

Town of Blowing Rock

Board of Commissioners/Tourism Development Authority

Joint Meeting

Minutes – March 2, 2005

A joint meeting of the Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners and the Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority (TDA) was held on Wednesday, March 2, 2005. Board members attending were Mayor Pro-tem Terry Lentz, Commissioners Bobby Ball, Rita Wiseman, David Wray and Keith Tester. Mayor Lawrence was out of town and unable to attend. Others present were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Finance Director Margaret Pierce and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

Members of the TDA attending were Chairperson Bernie Keele, Vice-Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Lynn Drury, Keith Tester and Phillip Pickett, and ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Margaret Pierce.

The TDA By-laws require an annual meeting with Town Council to discuss the TDA yearly achievements and future plans.

Call to Order

Mayor Pro-tem Lentz called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. He welcomed the TDA members and assembled citizens.

Topic of Discussion

Mayor Pro-tem Lentz then introduced TDA Chairman Bernie Keele.

Mr. Keele reviewed with the Council the TDA 2004 Annual Report (**Attachment #1**), which was distributed to Council at their Retreat. He reviewed the highlights of activities accomplished during 2004 and the future goals of the TDA.

He also discussed the relationship between the TDA and Chamber of Commerce and their eventual co-location at the newly acquired TDA building located at 7738 Valley Boulevard. He stated that after some discussion the TDA and Chamber had reached a satisfactory sub-lease agreement, which both parties would be considering in the near future.

Chairman Keele informed Council they were in the process of getting the TDA web site up and going. He stated all businesses in the Town of Blowing Rock would be listed on the web site.

Commissioner Wiseman inquired if the TDA anticipated additional staffing. Chairman Keele stated they hoped to use interns and volunteers during their busier times. As of now, he felt the number of present employees at the Chamber, plus the addition of TDA Director Susan Freshcorn would be sufficient.

Commissioner Tester stated the TDA had progressed very well considering their difficulty in developing an operating structure and defining appropriate guidelines.

Commissioner Wiseman commended the TDA on a job well done. She commented they were moving in the right direction and had developed outstanding goals.

Commissioner Wray asked what the anticipated budget would be for advertising for the up-coming year. TDA Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated they did not have a figure as of yet. Commissioner Wray encouraged the TDA to utilize billboard advertisement.

Mr. Tarbutton advised that occupancy rates, which can show the impact of TDA efforts, should be monitored throughout the year. He requested Council to consider an ordinance that would require occupancy rates be reflected on the monthly occupancy tax reports.

TDA Chairman Keele asked that Council continue to look at the town's parking problem and move forward with a parking facility.

Town Manager Hildebran stated that the cost of such a structure was a major issue. He also stated that the General Assembly had been approached about enabling legislation that would permit alternative funding methods for a parking facility.

Commissioner Wiseman stated she felt the town's top priority at the present time was the Emergency Services Building, but she did recognize the need for additional parking and for changes in the legislation.

A few members of the audience mentioned the need for improved communication between the merchants and the TDA. They also felt there should be more advertisement of their businesses.

Chairperson Keele responded that all audience members are welcome at their meetings and that all TDA minutes are available on the Town web site.

Ed Burke, owner of the Cliff Dwellers Inn, stated that the TDA meeting time was inconvenient for himself and other motel owners in town. TDA members responded that the 8:00 a.m. monthly meeting time was the best time for the majority of people (retail, restaurants and lodging), but they were willing to schedule an occasional night meeting, if needed. Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that the TDA had held an evening meeting and that attendance was similar to the 8:00 a.m. meeting.

Commissioner Tester stated, "that for the next three months the TDA would be working diligently on their budget for the upcoming year," and suggested this would be a good time for the public "to share with the TDA what their funding desires are".

One audience member expressed his concern that the TDA was spending too much occupancy tax money on refurbishing the new Visitor's Center. Chairperson Keele's responded that practically all refurbishing of the building was being donated by local businesses at no cost to the TDA.

Town Manager Hildebran informed those in attendance that he had received a phone earlier in the day from Watauga County and that the County had requested local act legislation enable them to implement an occupancy tax. Vice-Chair Tarbutton complimented Town Council and Blowing Rock lodging establishments for moving forward with the TDA several years ago and not being subject to the new county initiative.

Mr. Tarbutton stated that based on initial discussions with the TDA marketing firm that Blowing Rock might not have adequate higher end lodging. He then requested that Town Council review the short-term rental issue and possibly consider an overlay district that would permit areas in town for single family home rental.

Commissioner Ball summarized the meeting in saying there should be trust and good communication between the TDA and the Chamber of Commerce as well as with the public. She felt the TDA board was moving in the right direction but needed a chance to get organized.

Mayor Pro-tem Lentz expressed that the TDA cannot be expected to do accomplish everything in one year, and that he felt the TDA should be given adequate time to set their guidelines and prioritize their goals.

Chairperson Keele thanked Council for their support and stated he felt the following year would be very productive for the TDA as well as the Chamber of Commerce.

There being no further business, Mayor Pro-tem Lentz thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 6:10 p.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary