

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – May 3, 2005

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, May 3, 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 – April 7 & 13, 2005

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the April 7 and 13, 2005 meeting minutes. Motion by Vice Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Tester to approve the April 7 and 13, 2005 meeting minutes, with the correction that the minutes should read “that Chetola Resort was represented at the Governor’s Conference on Travel And Tourism in Asheville”. Unanimously approved.

Financial Report – Occupancy Tax Proceeds/FY 2005-06 Budget

Chairperson Keele suggested that a work session be scheduled for review of the FY 2005-06 TDA Budget. It was the consensus of the Authority to schedule a budget work session for Monday, May 9, 2005 at 1:30 p.m. at Town Hall.

Finance Officer Margaret Pierce then reviewed the FY 2004-05 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through March 2005 as well as the April financial statements. Ms. Pierce stated that March revenues were down slightly compared to March 2004 and that she would continue to monitor the remaining months of revenue totals. She also advised that due to several pending budget issues that the TDA may want to schedule a future work session to further discuss the items.

Report – Visitors Center

Chairperson Keele updated the Authority on the renovation of the Visitor Center. He stated approximately \$45,000 (\$24,000 in materials/furnishings and \$21,000 in services) worth of materials and services had been donated to the project. On behalf of the Authority, Chairperson Keele accepted these contributions and thanked everyone for their assistance with getting the building renovated and advised that he would send a "thank you" letter to all who provided resources for the project.

Member Pickett stated that he had made contact with Broyhill Furniture regarding additional furniture for the building and was awaiting a response. Chairperson Keele advised that other potential furniture suppliers include Wellington's Leather Furniture, Bernhardt Furniture and Kincaid Furniture.

Executive Director Susan Freshcorn provided an update on the transition and discussed remaining punch-list items to be completed.

Member Tester asked about the Visitor Center scheduled operating hours. Ms. Freshcorn replied that the Center would be open seven days a week beginning June 1. Authority members suggested that the Center should operate during Appalachian State University graduation and Art in the Park and anticipate high traffic volume periods.

Member Pickett inquired about parking at the Center and the limited availability of spaces. Authority members discussed alternative satellite parking areas.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton encouraged Ms. Freshcorn to track walk-ins in order to get a measure for effectiveness, especially for operating hours.

Member Drury asked about staffing and the success of obtaining volunteers. Ms. Freshcorn advised that she had received several good prospective volunteers and is also coordinating with other civic groups.

Master Signage Plan

Ex-officio Member Hildebran informed the Authority that the Visitor Center signage would be in place by the May 25, 2005 grand opening. He also advised the proposed TDA budget included funding for several bypass directional signs.

FY 2005-06 TDA Budget

Ex-Officio Members Hildebran and Pierce distributed a copy of the proposed FY 2005-06 TDA Budget for Authority review (**Attachment # 1**). The proposed budget totals \$627,850. Mr. Hildebran and Ms. Pierce stated that several line-items would need to be detailed by TDA Executive Director Freshcorn, as noted on the draft document. A public hearing on the proposed budget is scheduled for the June 7, 2005 TDA meeting.

Member Tester suggested that Ms. Freshcorn merge her detailed information into the main budget prior to the budget work session. He also requested that the Authority be ready to make a commitment on the town portion of the FY 2005-06 budget at the work session in order to allow the Town budget to go forward.

Chairperson Keele suggested that the TDA Events Committee provide information on any FY 2005-06 funding requests at the work session in order to ascertain possible future budgetary requirements.

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 just completed their move to the new Visitor Center.

She advised that the Chamber was in final preparation for the approaching 2005 Art in the Park season, which begins on May 14. She stated that they were continuing to work on the Summer Concert Series, as well as booking the Army National Guard Band for the Wednesday after July 4th.

Member Drury suggested that the Chamber of Commerce contact and work with Appalachian State University Cannon School of Music, if possible. Ms. Vines advised that they would follow up on the matter, but that many students are away for the summer during this time period.

