

Town of Blowing Rock

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – July 6, 2004

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, July 6, 2004 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Keith Tester, 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.

Chamber/TDA Agreement

Chairperson Keele announced a proposed agreement with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce in regard to the functional relationship between both organizations.

Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce:

- Web Site - www.blowingrock.com

Links on Main Page:

Accommodations

Attractions

Restaurants

Shopping

Visitors Center

Chamber of Commerce

- Event Management and Promotion
- Data Collection
- Merchant, Retail Promotion – All concerns
- Share Physical Space if Possible

Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority

- Web Site - www.blowingrock.com

Links on Main Page:

Accommodations

Attractions

Restaurants

Shopping

Visitors Center

Chamber of Commerce

- Operation of Visitors Center
- National, Local and other Image Advertising
- Provide ad support and funds for co-op ads for events
- Provide funds for start up events and ongoing event support where appropriate
- Share physical space, if possible

Chairperson Keele thanked Chamber President Michael Button and Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin for their efforts.

Approval of Minutes – May 27, 2004, June 1, 2004 and June 14, 2004

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the May 27, 2004, June 1, 2004 and June 14, 2004 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Pickett to approve the May 27, 2004, June 1, 2004 and June 14, 2004 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

Committee Report – Tourism Data Survey & Ad Agency

Chairperson Keele requested an update from the Tourism Data Survey Committee. Vice-Chair Tarbutton advised that the committee had met several times since the last TDA meeting. He distributed a proposal from Appalachian State University on the proposed Blowing Rock tourism market survey (**Attachment #1**) and reviewed the document with the Authority.

After a brief discussion, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Drury to approve a contract with Appalachian State University (DESS Consulting Services) for a Blowing Rock tourism market survey for \$14,000. Unanimously approved.

Chairperson Keele requested an update on the advertising agency selection status. Member Drury advised that she would provide a recommendation on website/branding firms by the August meeting. Once those two issues are decided, the Authority can consider selection of an advertising agency.

Matching Grants – Guidelines (Advertising and Events)

Chairperson Keele reviewed proposed guidelines with the Authority regarding Matching Grants for Advertising and Events. He advised that both documents would provide a process for the Authority to review funding requests.

After several minor modifications, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Drury to approve Matching Grant Guidelines for Advertising and Events. Unanimously approved. (**Attachments #2-3**)

Financial Report – Occupancy Tax Proceeds

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

Member Tester noted the collections for the first six months of the 2004 were slightly less than the collections in 2003, when considering the new 6% rate.

Ex-Officio Member Beach advised that she had opened the Authority checking account at First Citizens Bank and had deposited \$22,657 into the account, which is the occupancy tax balance from the Town. It was the consensus of the Authority that Chairperson Keele, Vice-Chair Tarbutton, Ex-officio Members Hildebran and Beach be authorized as signatories for the account.

After a brief discussion, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Drury to approve Billy G Combs, P.C. as auditor for the Tourism Development Authority. Unanimously approved.

TDA Position – Job Description

Chairperson Keele reviewed with the Authority a potential job description for a Director of Tourism. Member Tester suggested that the part-time status be changed to full-time due to the earlier decision for the Authority to oversee a Visitor Center. It was the consensus of the Authority to proceed with a process for selection of a Tourism Director.

Tourism Director – Description

The Town of Blowing Rock has recently formed a Tourism Development Authority with the mission of increasing tourism to the Town of Blowing Rock. The mission will be accomplished by the development and implementation of local and national advertising, events and programs. A primary goal of the TDA is to increase the number of overnight stays in Blowing Rock accommodations. The Town of Blowing Rock has an occupancy tax rate of 6%, with an annual tourism budget of approximately \$600,000.

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority is accepting applications for the position of a full-time Director of the Authority.

This person will perform responsible administrative, management and advisory work in directing and managing activities of the Tourism Development Authority. The minimum qualification requirements include: demonstrated expertise and ability to provide leadership for advertisement campaigns, development of printed material, event management and program development to bring additional visitors to Blowing Rock in order to increase the number of overnight stays. Must have ability to direct operations of a visitor center. Must have the ability to develop and operate a tourism website. The position reports to the Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority. Salary and compensation is dependent upon experience and qualifications.

NCACVB Membership

Chairperson Keele reviewed with the Authority a potential membership in the North Carolina Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus. An Associates Membership would cost approximately \$300 a year.

Judy Donaghy, Executive Director of High Country Host, stated that the NCACVB was a worthwhile organization and recommended that the Authority obtain an Associate Membership.

After a brief discussion, motion by Member Drury and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to acquire an Associate Membership with the North Carolina Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus. Unanimously approved.

