

Town of Blowing Rock

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – May 3, 2004

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Monday, May 3, 2004 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Authority members Keith Tester, Kent Tarbutton, Lynn Drury, and Phil Pickett, and Ex-officio members Barbara Beach and Scott Hildebran.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – April 8, 2004

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

Blowing Rock Master Signage Plan – Presentation

Kirk Lowry, of Southwood Corp., reviewed with the TDA members the steps involved in completing a Comprehensive Town of Blowing Rock Master Signage Plan. He discussed the importance of stakeholders in the planning process. The wayfinding strategy will include:

- Define and prioritize objectives of wayfinding/graphics program.
- Geographical definitions.
- Tourist destinations/Town assets.
- Traffic flow projections.
- Identify roadblocks to design and implementation process.

Mr. Lowry and Planning Director Kevin Rothrock advised that they would set up a worksession meeting for the various constituencies on the matter later this month. Member Tester asked if there were a timeline for completing the project. Mr. Lowry advised that late August was a realistic date.

FY 2004-05 TDA Budget

Chairperson Keele stated that the TDA had received requests from various community groups seeking funding. He then advised that the TDA would listen to presentations from any of the groups in attendance. (Requests - Attachments #1 - #8)

REQUESTS:

- 1) Town of Blowing Rock \$233,055
- 2) BRAAC \$5,500

- 3) Blowing Stage Company \$20,000
 - 4) Blowing Rock Community Arts Center \$50,000
 - 5) Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show \$25,000
 - 6) Chamber of Commerce \$165,073
 - 7) Winterfest \$20,000
 - 8) Watauga County Arts Council \$3,000
- Master Signage Plan (Southwood Corp.) \$3,000

(A town-supported initiative)

Chairperson Keele called upon the following groups:

Watauga County Arts Council – No one present.

Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission – No one present.

Winterfest – Earle Horne, representative of Winterfest, stated that Winterfest had been operating for 6 years and was established to bring tourism to Blowing Rock during the winter period. He advised that Winterfest wanted to grow the event and would like to increase advertising in surrounding markets.

Chairperson Keele asked about the revenue/expenses of Winterfest. Mr. Horne stated that Winterfest had \$16,000 in revenue and \$8,000 in expenses in 2004.

Member Tester asked if Winterfest was independent of the Stage Company or a subsidiary. Mr. Horne advised that they were two separate organizations and that Winterfest had contributed proceeds to the Stage Company.

Mr. Horne mentioned that no formal occupancy survey had been completed, but informal data results show that Winterfest had increased motel occupancy during the festival weekend.

Chairperson Keele asked if Winterfest would consider folding into the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Keele further mentioned that discussion had begun regarding the Chamber and Merchant's Association combining organizations. Mr. Horne responded that volunteers put on the event and that Winterfest would listen to any suggestions for improvement and/or full-time assistance.

There were no further questions.

Charity Horse Show – No one present.

Stage Company – Ken Kaye and Bob Miller, representatives of the Stage Company, were present to discuss the request by the Stage Company for \$20,000. Mr. Kaye advised that the Stage Company had been operating for 19 seasons in Blowing Rock. Over 70% of attendees to performances are from out of the county. Season ticket sales topped 1,000 last year for the 83 performances. Attendance averaged about 70% for the 240-seat

venue. Mr. Kaye stated that for every dollar spent on a theater performance an additional \$3.00 is spent in the local economy.

Member Drury asked about the drop in revenue during the past season. Mr. Kaye responded that the revenue drop was due to a cut in state funding.

Mr. Miller advised that the Stage Company makes contact with all local motels/hotels and Tanger Outlet to promote the Stage Company productions and bring overnight visitors to Blowing Rock.

Mr. Kaye mentioned that the new Community Arts Center would hold 350 seats. The Stage Company will be the main tenant and will have a 99-year lease with the facility. Mr. Miller mentioned that based on 1992 survey data, 75% of patrons stay overnight in the Blowing Rock area.

The Stage Company hopes to market the productions in Florida, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia due to the fact that is where the current patrons reside.

Blowing Rock Arts Center – No one present.

Chamber of Commerce – Charles Hardin, Executive Director of the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce, was present to discuss the Chamber request for \$165,073. He stated that the Chamber has been promoting tourism in Blowing Rock for 40 years. Mr. Hardin reviewed their budget request and advised that the most immediate need was for \$11,000 to cover the newly created brochure costs.

Member Tester encouraged the Chamber to think about how it plans to separate TDA funds from Chamber funds because this would be critical for how the groups work together.

Chairperson Keele informed TDA members that he, Member Tester, the Chamber and Merchants Association have been holding regular meetings to facilitate a unified tourism effort.

