

**TOWN OF BLOWING ROCK
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
ANNUAL RETREAT – NOVEMBER 3, 2015**

The Tourism Development Authority (TDA) held their annual retreat on Tuesday, November 3, 2015 beginning at 10:00 a.m. The retreat was held in the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum (BRAHM) Conference Room. Present were Chairman Kent Tarbutton, Members Rob Dyer, Dean Bullis, Doug Matheson, Lianne Mattar, Ex-officio members Scott Fogleman and Nicole Norman, TDA Director Tracy Brown, Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell, and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Tarbutton called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Member Bullis made a motion to approve the October 6, 2015 minutes as written, seconded by Member Dyer. Unanimously approved.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT/BUDGET REVIEW

Finance Officer Nicole Norman advised that typically the auditors would be at the retreat to present the final audit. However, the audit had not received final approval from the LGC as of yet. Ms. Norman stated the next TDA meeting would be held in April 2016 and asked the Board if they would like to wait until then to receive the final audit presentation or perhaps schedule a special meeting before April. Chairman Tarbutton commented that in his 10 years on the TDA Board, he had not seen an adjustment to the audit and felt the final audit presentation could wait until the April meeting. All members were in agreement. Ms. Norman also stated that the 2016 Audit Contract would be presented in April as well.

FY 2016 REVIEW & FUTURE PLANNING

- **Occupancy Tax Collections & Financial Statement Review**

Finance Officer Norman stated occupancy tax collections for September 2015 were the highest on record with an increase of 19.22% compared to September 2014. The fiscal year receipts thus far had increased by 12.57% compared to the previous fiscal year. She commented current year expenditures were at 33% and reviewed several expenditure items in more detail with the Board. Ms. Norman stated she wasn't aware of any items of concern regarding the budget.

- **Visitor Center Operations**

Mr. Brown asked the Board members for any input on items they would like to discuss pertaining to TDA operations. Chairman Tarbutton mentioned that he had received comments regarding the TDA not being as aggressive as needed relating to commercial tourism for retail businesses and economic development. TDA Director Brown stated he would put together a presentation regarding these topics for their joint meeting with the Town Council scheduled in the spring.

- **Marketing Efforts**

TDA Director Brown advised that marketing efforts had recently been extended to the Greenville/Spartanburg area through radio, television, billboards, etc. Mr. Brown explained after a few months they would be able to tell from their website visits if this had proven to be successful.

- **Infrastructure Support**

Town Manager Fogleman asked for thoughts or suggestions regarding future support of Town infrastructure, such as more parking, electronic kiosks, etc. He explained the Town was in the process of refining the Gateways to Town project with regard to preliminary costs, design, etc.

Several members suggested the need for an electronic counter for the American Legion Parking Deck to let people know when the lot was full.

They also discussed possible collaboration with the area churches in reference to use of their parking lots during certain times of the year and the possibility of a maintenance/upkeep agreement between the churches and the Town.

Electronic kiosks with Wi-Fi and a possible link to an area map were also discussed. Town Manager Fogleman stated grant funding could possibly be pursued. Town Manager Fogleman also stated a Wi-Fi access point had been added near the American Legion Building, Club House and pool area and future enhancements were planned for Main Street. He mentioned that small signs had been discussed in order to make people aware of this amenity.

Town Manager Fogleman advised that a meeting regarding the median enhancement near the Town's Water Treatment Plant and the Blue Ridge Parkway Bridge had taken place and the design concept for this project is currently being reviewed by the Blue Ridge Parkway.

- **Gateway**

Mr. Fogleman stated he had met with Kim Hartley regarding the Gateway Sign to be placed near the Citgo property at the corner of Sunset Drive and Valley Boulevard and Ms. Hartley had expressed concerns with the Gateway sign blocking the view of their property.

- **Middle Fork Greenway Support**

Mr. Fogleman commented that a Clean Water Grant had been received for the Middle Fork Greenway project in the amount of \$171,300.

- **Events Discussion**

Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin and Kathy Robbins of Tweetsie Railroad entered the meeting to discuss events that had taken place in 2015.

Mr. Hardin stated that Winterfest 2015 had been very successful, the Fashion Show, which was in its third year, had also been well attended and tickets to WinterFeast had sold out. The Polar Plunge, another popular event, had approximately 120 participants in 2015. Proceeds for the events had been given to the Western Youth Network and the Hospitality House.

Mr. Hardin reviewed other events that had taken place in 2015 and talked about possible enhancements to several of the events. Mr. Hardin discussed the events planned for 2016 as well.

- **Visitor Center – Future Options**

TDA Members spoke briefly regarding a potential site for relocation of the Visitor Center on Valley Boulevard and possibly rejoining the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce to save both entities on overhead costs.

- **Shuttle Services**

The feasibility of a shuttle service was discussed. It was the consensus of the Board that this type service would most likely need to be operated by a private enterprise.

- **North Carolina Resort Towns & Conventions Cities Organization**

Town Manager Fogleman mentioned that he was on the North Carolina Resort Towns & Conventions Cities Organization and asked the TDA Board to think about ways this Board could help with the tourism industry.

- **Class & Pay Study Discussion**

TDA Director Brown discussed the topic of a Classification and Pay Study and whether TDA should have one completed. Mr. Brown expressed that he felt Assistant Director Amanda Lugenbell may be in need of a market pay adjustment. After their discussion on the matter, the Board directed Mr. Brown to reach out to other areas to compare salaries comparable to Mrs. Lungenbell's position. Once this was completed, the Board would review Mr. Brown's pay adjustment recommendation individually and give him their feedback in order for him to go ahead and make an adjustment to her pay prior to the next regular board meeting in April. A budget amendment to allocate necessary additional salary funding would then be presented at the April meeting.

- **Other**

Chairman Tarbutton mentioned the need for more public art display in Town. Member Matheson advised that Town Council was contemplating the addition of another mural to be placed on the old Fire Department building.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss the meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

TDA Chairperson, Kent Tarbutton

Town Clerk, Sharon Greene