Master Signage Plan

Chairperson Keele stated that the Master Signage Plan process is in somewhat of a holding pattern until the branding efforts are completed in the coming weeks.

Agency Contract

Chairperson Keele reviewed the model contract agreement that will be utilized with agencies selected to receive TDA funds. After a brief discussion, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Tester to approve the model agency contract. Unanimously approved. (**Attachment #4**)

Screening Committee – Matching Grant Event Guidelines

Member Tester suggested that the Authority establish the formal structure for the Special Event and Tourism Related Activities Grant Program Review Committee. It was the consensus of the Authority that a five-member review committee, with two members of the Authority, 2 members of the Chamber of Commerce and one-member of the Blowing Rock Planning Board, should be established. After a discussion, motion by Member Tester and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to create the Review Committee, and appoint Member Pickett – Chair and Member Drury – Vice Chair. Unanimously approved.

Advertising Campaign (Short-term)

Vice-Chair Tarbutton reviewed the short-term advertising campaign developed by Heidi Lusk (High County Host), in cooperation with himself and Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin. (**Attachment #5**)

The proposal includes five campaigns:

- Internet
- Late Summer (August)
- Fall (September and October)
- Pre-Christmas
- Winter

After some discussion, it was recommended that the Internet Campaign be deleted from the proposal due to the ongoing efforts by the TDA to select a website firm.

Advertising would include:

- Radio Campaign in Raleigh and Charlotte
- Direct Mail in Charlotte Area & possibly Raleigh
- *AAA Go Carolinas* - September/October Issue
- *Southern Living* – Holiday Travel Guide - October
- *Our State* – Gift Guide - November/December
- Charlotte Observer – Holiday Guide – November 21st

- Raleigh News & Observer – Holiday Guide – November 14th & November 19th

- Radio/Raleigh News & Observer/Charlotte Observer – Winter Campaign

Motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Pickett to approve the short-term advertising plan as presented (excluding the Internet Campaign) for \$40,500. Unanimously approved.

Chamber Budget Request (July-December 2004)

Chairperson Keele stated that the Authority had received a proposed budget from the Chamber of Commerce for continual operation of a Visitor Center from July-December 2004. (**Attachment #6**) He advised that Member Tester had reviewed the proposed budget in detail and would present findings to the Authority.

Member Tester distributed a handout to the Authority (**Attachment #7**) and expressed some concerns with the proposed budget. He mentioned that, with the previous TDA allocation commitment for the first six months of the year and \$11,000 brochure and the proposed request of \$54,273.50, the total increase over last year would be 45.4%. Member Tester suggested two possible options for funding –

1) fund the Chamber the same amount as last year (\$62,000 plus the \$11,000 brochure allocation), or \$6,224.16/month for remaining 6 months; or

2) fund the Chamber 10% of the net occupancy tax collected (which would be equal to the 20% received at the old 3% rate), estimated at \$76,655 for the year.

Member Tester further suggested that additional allocations for "agreed to" added value items could be negotiated.

President Button requested that the Authority consider increasing the funding amount from previous years.

After some discussion, motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Pickett to allocate 10% of the net occupancy tax proceeds to the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce for Visitor Center operation from June-December 2004. Unanimously approved.

Next Meeting

It was the consensus of the Authority that at the August meeting (August 3, 2004, 8:00 a.m.) they would continue discussion on – Tourism Market Survey and Website/Branding Selection and Ad Agency. Other issues for the next regular meeting will include – the Edgewood Cottage and the Town Master Sign Plan.

New Business – Edgewood Cottage Tour

Chairperson Keele advised that the Authority would reconvene the meeting at the Edgewood Cottage in order for the Authority to tour the building with the Historical Society.

Member Drury, due to a prior commitment, left the meeting.

During the visit, Historical Society Members (Ginny Stevens, Cullie Tarleton and others) provided the Authority with an overview of the building. The Historical Society advised they would meet with State of N.C. Preservation officials as well as preservation architects in reference to restoration of the Edgewood Cottage. Chairperson Keele requested that the parties meet as soon as possible and stated a maximum project cost of \$300,000 for a Visitor Center amortized over a 10-15 year period would be feasible.

The Historical Society agreed to proceed as quickly as possible on the matter.

Recessed Meeting

Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Tester to recess the meeting until Sunday, July 11, 2004 at 2:00 p.m. (Town Hall) to meet with a Tourism Consultant, Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele recessed the meeting at 10:10 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

ATTACHMENTS

#1 ASU Market Survey Proposal

#2 Guidelines (Advertising)

#3 Guidelines (Events)

#4 Model Agency Contract

#5 Advertising Campaign Proposal (Short-term)

#6 Chamber Budget Request

#7 Tester Budget Review