Chamber President Vines reminded everyone of an upcoming Events Strategy Committee meeting that the Chamber of Commerce would be holding on Thursday, May 5, 2005 at 3:00 p.m. and invited TDA members to attend. Member Tester thanked Ms. Vines for the invitation and stated that it was important that both groups are on the same page.

Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin advised that the US 321 Improvement Project had begun and that the first blasting had occurred. He stated that the NC Department of Transportation had followed the road closing agreement that was implemented prior to the initial construction. He mentioned that general delays could increase travel time to Blowing Rock by over an hour.

Member Tester asked Mr. Hardin if there were any outstanding expenses owed by the TDA for the use of the Chamber building for the last three months. Mr. Hardin responded no.

Chairperson Keele thanked Ms. Vines and Mr. Hardin for their comments.

Report – Executive Director

Executive Director Susan Freshcorn provided a TDA Executive Director Monthly Report on her activities (**Attachment #2**) and updated the Authority on TDA Branding/Marketing/Web Site activities.

She stated that May 6-13 was National Tourism Week and that a Grand Opening was being planned for May 25 at Visitor Center.

She advised that advertisements for Blowing Rock had run in *Our State* magazine in April and that ads would be running in *AAA Go Magazine*, *Our State* and *Southern Living in May*. She mentioned that WCNC-TV Charlotte would be returning to Blowing again this year for an on-location news show on May 13 and would be doing a feature story on the area.

Ms. Freshcorn mentioned that the Charlotte Observer would also be doing a story on the area and co-op ad in mid-May. Member Tester requested that all retail, restaurant, hotel be advised of the possibility of participating in this co-op opportunity.

Member Drury suggested that the TDA become the local contact for both of these the tourism stories.

Member Tester expressed concern that one TDA advertisement contained the word “sizzle” in the copy. He stated that Blowing Rock is a place that offers cool temperatures for visitors and that “sizzle” was probably not compatible with that concept.

Director Freshcorn stated that there was going to be a Hotel meeting on May 18. She mentioned that the web site had been converted to a spring theme and new events added to the main page. Member Tester asked about the status of getting all the Blowing Rock businesses listed on the www.visitblowingrock.com. Ms. Freshcorn responded that the new intern would be tasked with following up on the issue.

Ms. Freshcorn announced the hiring of three new employees: Lindsay Galvin, Assistant Director; Marcia Vaughan, PT – Information Sepcialist; and Amanda Fife, Intern.

Member Tester expressed concern about the draft e-newsletter and the amount of photos on the draft document. He stated that the amount of photographs might increase the download time and deter use by web site visitors.

Ms. Freshcorn discussed various collateral materials that had been ordered. Chair Keele inquired about the distribution of image brochures. Mr. Hardin responded that 20,000 were distributed to State Visitor Centers, with others sent to the High Country Host, mailings, response cards and lodging establishments. Chair Keele requested that the TDA Marketing Committee review the effectiveness of the image brochure and other possible marketing materials and provide some guidance prior to final budget adoption.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton suggested that Smith Travel Research be included in future marketing funding.

Member Pickett suggested that a notebook be prepared with listings of merchants/attractions/restaurants for placement in all hotels

Member Drury recommended that a special meeting be held to discuss marketing as well as a TDA business plan. It was the consensus to continue the TDA meeting to discuss these items on Wednesday, May 4, at 2:00 p.m.

Next Meeting

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

- Proposed FY 2005-06 Budget
- Visitor Center Update
- Report - Chamber of Commerce
- Report – TDA Executive Director
- Master Signage Plan

Closed Session

Upon motion of Member Tester and second by Member Pickett, the Authority convened at 9:30 a.m. in closed session pursuant to - N.C.G.S. 143.318.11 (a)(6) for discussion of personnel issues.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the closed session was adjourned at 10:11 a.m.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Tester to continue the meeting until Wednesday, May 4, at 2:00 p.m. to continue discussion on marketing and the TDA Business Plan. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 10:12 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - FY 2005-06 Proposed TDA Budget

#2 - TDA Executive Director Monthly Report