

## **Town of Blowing Rock**

### **Tourism Development Authority**

#### **Minutes – April 7, 2005**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Thursday, April 7, 2005 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Lynn Drury, Phil Pickett and Keith Tester, and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Margaret Pierce. TDA Executive Director Susan Freshcorn was also present.

#### **Call to Order**

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

#### **Approval of Minutes – March 1 & 2, 2005**

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the March 1 and 2, 2005 meeting minutes. Motion by Vice Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Tester to approve the March 1 and 2, 2005 meeting minutes, which the correction that the architect should read "David Wagner". Unanimously approved.

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

Finance Officer Margaret Pierce reviewed the FY 2004-05 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through February 2005 as well as the financial statements. Ms. Pierce stated that February revenues were up somewhat compared to February 2004 and that FY 2004-05 revenues should hit the budget target if the next four months revenue reflect last year totals. She also advised that due to several pending budget issues that the TDA may want to schedule a work session to further discuss the items.

It was the consensus that a TDA work session on budget issues be scheduled for Wednesday, April 13, 2005 at 2:30 p.m.

#### **Committee Report – Tourism Data Survey**

Vice-Chair Tarbutton discussed the status of the Blowing Rock TDA Tourism Data Survey. He advised that Phase I - Fall 2004 of the survey was reviewed at the last TDA meeting. Mr. Tarbutton stated that additional surveys were scheduled in the following seasons - Spring, Summer and Winter. However, he stated that the Authority may want to postpone any additional surveys due all the recent surveys conducted in the market (High Country Host, Art in the Park, the Arts Council, etc.), and that all surveys seem to have similar results.

Executive Director Freshcorn suggested that the TDA might want to conduct surveys every other year.

Member Tester recommended with proceeding with the surveys in order to obtain an initial 12-month baseline measure of data.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that the current survey probably does not measure the parameters that the TDA desires and that other techniques might provide better survey results on the success of TDA activities – hotel occupancy rates, 800 numbers responses, and Visitor Center caller data.

Member Drury suggested that the surveys be modified to provide more specific data to ascertain advertising effects.

It was the consensus of the Authority to reformat the survey and discuss the issue with the TDA marketing firm prior to continuing with future surveys.

### **Report – Branding /Marketing/Web Site**

Executive Director Susan Freshcorn provided a TDA Executive Director Monthly Report on her activities (**Attachment #1**) and updated the Authority on TDA Branding/Marketing/Web Site activities.

She stated that the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus had recommended a name change to "Destination Marketing Association International". She advised that advertisements for Blowing Rock had ran in *AAA GO Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *Our State* magazine in March and that the TDA had received a great deal of information requests as a result of the ads.

Member Tester asked who was tracking the results of the ads. Ms. Freshcorn stated that primarily occupancy tax rates and information requests were the means of tracking those ads.

Director Freshcorn invited the Authority to attend Tourism Day Extravaganza on Tuesday, May 10<sup>th</sup> in Raleigh as the tourism industry highlights the importance of tourism to state lawmakers.

She also announced that Blowing Rock received an award at the 2005 Governor's Conference on Travel and Tourism in Asheville on April 3-5 – as recipient of the Southern Progress Reader's Choice Award as one of the three best mountain destinations along with Asheville and Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Ms. Freshcorn stated that Vice-Chair Tarbutton attended the event and that Chetola Resort was represented at the conference.

Executive Director Freshcorn advised that Phase I of the TDA web site went live on March 4. To date, 104 businesses are participating on the site.

Member Tester asked what role the marketing agency had in regard to the web site. Ms. Freshcorn responded that Crown Communications updated all pictures and structural components, while the TDA maintained the content.

Member Tester asked what was included in Phase II and did the TDA own the web site. Member Drury advised that the web site was owned by the TDA. Director Freshcorn stated that Phase II was basically improved functionality, an e-newsletter and more bells and whistles.

Member Tester stated that the overall budget was not as bad as it might seem and that if the TDA needed to move forward with Phase II immediately than the Board should do so. Ms. Freshcorn responded that Phase II was scheduled for next fiscal year.

Chairperson Keele stated that the Authority would further discuss budget-related issues at their work session next week.

### **Report – Visitors Center**

Chairperson Keele updated the Authority on the renovation of the Visitor Center. He stated approximately \$42,000 worth of materials and services had been donated to the project. Mr. Keele invited the Authority and audience to go by and take a tour of the facility, and also mentioned the Visitor Center has a completion date of May 1.

Executive Director Susan Freshcorn discussed the new brochure racks to be located in the Center. She stated that the TDA rack category headings would be: Where to Stay, Things to Do, and Where to Eat. Chamber of

Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin stated the Blowing Rock Vicinity Area rack category headings (which includes the Chamber of Commerce out-of-town members) would be: Accommodations, Services, Relocation, and Things to Do.

