

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – July 15, 2005

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Friday, July 15, 2005 at 8:00 a.m. in a special meeting at Chetola Manor House. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Phil Pickett and Keith Tester, and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Margaret Pierce. Authority Member Lynn Drury was absent.

Also, present were Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce President Pam Vines, Chamber Board members Mark Lavin and Tracy Brown and Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin.

Call to Order

Chairperson Keele called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone in attendance. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to discuss various event and marketing matters with Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Representatives.

Discussion

Vice-Chair Tarbutton then introduced Chamber of Commerce President Pam Vines to discuss future events and how best to integrate the work of both organizations.

Chamber President Vines stated that the Chamber of Commerce was currently working on the following new events:

- Wine Festival
- Girls Night Out
- Mitford Days

She mentioned recent new projects have included The Gallery Stroll and Cruisin' – Jamin', as well as the long established projects such as Art in the Park and Concerts. She advised that the Chamber hoped to develop at least one new event per year.

She stated that the Chamber of Commerce has accepted the role of event planning, with the TDA assuming the role of marketing and funding events.

Ms. Vines reviewed the progress to date on the planning of a Wine Festival, including setting a late April date, working with restaurants to package items, and discussions with wine makers.

The TDA and Chamber then discussed the future of Winterfest and the potential of the Chamber of Commerce taking over the planning and management of the event. All parties agreed that this was something that the Chamber should continue to explore.

Attendees agreed that an off-season event mix of Winterfest - Winter, Wine Festival – Spring, Mitford Days - Fall, along with the other in-season mix of current activities (Art in the Park, Concerts, the Stage Company, the Blowing Rock Horse Show, etc.) should all have an impact on tourism. All concluded that the peak of the Summer, Fall and Thanksgiving/Christmas seasons were for the most part self-supporting.

Also, both organizations talked about the importance of including other venues in event discussion, i.e., the Blowing Arts Art Center, Blowing Rock Stage Company, the Blowing Rock Horse Show and the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum.

Member Tester and Vice-Chair Tarbutton strongly encouraged that the Chamber of Commerce and the TDA develop a comprehensive community-wide approach in the coordination of events.

President Vines mentioned the Wine Festival would include the first major attempt by the Chamber of Commerce to develop a package event in the community, whereby restaurants, retail, hotels and the event all offer special pricing selections for various functions, etc. Chamber Board Member Brown stated that High Country Host was currently developing packaging on a less formal basis. He advised that the Host were in the process of choosing the key players and building an a la carte program.

Chamber Executive Director Hardin updated those present on the potential of Mitford Days stating Chamber representatives hope to meet with Jan Karon in the next week.

Chair Keele encouraged the Chamber to educate retailers on the importance of evening operating hours. Chamber Board Member Lavin stressed the importance of planning events around shopping hours and minimizing too many give-away opportunities because otherwise they would decrease sales.

Member Tester stated that the promotion of tourism in Blowing Rock may be greater than just the Blowing Rock area – and that the TDA should focus on making Blowing Rock the hub. President Vines agreed and stated that we must get everyone involved in the process.

Chair Keele and Member Tester encouraged the Chamber and TDA develop a consolidated calendar of events – which includes BRAHM, BRAC, Stage Co., Chamber, Chetola, etc.

Authority members then discussed the importance of events to the marketing of Blowing Rock and making sure that TDA tourism marketing was tied to event scheduling.

Attendees discussed the importance of studying the correlation of overall retail sales data/occupancy rates, events and marketing.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton reminded everyone of the Smith Travel Research project that collects data from participating hotels. Chair Keele suggested that other sales data could be voluntarily collected from a sample of retail merchants and restaurants that might provide very valuable information on marketing effects.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton advised that he had met with Member Lynn Drury and Interim Executive Director Lindsay Galvin to review potential FY 2005-06 marketing. He stated that they discussed possible creative/advertisement agencies as well as marketing venues. However, they made no decision on a marketing theme or final direction until information is acquired on potential events. Member Tester recommended that once a final marketing plan was developed that it be shared with the various tourism-related organizations to receive feedback and/or suggestions.

Chair Keele requested that Member Pickett plan to update the TDA Board about the pending funding requests at the next meeting. Member Pickett stated he would report to the Board at the August meeting.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton agreed to follow-up on the information on a possible Auction event.

Chair Keele thanked everyone for the attendance and the positive discussions.

Chair Keele stated that from all reports that the overall retail sales were up in the community. He also mentioned that that the Raleigh *News and Observer* was in town this past week doing a travel piece on Blowing Rock.

Ms. Vines requested that all meeting attendees please erect posters for the upcoming Blowing Rock Horse Show.

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 9:45 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary