

Town of Blowing Rock

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – June 21, 2005

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, June 21, 2005 at 8:00 a.m. in a special 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.

Others in attendance included – Chamber of Commerce President Pam Vines, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin, and Chamber of Commerce Event Committee Representative Melissa Pickett.

Call to Order

Chairperson Keele called the meeting to order and welcomed the Authority members. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the formulation of a FY 2005-06 TDA Marketing Plan. He noted that based on comments received in the community that overall retail sales are somewhat down. He also mentioned that the TDA had conducted its first marketing this past year and occupancy rates are flat down for FY 2004-05.

Marketing Plan

Member Tester began by stressing the importance of an evaluation of the TDA FY 2004-05 marketing efforts. He offered the following questions for the TDA to consider – is what we're doing effective?, why are our numbers down and/or flat?, do our efforts have an impact?, and what are our measurement tools?

Member Drury responded that the ultimate measure would be the number of "heads in beds".

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that there were a variety of techniques that may provide some measure of success, including the number of web site hits to specialized web addresses, and a comparison with similar tourism markets.

Member Pickett suggested that it was important to have activities available for the tourist once they arrive and to attract them here.

Members debated the merits of image-based and event-based advertising. All Members agreed that event-based advertising was important especially in the shoulder and off-season months.

Executive Director Freshcorn distributed and discussed a Suggested Advertising Opportunities Schedule (**Attachment #1**). She recommended a focus on public relation marketing via travel and trade publications.

Chamber President Vines encouraged the Authority to look at their market – new or repeat visitors. She advised that 72% of her business is repeat customers.

The Authority discussed potential events such as a Wine Festival and an Auction Event. Member Pickett reminded the Authority that Bob Timberlake had expressed an interest in assisting in both endeavors.

Ms. Vines reviewed the status of the Wine Festival, such as a poster contest, potential dates (April or June) and discussions with Childress Wineries. She advised that the Chamber Events Committee was currently working on the event and nailing down a date.

Member Tester stated that there seemed to be a consensus that the Authority should shift to a more event-based marketing approach and that a common 12-18 month event timeline needed to be developed prior to plan implementation. He also stated that all TDA efforts should include co-op opportunities for advertising for Blowing Rock tourism-related businesses.

Ms. Vines then distributed a Chamber of Commerce Events Budget Request and a draft Wine Festival Budget (**Attachment #2**). Executive Director Hardin recommended that the Wine Festival needed to secure a web site and begin marketing this fall. The Authority briefly discussed the proposed location of the event and potential alcohol-related issues. Member Tester reminded the Chamber to review all aspects and any impacts of a street closing.

Mr. Hardin also mentioned other non-costs events, such the Gallery Stroll and the Cruise-in, Jam-in Event, as a way to provide activities for tourists.

Chairperson Keele stated that he believed that the web site and event-based advertising were marketing priorities.

After some discussion, motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Pickett to shift TDA marketing focus to event-based advertising, direct Executive Director Freshcorn to develop an 18-month Calendar of Events Time-line (event schedule, event promotion, and event tracking), coordinate advertising/events with key players, and that the TDA allocate resources to support the plan. Unanimously approved.

Chairperson Keele also requested that Ms. Freshcorn have the TDA web site proposals by the July TDA meeting.

Mr. Hardin requested the TDA to consider funding events previously funded by occupancy tax, i.e. July 4th Concert and Christmas Parade and Concert. Motion by Member Tester seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to allocate funds (\$2,500) for the Chamber of Commerce for the following events: \$350 – Army National Guard Concert, \$1,850 – Christmas Parade, and \$300 – Christmas Concert. Unanimously approved.

Mr. Hardin then requested \$5,500 in start-up funding for the Wine Festival for the web site and marketing.

Member Tester asked about what happens if the event is profitable?

Mr. Hardin responded that the proceeds could be used to fund a future Wine Festival event or other events.

Member Tester asked if the TDA would share costs with the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Hardin stated the event could flop. The Authority discussed the funding available to the Chamber of Commerce.

Chairperson Keele expressed opposition to funding at this time until the Chamber of Commerce finances were better known.

Member Tester requested to see what funding the Chamber of Commerce is putting into proposed events.

Member Drury stated she was not comfortable since other grant applicants were not present to speak and were not being considered.

Member Tester stated that with the limited budget, if we fund all requests at this time then the Calendar of Event time-line is meaningless.

Chairperson Keele advised that all applicants need to meet all the requirements in order to have a level playing field.

Member Tester again stated that the time-line must come first.

Member Drury left the meeting at 9:30 a.m. due to another commitment.

Ms. Freshcorn stated that the TDA had received two full funding applications, one letter request, and one budget request. She advised that all organizations needed to complete the same application.

Member Pickett inquired if excess funds could be rolled back to the TDA. Member Tester stated he could not support that idea.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that Winterfest was a key example of an organization that doesn't adhere to the request to hold excess funds for the next year as seed money.

Chairperson Keele responded that if that is the case then there should not be any seed money appropriated again to the organization.

Closed Session

Upon motion of Vice-Chair Tarbutton and second by Member Pickett, the Authority convened at 9:55 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 10:20 a.m.

Adjournment

It was the consensus of the Authority to hold a special meeting on Thursday, June 30 at 3:00 p.m. to consider end of year budget amendments.

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 10:20 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - Suggested Advertising Opportunities

#2 - Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Events Budget Requests