Member Tester asked about the process for getting the racks filled with brochures. Ms. Freshcorn advised that the Chamber of Commerce had the primary stock of brochures for the racks. TDA members suggested that an article be placed in newspapers (in the *Blowing Rocket*, *Mountain Times* and the *Watauga Democrat*), that Ms. Freshcorn utilize the TDA monthly business service meetings and that through personal contact with businesses that updated brochures be obtained.

Ms. Freshcorn advised that a grand opening reception for the Visitor Center would be held on May 25<sup>th</sup>.

### **Master Signage Plan**

Ex-officio Member Hildebran informed the Authority that town staff had met with representatives of Southwood Corp. about the master signage efforts. The first priority of Southwood Corp. was designing a sign for the new Visitor Center. Mr. Hildebran distributed a preliminary design of the Visitor Center sign as well as other general and regulatory signage for Authority review and comment. (**Attachment #2**)

The Authority requested that the leaf emblem be brightened on the signage and that staff investigate the possibility of placing a leaf emblem on the poles of all regulatory signage.

Mr. Hildebran stated that he would follow-up on those matters.

Overall, the Authority unanimously endorsed the signage concepts.

### **TDA/Town Council Joint Meeting**

Chairperson Keele asked if any Authority members had questions or comments regarding the TDA/Town Council joint meeting held on March 2, 2005. Hearing none, Mr. Keele expressed thanks to the Town Council for their support of the TDA activities and stated that he hoped the TDA would continue to meet the expectations of Town Council.

### **TDA/Chamber Sub-Lease**

Secretary Hildebran stated that the Town Attorney has drafted a sub-lease to allow the TDA to sublet a portion of the building to the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce. He advised that Chamber of Commerce reviewed the draft sub-lease and suggested several modifications, all of which had been incorporated into the document. Chamber President Pam Vines stated that the Chamber of Commerce was satisfied with the proposed lease and would execute the sub-lease once the floor plans were completed and attached to the sub-lease.

Motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Drury to approve TDA/Chamber of Commerce sublease as presented. Unanimously approved. (**Attachment #3**)

### **Report – Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce**

Chairperson Keele welcomed Chamber of Commerce President Pam Vines to provide an update on Chamber of Commerce activities. She reported that the Chamber had begun drafting their strategic plan and distributed a copy to the Authority for their review (**Attachment #4**).

She advised that the Chamber is preparing for the 2005 Art in the Park season, had recently held the first Pickin' in the Park and is working on a new High Country Classics (vintage cars) event.

She stated that their first Pickin' in the Park did not result in a large turnout, but the Chamber of Commerce was committed to work to improve the event and publicity for the event.

Vice-Chairperson Tarbutton suggested that the Chamber inform lodging establishments of upcoming events so that they could pass along the information to their guests.

Councilmember Barbara Ball suggested that the Chamber contact the Blowing Rock Country Club and request information to be placed in their Club newsletter as a way to inform locals of events.

Chairperson Keele stated that Thursday night events were important to encourage overnight hotel stays and shopping and that would extend weekends. Also, he stressed the need for merchants to have evening operating hours.

Member Tester mentioned that the type of event hosted would be critical in getting the merchants to stay open later.

Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin stated that the Merchants Association has discussed with its membership extending business hours to 9:00 p.m. on Event Nights as well as during the month of July.

Chamber Board Member Caroline Smith invited those in attendance to the Chamber of Commerce "Business After Hours" function to be held at 5:30 p.m. on April 19<sup>th</sup>. The cost is \$2.00 a person.

Chamber President Vines reminded everyone that the Chamber of Commerce would be holding a Yard Sale on April 23<sup>rd</sup> and that the Chamber of Commerce would be relocating to the new Visitor Center on April 28-30.

Chairperson Keele thanked Ms. Vines for her comments.

## **Other**

Executive Director Freshcorn reminded everyone of the Volunteer Day meeting to be held on April 13, 2005 at 4:00 p.m. in Town Hall. She stated that the TDA, Blowing Rock Historical Society, the Blowing Rock Stage Company and others would be gathering in an effort to obtain volunteers for their various activities.

Town Councilmember Barbara Ball suggested that the groups welcome children and families in an effort to improve volunteerism.

## **Next Meeting**

Chairperson Keele stated topics to be discussed at the May 2005 meeting included:

- Proposed FY 2005-06 Budget
- Crown Communications – Web Site/Branding
- Visitor Center Update
- Report - Chamber of Commerce
- Report – TDA Executive Director
- Master Signage Plan

## **Adjournment**

With no further business, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Pickett to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 9:25 a.m.

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Bernard Keele, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

## **Attachments**

**#1 - TDA Executive Director Monthly Report**

**#2 - Master Signage Plan**

**#3 - TDA/Chamber Sub-Lease**

**#4 - Chamber of Commerce Draft Strategic Plan**