

Town of Blowing Rock

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – June 1, 2004

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, June 1, 2004 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Authority members Keith Tester, Lynn Drury, and Phil Pickett, and Ex-officio members Barbara Beach and Scott Hildebran. Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton was absent.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – May 3, 2004

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the May 3, 2004 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Drury to approve the May 3, 2004 minutes. Unanimously approved.

FY 2004-05 TDA Budget – Public Hearing

Chairperson Keele stated that the TDA would be holding a public hearing on the proposed FY 2004-2005 TDA Budget and asked the Authority for any comments. Member Tester suggested the budget be amended to clearly state the \$5,500 appropriated to the Town of Blowing Rock for BRAAC be revised to appropriate \$5,500 to the Town for Town Center beautification. All members agreed with this change. Chairman Keele then opened the public hearing for comments from citizens.

Bill Leahey asked if the balance available meant that the money had not been appropriated by the TDA. Chairman Keele stated that was correct and that the TDA would review additional funding requests once a formal Budget Request Review Policy was developed by the TDA. Also, Chairman Keele advised that the TDA was developing a tourism survey and marketing plan and those two elements would drive future funding.

Mr. Leahey then asked about the Tiller Property appropriation to the Town for \$81,850. Member Tester responded that the property was purchased by the Town and would be used for tourism purposes – a front portion for a park, the middle portion leased to the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum and a rear portion used for a parking facility. Chairman Keele also stated that later in the meeting the TDA would discuss a possible use for the Edgewood Cottage located on the front of the property.

Hearing no additional comments, Chairman Keele entertained a motion to close the public hearing. Motion by Member Tester, seconded by Member Drury to close the public hearing on the FY 2004-2005 TDA Budget. Unanimously approved.

Motion by Member Tester, seconded by Member Pickett to approve the FY 2004-2005 TDA Budget as amended earlier in the meeting. Unanimously approved. (**Attachment #1**)

Financial Report – Occupancy Tax Proceeds

Finance Officer Barbara Beach reviewed the FY 2003-04 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through April 2004. She reminded the members that the collections are in arrears so that the May receipts are collected in June. Members noted the collections for April 2004 were slightly higher than the collections in April 2003.

Committee Report – Tourism Data Survey & Ad Agency

Member Drury advised that the committee had not met since the last TDA meeting but would complete their tasks in the near future. She also stated that the committee hasn't at this time firmed up the commitment with Appalachian State University on the survey

Chairperson Keele requested that the committee move quickly on the survey and ad agency selection process and that a TDA special meeting could be called for in the next few weeks to address any issues. Member Drury advised she and the committee would move forward as soon as possible.

Master Signage Plan

Chairperson Keele stated that the TDA held a Stakeholders Meeting on May 27th to discuss the Master Signage Plan process and that Wayfinding Specialist Kirk Lohry would be in contact in the next few weeks.

New Business – Committee Report on TDA Visits

Chairperson Keele stated that he and Members Pickett and Tester had traveled to visit several Western North Carolina Tourism Development Authorities to see how they operate. Visits included – Asheville/Buncombe County, Brevard, Hendersonville, and Highlands. Chairperson Keele shared an overview of the recommendations received during the visits:

Overall Recommendations from Visits

- Trained tourism development persons to direct Visitors Center
- Inventory Blowing Rock
- Branding of Blowing Rock
- Separate Visitors Center
- Most effective organization is for TDA Visitors Center to be separate from Chamber of Commerce
- Careful selection of media placement to select the types of visitors solicited
- Track all ads for response rates
- Set up referral system to motels – motels to notify TDA of open rooms

Mr. Keele also provided a summary from each visit. (**Attachments #2-5**)

Member Tester stated that the TDA has a great opportunity due to a larger budget than most other TDA's and what the TDA has to market – Blowing Rock. He advised that the TDA must inventory what we have, find our unique qualities, brand it, figure out who we want to come here and then market the area to them. He further stated that the Chamber and TDA are different entities with different purposes and funding sources. Member Pickett mentioned that each hosts advised the TDA to remember where their income was coming from – the local motels/hotels. Member Tester stated that all locations visited repeatedly pointed out that in advertising you must promote the area.

New Business – Matching Grants, Agency Contracts & Visioning Sessions

Chairperson Keele provided handouts to the Authority regarding Matching Advertising Grants, Agency Contracts & Visioning Sessions. (**Attachments #6-8**)

Highlights from Visits - Co-op Grant Programs

- To promote assistance to tourism related endeavors for the Town of Blowing Rock
- Will provide 100-50% of the cost of advertising for the event (brochure)
- Request to TDA by the 15th of the month
- Decision at next TDA meeting
- No funds for capital projects
- Advertising must be targeted 50 miles or more from Blowing Rock
- Budget set aside for 2004-2005 - (\$25,000 – Example)

The Matching Advertising Grant Program was modeled after Highlands. The Agency Contract was acquired from Mount Airy. The Visioning information came from the Town Center sessions held last year. He requested that the Authority review each item prior to next months meeting. Chairperson Keele suggested that these items be discussed in detail at the next meeting.