Member Pickett encouraged the Chamber to expand Art in the Park to a two day event, which would increase overnight accommodations.

After a brief discussion, motion by Member Drury and seconded by Member Pickett to fund the Chamber brochures with an \$11,000 allocation. Motion unanimously approved.

TDA Budget Review Action:

Prior to hearing the Town funding request, Member Tester suggested a proposed budget structure to be used as a guide for the TDA in budgeting. (Attachment #9) All members agreed by consensus to use the structure.

The proposed \$600,000 in occupancy proceeds would be distributed in the following manner:

Expenditure Ratios

- 1. Administrative/Operational Activities – 5%
- 2. Goal Setting and Direction Activities – 25%
- 3. Direct Tourism Promotion – 25%
- 4. Support to Organized Groups/Events – 11.7%
- 5. Tourism Infrastructure – 33.3%

Member Drury left the meeting due to a previous commitment.

Town of Blowing Rock –

Chairperson Keele requested Ex Officio Member Hildebran to present the proposed Town of Blowing Rock funding request. Mr. Hildebran reviewed the Town's request, which was designed to hold the Town harmless from the new occupancy tax change.

Upon recommendation of Member Tester, the TDA agreed to include the BRAAC funding request with the Town of Blowing Rock request.

After some discussion and funding category changes, motion by Member Tester, seconded by Member Pickett to approve the Town of Blowing Rock funding request for \$238,555. Motion unanimously approved. (A breakdown of the funding category allocation is included in Attachment #10)

Watauga County Arts Council – Due to the fact that the request was not tourism-related, the TDA referred the request to the Town of Blowing Rock for consideration.

Winterfest – The TDA discussed the possibility of the Chamber incorporating Winterfest into their program offerings. Member Tester stated that it is difficult to increase Winterfest marketing funding from \$8,000 to \$20,000 without a clear plan for increasing event activities.

It was consensus to table the request until such time as the Chamber and Winterfest work out an arrangement.

Blowing Rock Appearance Advisory Commission – TDA agreed to fund \$5,500 via the Town of Blowing Rock budget request.

Charity Horse Show – TDA tabled this request until a more comprehensive TDA advertisement plan is developed.

Blowing Rock Arts Center – Chairperson Keele said he felt the Arts Center could potentially be great for Blowing Rock, but questioned how are they going to annually fund the continuing operations of the venue. Vice-chair Tarbutton stated that he sat on the Board of the Arts Center and that the Center was \$1½ million short of their \$8 million goal at this time. Mr. Tarbutton mentioned that a feasibility study had been conducted and he would ask the Arts Center to share the study with the TDA.

Member Tester stated that the request was for capital funding and that the TDA had just committed its available capital funding to the Town.

It was the consensus that the TDA table this item at this time until further information was available.

Stage Company – Member Tester stated that the Stage Company had requested very specific funding for marketing activities. It was the consensus of the TDA to fund the Stage Company \$10,000 for their marketing efforts.

Signage Master Plan (Southwood Corp.) – It was the consensus of the TDA to fund \$3,000 to cover the master signage plan expenses.

Funding Approvals

Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to formally approve TDA funds as follows:

- Town of Blowing Rock - \$238,555 for tourism infrastructure/promotion/planning

(Category #2 - \$12,500)

(Category #3 - \$7,500)

(Category #4 - \$18,935)

(Category #5 - \$199,620)

- Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce - \$11,000 for brochures (Category #3)

- Blowing Rock Stage Company - \$10,000 for marketing (Category #3)

- Master Signage Plan - \$3,000 for signage plan (Category #2)

Motion unanimously approved.

Financial Report – Occupancy Tax Proceeds

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

Tourism Statistics

Vice Chairperson Tarbutton shared with members statistics provided from American Express regarding who spends money at Chetola Resort. Everyone agreed that the information could be of value to the TDA and motels/hotels. A discussion followed about how to best obtain the confidential spending patterns at local businesses in the community and still maintain privacy. TDA members agreed to look further into this matter.

Committee Report – Tourism Data Survey & Ad Agency

Vice Chairperson Tarbutton shared information with the TDA from the committee. He stated that the committee has reviewed potential collection techniques, sample size, sample locations, and survey times. Vice-chair Tarbutton requested direction for the committee regarding survey size and costs. The TDA suggested a sample size of at least 400.

Mr. Tarbutton advised the committee would continue to meet to discuss the next steps in acquiring an ad agency.

Next Meeting

It was the consensus of the Authority that budget discussions would continue at the June meeting (8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, June 1, 2004). Other issues for the next regular meeting will include – Committee Report Update on Tourism Data Survey and Ad Agency, the Town Master Sign Plan and Chamber/Merchants Association Discussions.

Comments

Member Hildebran reminded members once again 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 Tester to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at noon.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary