

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – August 2, 2005

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, August 2, 2005 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. TDA Interim Executive Director Lindsay Galvin was also present.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – July 5 and July 15, 2005

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the July 5 and July 15, 2005 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Drury to approve the July 5 and July 15, 2005 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

Financial Report – Occupancy Tax Proceeds

Finance Officer Margaret Pierce then reviewed the FY 2004-05 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through June 2005. She stated that June revenues were up slightly compared to June 2004.

Master Signage Plan

Ex-officio Member Hildebran informed the Authority that Town staff was working on NCDOT approval for the signage placement that was included in the adopted TDA budget. He also stated that Southwood Corp. was reviewing designs to make the leaf emblem interchangeable with other emblems so that it could be changed out over time. Mr. Hildebran then advised that Southwood was developing a design for an information kiosk for Board review and that staff would begin work with Southwood Corp. to finalize plans and costs for final Town Council and TDA review and approval.

Chair Keele asked about the status of the new downtown streetlight installation. Ex-officio Member Hildebran responded that this project would begin later in the year at the conclusion of the fall tourist season.

Report – Visitors Center

Chairman Keele stated the next item on the agenda was a Visitor Center Report. Interim Executive Director Galvin provided a TDA Executive Director Monthly Report for Board review (**Attachment #1**). Ms. Galvin reviewed the daily and monthly Visitor Center traffic report with the Authority and advised that overall visitor numbers were up at the Center. She also mentioned that the operating hours have been modified to insure some consistency.

The Authority discussed that the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum had taken responsibility for the building art program and that each respective gallery would be required to add the Town and TDA as additional insured for the artwork.

Chairperson Keele mentioned that the Town appeared in two newspaper articles in the past month – an article on Tweetsie Railroad in the *Raleigh News and Observer* and a 4th of July article on tourism in the *Charlotte Observer*.

Branding/Marketing/Web Site Update

Chairman Keele stated the next item on the agenda was a Branding/Marketing/Web Site Update.

Marketing

Member Drury advised that she and Vice-Chair Tarbuton had interviewed three advertising/marketing agencies, each with various specialties. After reviewing the capabilities of each firm, funding availability and the needs of the TDA, the Branding/Marketing/Web Site Committee recommended that the Authority retain the services of the Meridian Agency (Heidi Lusk) from Boone, N.C.

Vice-Chair Tarbuton stated that Ms. Lusk had media contacts, knew the local area, was reasonably priced and had co-op capabilities and experience.

Member Tester complimented the Committee for looking at the big picture and that the Meridian Agency local understanding and knowledge of the area would be advantageous to the TDA.

Chairperson Keele asked if the ad campaign would be event or image based. Member Drury responded that the campaign would do both and that all advertisement involves image. She also advised that the co-op ad program was a key and that a combination of the event/image funding made for a larger ad budget.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that the TDA could supplement a co-op campaign financially with an image piece and allow local merchants to participate with specific ads creating an economy of scale.

Member Tester suggested that if the TDA participated financially that the TDA could define the overall image. Member Drury and Vice-Chair Tarbutton agreed and advised that the TDA could also set the format so that the whole advertisement would mesh together.

Web Site

Member Drury stated the Branding/Marketing/Web Site Committee had solicited proposals from web development companies and received no responses, as most wanted to redesign the complete site. Due to nominal benefit and potential costs, the Committee did not recommend hiring a new web site company at this time. She suggested that existing staff could maintain the current site and make web content updates for this fiscal year.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton advised that Heidi Lusk had the background to assist with the web site. He then recommended that the TDA focus this year on increasing the hits to the web site and search engine priority rank.

Member Tester agreed and stated it was important to have the web site updated regularly to increase overall exposure.

Marketing Budget

Vice-Chair Tarbutton reviewed various budget recommendations of the Committee with the Authority **(Attachment #2)**.

Map Design – The Authority discussed the various maps currently used in the area. After some debate, it was the consensus that the Committee meet with the Merchants Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and High Country Host to see how each map would fit in with the needs of the TDA. Town Councilmember Barbara Ball distributed a map from a town in the New England area for the Authority to review.

Calendar of Events – The Authority discussed that the events calendar was currently produced in-house and would meet the needs of the TDA.

Village Brochures & Visitor Guides – The Authority discussed the quantity of brochures and guides on hand and that a monthly inventory should be performed to determine future needs.

Purchased Services – The Authority discussed that Appalachian State University could meet the needs of the Authority.

Salaries – This item was deferred to a future meeting once the personnel/staffing needs are determined.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton suggested that the functions of the Events Committee and the Marketing Committee be combined since they both seem to overlap. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to combine functional relationship of the Events Committee with the Branding/Marketing/Web Site Committee. Unanimously approved.

After some discussion and since the budget was approved at a category level, it was the consensus that the Authority would not entertain a budget amendment at this time. Member Tester requested that any future budget amendment be placed on the agenda as an item for decision.

Staffing

The Authority entertained a request from Interim Executive Lindsay Galvin to hire a temporary part-time employee through October of this year (**Attachment #3**).

After a brief discussion, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Pickett to authorize hiring a temporary part-time position for up to twenty hours per week at \$7.00 per hour until the end of October 2005. Motion unanimously approved.

It was the consensus of the Authority to continue the discussion of personnel/staffing issues on Wednesday, August 3, 2005 at 8:00 a.m. Vice-Chair Tarbutton requested that the Authority review a memo from Judy Donaghy regarding recommendations on personnel/staffing prior to the meeting.

Grant Requests

The Marketing/Branding/Web Site Committee then made recommendations on FY 2005-06 grant funding requests, with the understanding that many of the requests were for advertising partnerships and would be included in the TDA marketing campaign.

Chamber of Commerce

Requested \$2,500 for Army National Guard Concert, Christmas Parade and Concert.

Recommendation: \$2,500

Motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Pickett to approve \$2,500 in funding to the Chamber of Commerce for Army National Guard Concert, Christmas Parade and Concert. Motion unanimously approved.

Chamber of Commerce

Requested \$5,500 for Blue Ridge Wine Festival event to be used for posters, rack cards, and website development.

Recommendation: \$3,800 (Posters, rack cards, website)

Motion by Member Drury and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to approve \$3,800 in funding to the Chamber of Commerce for for Blue Ridge Wine Festival event to be used for posters, rack cards, and website development. Motion approved 4-1, with Member Pickett dissenting.

Winterfest

Requested \$10,000 for advertising.

Recommendation: \$3,200 (\$2,000 for Charlotte Billboard, \$1,200 for rack cards)

Motion by Member Drury and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to approve \$3,200 in funding to Winterfest for the winter event with \$2,000 for Charlotte Billboard and \$1,200 for rack cards. Motion unanimously approved.

Blowing Rock Community Arts Center Foundation

Requested \$25,000 for start-up marketing and advertising.

Recommendation: \$2,500 (newsletter)

Motion by Member Drury and seconded by Member Pickett to approve \$2,500 in funding to the Blowing Rock Community Arts Center Foundation for a newsletter. Motion unanimously approved.

Blowing Rock Art and History Museum

Requested \$11,000 for marketing costs related to art exhibit and auction.

Recommendation: \$3,500 (\$1,000 for poster, \$2,500 for catalogue – TDA listed as sponsor)

Motion by Member Drury and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to approve \$3,500 in funding to the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum with \$1,000 for poster and \$2,500 for a catalogue – and the TDA listed as sponsor. Motion unanimously approved.

Blowing Rock Stage Company

Requested \$11,500 for advertising

Recommendation: TBA next month

The Committee advised that they would meet with the Stage Company and report back at the September meeting with a recommendation.

July 4th Fireworks

Requested additional \$1,500 for July 4th Fireworks (split with BR Country Club)

Recommendation: TBA next month

The Authority suggested that a formal funding request be submitted and that other funding alternatives, such as a sponsorship be explored for the fireworks

Member Drury then announced that the Branding/Marketing/Web Site Committee had invited additional citizens to participate with web site, planning, creative, and tracking the marketing efforts of the Authority. The members and their assignments are as follows:

Lynn Drury, Committee Chair/TDA	Creative
Kent Tarbuttion, TDA	Planning
Jim Smith, Village Inns of Blowing Rock	Planning
Dana Clark, ASU	Planning
Tim Miller, BR Frameworks & Gallery	Planning
Mike Keibelbeck, Meadowbrook Inn	Tracking
Nancy Santay, Cabin Fever	Web
Jeff Clard, Hayes Performing Arts Center	Creative
Tracy Brown, Tanger Outlet	Tracking
Randall Potter, Timberlake Gallery	Creative
Cathy Robbins, Tweetsie Railroad	Web

Staff:

Heidi Lusk	Planning/Creative
Lindsay Galvin	Web/Tracking

Member Drury stated that the Committee would meet on Thursday at 1:00 p.m. and that she would update the Authority at the next meeting.

Member Tester commented that the inclusion of citizens on the Committee would be a great benefit.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton updated the Authority on the Smith Travel Research Project and the \$1,800 TDA commitment to the project. He stated that the project is ready to go and that participants would soon provide information to Smith Travel. Once received, Smith Travel would compare the information to two other tourism destination locations for the Authority to review.

Chairperson then requested that the Authority consider the selection of a marketing agency for FY 2005-06. After a brief discussion, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Drury to retain the services of the Meridian Agency (Heidi Lusk) for TDA marketing services. Motion unanimously approved.

Report – Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce

Chairperson Keele welcomed Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin to provide an update on Chamber of Commerce activities. He stated that the Chamber was busy working on the future Wine Festival and thanked the Authority for the start-up funding approved.

Chairperson Keele thanked Mr. Hardin for his attendance.

Recessed Meeting

Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Drury to recess the meeting until 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday, August 3, 2005 to discuss personnel/staffing issues. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele recessed the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - TDA Executive Director Monthly Report

#2 – Committee Budget Recommendations

#3 - Part-time Staffing Request