New Business – Goals for FY 2004-2005

Chairperson Keele reviewed proposed TDA goals for FY 2004-2005.

Goals for 2004-2005

- Complete Tourism Survey
- Retain Branding Firm
- Retain Consultant or employ Director of the TDA, who will:
 - Oversee projects
 - Inventory Blowing Rock
 - Determine criteria for TDA membership
 - Develop image campaign
 - Put in place an organized media campaign
 - Develop a web site
- Plan for the operation of a visitors center
- Plan for the Visitors Center physical location
- Agree on Mission Statement

Mission Statement Draft: "To develop travel and tourism to and within the Town of Blowing Rock – This shall be done by state and national advertising with the goal of increasing the number of overnight guests."

By consensus, all members concurred with proposed FY 2004-2005 TDA Goals.

Member Tester requested that the TDA consider two issues for the remainder of the calendar year – fall/winter marketing and visitors center. He suggested that the TDA acquire an advertising agency immediately for a fall & winter focused marketing. Member Drury advised she would seek potential ad agencies for TDA consideration.

Member Tester also suggested the TDA work with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce to continue as the Visitors Center until at least the end of the year. He stated that he would be open to all possibilities for Visitors Center operations beyond that date. By consensus, the Authority agreed to work with the Chamber to establish a budget for a Visitors Center for the remainder of the year.

Chairperson Keele informed the Authority that staff had reserved www.blowingrockvisitorscenter.com for possible use as a TDA website.

New Business – Edgewood Cottage/Visitors Center

Chairperson Keele advised that he had in the last several days met with the Blowing Rock Historical Society in reference to their project to restore the Edgewood Cottage. Based on conversations, the idea was formed to possibly locate a Visitors Center in the restored Cottage. Mr. Keele mentioned that there were several valid reasons for pursuing this venture – a location downtown on Main Street, the property is town-owned, additional parking is planned on the property, a possibility of constructing additional public restrooms adjacent to the Center, and potentially saving a historically significant structure. **(Attachment #9)**

Member Drury stated that she believes the cost to restore the structure was in the vicinity of \$150,000. Chairperson Keele mentioned, that even including another \$100,000 to construct restrooms, the project cost of \$250,000 amortized over a 10-15 year period would be feasible.

Member Tester stated that wherever the Visitors Center is located your either going to pay a lease payment or a mortgage payment. He also suggested the TDA work with the Historical Society to see if the structure would be salvageable; if not, possibly a replicate could be constructed on the site. Further, Member Tester advised that this location provided an opportunity for adequate parking for visitors.

Member Pickett concurred and stated that based on their recent visits that adequate parking was a necessity at a Visitors Center.

Mr. Leahey requested that the TDA conduct a survey prior to making a final decision.

After a brief discussion, motion by Member Tester, seconded by Member Drury to explore as an option, with the Blowing Rock Historical Society, using the Edgewood Cottage as a Visitors Center. Unanimously approved.

New Business – School Calendar

Member Pickett suggested that the TDA take a position on the "Save Our Summers" initiative, which would extend the summer school break and aid tourism.

Cathy Robbins, with Tweetsie Railroad, requested that the Authority take a position supporting a delay in the start of the school in order to aid the tourism and the economy. She provided a handout on the issue and advised that the Boone TDA had approved a letter of support of legislation that would mandate some sort of compromise. **(Attachment #10)** She advised that the State of North Carolina provides 20 teacher workdays a year compared to an average of 6 teacher workdays nationally.

After a brief discussion, motion by Member Pickett, seconded by Member Drury to draft a letter to the local legislative delegation supporting a delay in the start of school to enhance tourism in the High County. The motion also requested that the Blowing Town Council take a position on the issue. Unanimously approved.

New Business – Budget Request Reviews

Member Tester advised that he had received a TDA funding request from the Blowing Rock Charity Horse Show Foundation to aid a "Rock Stars to Royalty" event that would bring a famed interior designer to Blowing Rock. **(Attachment #11)**

Mr. Tester suggested that TDA move forward with development of a procedure and a process to review formal budget requests. Chairperson Keele stated that the TDA would be addressing this issue at its next meeting.

Next Meeting

It was the consensus of the Authority that at the July meeting (July 6, 2004, 8:00 a.m.) they would continue discussion on the survey and ad agency. Other issues for the next regular meeting will include – Matching Grants, Agency Contracts, Visioning Sessions, the Town Master Sign Plan and Chamber/Merchants Association Discussions.

Adjourn

There being no further business - motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Tester to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 9:15 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

ATTACHMENTS

#6 Matching Grant Draft Guidelines

#7 Agency Contract - Example from Mt. Airy

#8 Visioning Sessions Summary - May and June 2003

#9 Edgewood Cottage Information

#10 School Calender – Save Our Summers Information

#11 Rock Stars to Royalty – Charity Horse Show Request