-mail received by Executive Director Brown from a local restaurant owner stating concerns that tourism numbers are down. Brown stated he had spoken to the owner and met with Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin and Town Manager Scott Fogleman, and had also spoken with other business owners in Town to further get a feel for the actual environment. Occupancy indicators are up, with some businesses reporting high figures, with others reportedly down. The Authority discussed the possibility of several factors contributing, such as the many changes in the market place were noted, thereby creating more "slices of the pie" in Town and Town Council has made steps that now allow more business and events to come to Town. Audience member Commissioner Dan Phillips gave the perspective of merchants on Main St. reiterating that some businesses saw business down in June and now there may be 3 or 4 new businesses that are all now sharing the same pie, so some businesses numbers will go down due to this. The Authority then discussed that eventually the new restaurants and hotels would absorb into the market place and numbers would level back out over time and how the change in economy may also play a part in how patronage is spread. The group discussed the changes to take place in Blowing Rock over the next two or three years and the positive impact on the community in creating a bigger market to share. Mr. Phillips further stated he would like to see the Authority allocate more money to advertising and if needed, he would support reallocating funds given to the Town towards this. Mr. Brown explained there was a balance necessary in the allocation of funds and things like parking and downtown beautification are necessary to bring people here as well as advertising. Chairman Tarbutton felt some of the things the Authority is currently contributing to may be able to be reallocated such as the Town calendar.

Member Dyer posed the topic of text reminders of special events (i.e.: Winterfest, Romance Month, etc.). Executive Director Brown explained they have done a texting campaign in the past with a partner and agreed to further examine doing this regularly. The group agreed the messages should be approximately 8-10 per year announcing what is happening in Town in the upcoming month. It would also be necessary to narrow down the visitor's interest to keep the texts from being too broad.

Mr. Brown spoke with the Authority about a request he received about placing Authority funds towards a local billboard campaign and suggested placing \$3,000 from Media into a local billboard campaign for restaurants, lodging and retail. Specifically, it would run during transient months when people are in the area to bring them to Blowing Rock. He stated while he is against Authority dollars going towards local advertising when in fact those funds should be used to bring in visitors from outside of the area, no one else was currently placing ads to draw visitors specifically to Blowing Rock. The Authority agreed they did not want to set a precedent. It was discussed that the billboards will likely not benefit hoteliers, but all others may benefit.

Adjournment

With no further business, a motion to close the meeting was made by Doug Matheson and seconded by Dean Bullis and unanimously approved. The meeting adjourned at 4:45 p.m.



Kent Tarbutton, Chairman



Scott Fogleman, Secretary

Attachment #1 – Financial Report including monthly Occupancy Tax Proceeds

Attachment #2 – Power Point Materials compiled and reviewed by Executive Director Tracy Brown