

Town of Blowing Rock

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes - March 8, 2004

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Monday, March 8, 2004 at noon in a worksession meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Keith Tester, Phil Pickett, Lynn Drury, and Ex-officio members Barbara Beach and Scott Hildebran. Others present included Lowell Thomas, Lou Gutheil, Suzann French and Earl and Carol Horne.

Call to Order

Chairperson Keele called the luncheon meeting to order and welcomed the members and guests.

Approval of Minutes

The March 2, 2004 minutes will be presented at the April meeting.

Review of upcoming April Agenda

Chairperson Keele advised that the April Agenda will include the following items: Town of Blowing Rock Comprehensive Plan, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin and their use of occupancy tax funds, local tourism statistics, the upcoming budget and other business.

Discussion Items:

Tourism Data Survey

Chairperson Keele stated that he recently discussed with Chancellor Ken Peacock of Appalachian State University the need for university assistance in conducting a tourism survey for the Town of Blowing Rock TDA. Some prospective questions that need to be answered in the survey include:

1. Why do tourists come to Blowing Rock?
2. How long do they stay when visiting Blowing Rock?
3. Where are the tourists coming from?
4. How is the best way to reach our tourism market?

Vice-Chair Tarbutton advised that some of the basic area information could be acquired from the High Country Host and AdvantageWest, which he would discuss in more detail at the April meeting. He provided the Authority a list of the top tourism markets of Chetola Resort and the High Country Host.

Chetola Resort High Country Host

Charlotte Charlotte

Winston-Salem/Greensboro/High Point Winston-Salem/Greensboro/High Point

Raleigh/Chapel Hill/Cary Raleigh/Chapel Hill/Cary

Florida (Seasonal) Florida (Seasonal)

Remainder of Carolinas Atlanta (Ski Resort business - seasonal)

Remainder of Carolinas Charlotte

Member Tester stated that the retail sector had many visitors from Eastern Tennessee and as well as a 200-mile radius from Blowing Rock. He also mentioned that many retail tourists pass through the area en route to other destinations throughout the South. He suggested that we consider advertising beyond the local markets. Further, he stated that the TDA must determine if Blowing Rock is going to be a tourist town or resort town.

Member Drury suggested that the survey data that includes gap research and focuses on what brings tourists back to Blowing Rock again and again.

Member Tester discussed the retail traveler and what affects tourism traffic. He stated that the Chamber of Commerce local advertising expenditures and visitor access to the stores play an important role in who shops in downtown Blowing Rock. Most high-end shoppers come downtown via car and like easy accessibility.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton and Member Pickett advised that accommodation stays are somewhat shorter than in years past, with most preferring long weekend stays except for peak tourism periods during the year. Both discussed that diverse rooms attract stays as well.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton advised that "seeing real things" as opposed to man-made attractions are now considered desirable in the tourism industry. He stated that the Highland Games at Grandfather Mountain is ranked as the most popular Scottish games in the world. Also, other regional events can create stays in Blowing Rock, such as MerleFest and the NASCAR Bristol Race.

Member Drury discussed the importance of branding our area and our "image". Chairperson Keele mentioned the Jan Karon books and "Mitford".

Lou Gutheil mentioned the need for Friday and Saturday night events. Chairperson Keele mentioned the operating hours of merchants at nights and during the winter are also factors.

Member Tester stated the Chamber, the Merchants Association and the Lodging Association must work together. Also, he cautioned that the TDA promotional efforts could bring more tourists to the area and that might have a great impact on the small retail and lodging establishments. More tourism could drive larger scale chain operations into coming to Blowing Rock. Member Pickett stated that the Town Code must be adhered to in order to preserve our community character.

Member Tester stressed the importance of the Town Comprehensive Plan in guiding TDA activities.

Member Drury suggested that TDA be prepared with a Request for Proposal from Ad agencies once the survey results are complete. She also asked if the survey and advertising component should be completed simultaneously.

Based on the consensus of the Authority, a committee of Vice-Chair Tarbutton, Members Drury and Tester was formed to begin the work with Appalachian State University on a survey and subsequent Ad agency search.

Update on Chamber meeting

Chairperson Keele advised that he had met with Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin to discuss the relationship of the Chamber with the TDA. Items discussed included staffing a tourism bureau and the possible

restructure of the Chamber. He stated that Mr. Hardin would be attending the April meeting of the TDA to discuss these issues.

Chairperson Keele stated that Mr. Hardin expressed interest and seemed open to looking at changes in the Chamber. Mr. Hardin shared his concern with the Chair about rental costs of the current Chamber location. Chairperson Keele stated the current Art and History Museum might be a future option for a visitor bureau.

Member Drury mentioned that she was a member of the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum and would update the TDA on their future activities at the next meeting.

Budget Funding Requests

After a brief discussion, it was the consensus that May 8, 2004 would be the funding request deadline for existing agencies (with awards made in June) and November 1, 2004 would be the funding request deadline for all new agencies (with awards made by January 1st).

Secretary Hildebran will contact other TDA's throughout the state to seek guidance on a process for accepting funding requests.

Other

Secretary Hildebran discussed the upcoming 2004 Governor's Conference on Tourism which will be held in Charlotte, NC on April 5-7. Members who are interested in attending the conference were requested to contact Mr. Hildebran to make arrangements.

Adjourn

There being no further business - Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 1:35 p.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary