

Town of Blowing Rock

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – December 1, 2004

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

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – November 1, 10, 12, 18 and 24, 2004

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the November 1, November 10, November 12, November 18 and November 24, 2004 meeting minutes (including closed sessions). Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Drury to approve the the November 1, November 10, November 12, November 18 and November 24, 2004 meeting minutes (including closed sessions). Unanimously approved.

Financial Report – Occupancy Tax Proceeds

Finance Director Pierce reviewed the FY 2004-05 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through October 2004 as well as the financial statements. She reminded the members that the collections are in arrears so that the November receipts are collected in December. Authority members noted that the October revenue totals were up, even when compared to prior years. Both Vice-Chair Tarbutton and Member Pickett stated that the numbers were heading in the right direction and November revenue totals should be strong.

Report – Visitors Center

Chairperson Keele announced that the Town had finalized a contract to purchase the Caruso property on U.S. 321 for a Visitor Center. The closing is scheduled to occur prior to January 1, 2005. Mr. Keele discussed the various renovations needed on the building to make it functional for a Visitor Center opening on or around April 1, 2005.

- Install Drywall in Right Front Office Area
- Construct Wall Creating two Front Offices
- Enclose Telephone/Computer Equipment
- Construct ADA Restroom Facilities
- Construct ADA Ramp at Upper Level Front Door
- Replace Exterior Front Door (with Wood Door and Side Lites)
- Construct Exterior Stairway to Lower level
- Replace Lower Level Backdoor with Metal Door
- Exterior Painting (Trim Color Contrast)
- Install Wood Flooring Throughout First Level
- Install Carpet in Stairwell and Lower Level
- Remove Counter at Left Front Door
- Remove Barn Siding in Right Front Office Area
- Replace Tile Floor in Lower Level Restroom

- Remove Tub Lower Level Restroom
- Paint Lower Level - including Stairwell

Ex-officio Member Hildebran advised that the Town would likely obtain a 15-year loan for \$525,000 to acquire and outfit the building. It is estimated that the TDA debt requirements for the building would total \$4,200 a month. However, Chairperson Keele stated that the TDA would lease a portion of the building to the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce (lease amount to be dictated by space needs).

Other

Chairperson Keele advised he would draft an annual report on the 2004 accomplishments of TDA activities. Once the Authority concurs with the draft, the TDA Annual Report will be forwarded to Town Council for review at their Retreat to be held in January. Member Tester suggested that prior to submission of the report that the Authority make all the necessary budget adjustments (personnel, visitor center, and Chamber) to adequately reflect a year-to-date budget. Ex-officio Member Pierce stated that she would have the adjustments ready for Authority consideration at the January 10th meeting.

Committee Reports – Tourism Data Survey & Ad Placement

Vice-Chair Tarbutton advised that several dates of the tourism data survey collection were missing and that he was trying to ascertain which party may have them. As a result, the confidence level of the survey information is not as high as ASU would desire. He further stated that the process would continue to move forward and additional survey dates would be scheduled.

Member Drury stated that Crown Communications would discuss the ad placement campaign later in the meeting, but, the committee had authorized an ad co-op placement in *The New York Times*.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton briefly discussed ad placement results tracking via the use of internet site hits and telephone calls. He also mentioned the use of temporary toll-free numbers as a tracking device.

Member Tester requested that the Chamber of Commerce provide the TDA with their historical visitor walk-in numbers at their present location to be used as comparative data for the new Visitor Center.

The Authority then discussed the Monthly Occupancy Tax Reports and the need for information on available rooms during weekdays and weekends. It was suggested that this item be added to the monthly reporting requirements.

Recessed Meeting

Chairperson Keele recessed the meeting at 8:25 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. when Crown Communications would review their latest branding/marketing design concepts with the Authority.

Executive Director Announcement

Chairperson Keele reconvened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. and formally announced the selection of Susan Freshcorn as Executive Director of the Tourism Development Authority and welcomed Ms. Freshcorn to the meeting. Mr. Keele stated a formal press release would be forthcoming. Ms. Freshcorn is expected to begin her duties after the first of the year. Everyone in attendance welcomed Ms. Freshcorn.

Committee Report – Branding

Mr. Keele then welcomed the TDA's advertising agency, Crown Communications. Tim Minor of Crown Communications distributed an agenda for their discussion. (**Attachment #1**) He announced co-op ad placement with the State of N.C. in the *New York Times*, Southeast Travel Edition in April 2005.

Mr. Minor then reviewed the comments received from the focus groups on the three branding concepts [A – Contemporary Logo, B – Circle Logo, and C – Word Mark Mountains Logo]. (**Attachment #2**) The following questions were asked of the focus group:

What words come to mind when you look at this logo?

What does this say about Blowing Rock?

What do you like about this logo?

What don't you like about this logo?

At this point, Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce representatives arrived at the meeting. Chairperson Keele requested that the Authority place the branding issue on hold temporarily until the Chamber of Commerce Operations Agreement could be resolved.

Chamber of Commerce – Operations Agreement

Chairperson Keele recognized Chamber of Commerce President Michael Button to discuss the results of the Chamber of Commerce Board meeting. Mr. Button announced that the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors approved an Operations Agreement with the Tourism Development Authority (as adopted by the TDA at their prior meeting). He advised that the Chamber had some concern over membership issues, but hoped that the TDA would support the Chamber in their in-town membership recruitment efforts.

Member Tester and Chairperson Keele recommended that the Chamber of Commerce clearly spell out their benefits to potential members and the value added by being a member. President Button agreed and stated there were still some gray areas which both entities would need to continue to work out. Mr. Keele suggested four key areas for the Chamber to focus on – Economic Development, Education, Governmental Affairs, and Event Management. Vice-Chair Tarbuton echoed those sentiments.

Ex-officio Member Hildebran recommended that this would be an opportune time for Chamber of Commerce to draft a Strategic Plan. Chairperson Keele requested that Vice-Chair Tarbuton and Member Tester work with the Chamber of Commerce on these issues.

Mr. Keele updated the Chamber of Commerce representatives in the audience that the Visitor Center property purchase was moving ahead and that he would set up a walk-through of the building later in the day for interested parties.

Committee Report – Branding - continued

After the Operations Agreement issue was resolved, Mr. Minor then asked the Authority for their reactions and comments to the focus group comments. After some discussion, it was the consensus of the Authority to use a variation of concepts for the Blowing Rock brand - the Solo Contemporary Leaf with the new font Word Mark. (**Attachment #3**)

Mr. Minor thanked the Authority for all of their efforts on this important task.

Tag Line

Mr. Minor reviewed potential tag lines for the TDA – "Crown of the Blue Ridge", "Mountains of Adventure, Beauty, and Taste", and "Blowing Rock - Where the wind takes you".

After a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the Authority to use "Blowing Rock – where the wind takes you".

Ad Placement

Mr. Minor then discussed a proposed Ad Campaign for the remainder of the fiscal year. (**Attachment #4**) The proposed publications would include: *Our State Magazine*, *AAA Go Magazine*, *Southern Living Magazine*, *The New York Times*, VisitNC.com and the VisitNC.com Virtual Rack Brochure for a total expenditure of \$30,952. He advised that some monies would still be available for marketing, as leverage opportunities arise. It was the consensus to support the campaign as presented.

Various members suggested future co-op ad placement with Tweetsie Railroad, Grandfather Mountain and Tanger Outlet as well as in the Hilton Head Island Packet and Charleston Area Packet. Ms. Freshcorn also mentioned co-op opportunities with the Southeast Tourism Society.

Member Drury recommended that *The New York Times* ad be used as the prototype ad.

Web Site

Mr. Minor then discussed the web site development process and that Crown Communications would be in contact with local businesses in the next several weeks to receive information. It was suggested that a letter be drafted to Blowing Rock businesses requesting updated web site information and that new Executive Director Freshcorn use this as an opportunity to introduce herself to the community.

Signage

Chairperson Keele proposed, that with the development of a brand logo and tag line, Crown Communications contact Master Sign Plan Consultant Southwood Corp. to further discuss signage issues. The Authority also discussed the need to begin design of a Visitor Center sign.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 10:35 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 – Crown Communications Meeting Agenda

#2 – Focus Group Comments

#3 - Solo Contemporary Leaf with the new font Word Mark

#4 – Crown Communications Ad Campaign - remainder of the fiscal year

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