

## **Town of Blowing Rock**

### **Tourism Development Authority**

#### **Minutes - April 8, 2004**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Thursday, April 8, 2004 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Authority members Keith Tester, Kent Tarbutton, and Phil Pickett, and Ex-officio members Barbara Beach and Scott Hildebran. Authority member Lynn Drury was absent. Others present included Town Council member David Wray, Planning Director Kevin Rothrock, Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin and Sonny Howard.

#### **Call to Order**

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

#### **Approval of Minutes – March 2, 2004 and March 8, 2004**

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the March 2 and March 8, 2004 meeting minutes. Motion by Vice Chairperson Tarbutton and seconded by Member Tester to approve the March 2 and March 8, 2004 minutes. Unanimously approved.

#### **Blowing Rock Comprehensive Plan – Presentation**

Planning Director Kevin Rothrock reviewed with the TDA members the recently approved Town of Blowing Rock Comprehensive Plan. He discussed the importance of the document to all the Town's various Boards and Commissions. Further, he stressed that the Comprehensive Plan can be used as a tool in guiding tourism in Blowing Rock.

Planning Director Rothrock advised a copy of the document would be distributed to all the Town's various boards once the printing is complete in the next few weeks.

#### **Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce – Use of Tax Proceeds**

Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin presented the Chamber budget and membership statistics to the TDA members.

#### Revenue

\$64,000 – 30% Net Art in the Park

\$76,800 – 37% Net Membership

\$65,000 – 31% (\$61,000 - Occupancy Tax & \$4,000 - County)

\$4,200 – 2% Other Events (Symphony, Concerts, 4<sup>th</sup> of July, Parades, Trout Derby)

**Total - \$210,000**

#### Expenses

\$152,800 – 63% Salaries/Benefits

\$38,300 – 16% Rent/Facilities

\$18,000 – 7% Advertising, Printing, Print Media

\$10,000 – 4% Postage

\$ 8,000 – 3% Telephone

\$3,000 – 1.5 % Supplies/Misc.

\$8,500 – 3.5% Repairs/Maintenance (Entrance Signs)

\$5,000 – 2% Administrative Expenses

**Total \$243,342**

Director Hardin advised that the Chamber Directory is a self-supporting venture.

#### Membership

500 Memberships

60% located in Blowing Rock

30% located in Area (High Country)

10% located Outside Area

Mr. Hardin stated the mission of the Chamber of Commerce is to "promote tourism in Blowing Rock". He advised that his short-term goals were to upgrade technology, implement a new web site and improve relationships.

#### Chamber Staffing - 4

Art in the Park – 1

Events – 1

Visitor Center – 1 (½ - part-time)

Director – 1

He stated that a Visitor Center would take 1½ positions plus part-time staff to operate, with estimated costs of \$50,000, not including advertising and facilities.

Mr. Hardin also informed the TDA that the Chamber is looking for another annual event, but they have not decided on any idea at this time.

Member Pickett stressed the importance of making Blowing Rock businesses a priority of the Chamber and not outside businesses. He suggested the Chamber website link to the local businesses. Director Hardin advised that the Chamber was considering some type of rotation of local businesses in each category.

Chairperson Keele asked about the rate structure of the Chamber and how the Chamber funded its' deficit spending. Chamber Director Hardin responded that the Chamber has over two pages of rates based on business category and that the Chamber Fund Balance covered deficit spending.

Member Tester asked what is the advantage of having members "in the area" to the Chamber? Mr. Hardin advised that those members bring in approximately \$25,000 in membership revenue to the Chamber. Mr. Tester suggested that the Chamber Board may want to review the matter because the TDA might be a greater source of revenue in the long run.

Authority members discussed if the Chamber was the "Blowing Rock Chamber" or the "Blowing Rock Area Chamber".

Director Hardin discussed the financial impact of the building expenses on the Chamber of Commerce, especially since the Chamber relocated out of town hall to the Park Avenue location.

Councilmember David Wray stated that tourism-friendly weekend hours are very important if they desire to continue to operate as the Town's Visitor Center.

Authority members stressed the need for a contract with the Chamber for duties performed in order to avoid commingling of funds.

Director Hardin advised that he would provide a budget prior to May 4 for consideration by the Authority. He stated that the Chamber budget ends on December 31 and that he wants to work with the TDA.

### **Financial Report – Occupancy Tax Proceeds**

Finance Officer Barbara Beach reviewed the FY 2003-04 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through February 2004. She reminded the members that the collections are in arrears so that the March receipts are collected in April.

Member discussed the effects of weather on occupancy tax rates. Member Tester suggested that the TDA could work to mitigate the impacts of poor weather on the occupancy tax rates. Vice-Chair Tarbutton mentioned that Disney parks have a plan to do so and provide other activities to compensate for poor weather.

### **Tourism Statistics**

Vice Chairperson Tarbutton reviewed with the Authority tourism information collected from the High Country Host.

He stated that the High Country Host location is not the optimum due to all the traffic and clutter in the area on US 321 in Boone. Also, he mentioned that most people stop at a welcome/visitor center for restroom facilities.

He also advised that he had contacted AdvantageWest and American Express for their tourism information. He advised that he would share that information in an upcoming meeting.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton also distributed a copy of a survey prepared by the High Country Host that could provide more local data on the area.

## **Committee Report – Tourism Data Survey & Ad Agency**

No report was given. The committee will meet on March 9, 2004 to begin the development of a tourism survey and discuss the steps in acquiring an ad agency.

## **Report – 2004 N.C. Governor’s Conference on Tourism**

Chairperson Keele stated that the meeting was extremely informative. Several members expressed the same sentiment and that the sharing of ideas among TDA counterparts is important.

## **Next Meeting**

It was the consensus of the Authority to hold the next meeting at 8:00 a.m. on Monday, May 3, 2004 (instead of May 4) due to scheduling concerns of several members. Issues for the next regular meeting will include – FY 2004-05 Budget, Committee Report – Tourism Data Survey and Ad Agency, and the Town Master Sign Plan.

Chairperson Keele advised that the May meeting potentially could be a long session due to budget reviews.

## **Comments**

Sonny Howard suggested that inviting travel writers up to Blowing Rock to display what we have to offer might prove beneficial. He advised that they did a similar thing in Tallahassee, Florida.

Member Hildebran mentioned that NBC6 – Charlotte would be in Blowing Rock on May 17 from Noon to 6 p.m. broadcasting during their tourism promotion.

## **Adjourn**

There being no further business - motion by Member Tarbutton and seconded by Member Pickett to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 10:15 a.m.

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Bernard Keele, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary