

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – November 1, 2005

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, November 1, 2005 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernie Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Keith Tester and Phil Pickett and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Margaret Pierce. TDA Interim Executive Director Lindsay Galvin was also present.

Member Lynn Drury was absent.

Call to Order

Chairperson Keele called the meeting to order and welcomed the members and guests. He advised that Member Drury was out of the town.

Approval of Minutes – October 4 and October 21, 2005

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the October 4 and October 21, 2005 meeting minutes (including the October 4 and October 21, 2005 closed sessions). Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to approve the October 4 and October 21, 2005 meeting minutes (including the October 4 and October 21, 2005 closed sessions). Unanimously approved.

Chairperson Keele stated Jeff Clark, Executive Director of the Hayes Performing Arts Center, was present to update the Authority on the Hayes Performing Arts Center activities, but due to technical problems would provide his presentation later in the meeting.

Financial Report – Occupancy Tax Proceeds

Finance Officer Margaret Pierce then reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2005-06 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through September 2005. She stated that September revenues, totaling a gross of \$63,029.55, were up compared to September 2004.

Ms. Pierce also advised that expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

Report - Visitor Center

Chairperson Keele requested that Interim TDA Director Lindsay Galvin update the Authority on the status of various projects at the Visitor Center. Ms. Galvin reported the following:

TV/Monitor

Staff is presently reviewing various options for the TV/monitor, such as a ceiling mount system above the fireplace. The television would allow guests to view a Blowing Rock tourism video or the weather channel. This item is on hold until additional research is acquired on a wireless product.

Computer System

David Sechrist, of Sechrist Consulting, has installed the new server. The computer system design would permit the Chamber of Commerce to access the tourism ACT database.

Telephone System

Appalachian Technologies completed reprogramming of the Visitor Center telephone system to improve customer service. The system is up and working.

Security System

Creekside Electronics has completed the installation of the new security system for the Visitor Center.

Report - Advertising/Marketing/Web site

Vice-Chair Tarbuton updated the Authority on the status of various projects of the Advertising/Marketing/Web Site Committee.

Advertising Plan

Vice-Chair Tarbutton advised that the TDA Advertising Schedule was underway and thus far had relatively few changes.

TDA/Chamber Joint Marketing Website, Map & Directory

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that his committee was proceeding with implementation of the TDA/Chamber of Commerce agreement regarding improvement to the visitor inquiry process, development of a joint website and single map. They have met with Heidi Lusk and should have some something for Authority review in the near future.

Video

Interim Director Galvin informed the Authority that Tom Santay hoped to have a draft copy of the TDA tourism video (offered by the Village Inns and Chetola Resort) ready by the end of the week for review.

Chairperson Keele thanked everyone for the work on these issues.

WC&T Agency Update

Chairperson Keele introduced Dave Tomsy, Director of Public Relations with Wilson, Coman & Taylor, to update the Authority on the Blowing Rock Press Kit to be mailed to over 100 travel writers.

Mr. Tomsy reviewed the proposed press kit packet and cover letter (**Attachment #1**) and requested TDA approval prior to mailing. He also mentioned the development of a quarterly (winter, spring, summer and fall) news release that provides tourism information on upcoming events in the Blowing Rock area.

The Authority briefly discussed that this type of marketing effort may take time in order to see the results of the activities.

Motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Pickett to authorize distribution of the tourism press kit. Unanimously approved.

Chairperson Keele stated that he was made aware that the latest edition of *The Discerning Traveler* had a tourism review of a visit to Blowing Rock.

Master Signage Plan

Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated that the Phase II signage plan (new directional and downtown welcome signage) for the Town of Blowing Rock is expected to be erected by November 14.

Discussion of Watauga County Occupancy Tax

Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated that the Watauga County Board of Commissioners have scheduled a public hearing on the county occupancy tax on November 15, with possible implementation on July 1, 2006.

The County has agreed to explore the feasibility of out-of-town Blowing Rock area hoteliers be included in Blowing Rock tourism. Discussions have been held with the four-(4) close-by lodging establishments to seek their interest in becoming affiliated with the Blowing Rock TDA. Alpine Acres Motel, Blowing Rock Lodge, Roaring River Chalets and the Inn at Crestwood have all expressed interest in this effort.

Report – Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce

Chairperson Keele welcomed Chamber of Commerce President Pam Vines to provide an update on Chamber of Commerce activities.

Ms. Vines stated that the Chamber was continuing work on the 2006 Blue Ridge Wine Festival and has begun preparation for a 2007 Mitford Days event. She stressed the importance of volunteerism to make all these events successful.

Chairperson Keele thanked Ms. Vines for her attendance.

Report - TDA Executive Director

Chairman Keele stated the next item on the agenda was a report from the TDA Executive Director. Interim Executive Director Galvin provided a TDA Executive Director Monthly Report for Board review (**Attachment #2**). Ms. Galvin discussed the daily and monthly Visitor Center traffic report with the Authority and increased telephone and website activity. She mentioned that her report included tracking information on brochure usage.

She advised that the Visitor Center is now closed on Sundays; however, maps and event calendars have been placed outside for visitor convenience. Ms. Galvin also stated that Main Street Gallery was now the featured rotating art display vendor in the Center.

Chairperson Keele thanked her for the report.

Presentations

Chairperson Keele introduced representatives of the Hayes Performing Arts Center.

Hayes Performing Arts Center Presentation

Hayes Performing Arts Center Chairman Chip Williamson, Executive Director Jeff Clark, Blowing Rock Stage Company Manager Ken Kay and Wachovia Bank Community Banker Jason Triplett were all in attendance. Chairman Williamson introduced Mr. Clark.

A slide presentation was given, highlighting various stages of construction of the arts center. Executive Director Clark spoke of the groundbreaking ceremony held on July 10, 2005. He also discussed the great economic impact the performing arts center would have on the Blowing Rock community and presented the Authority with information regarding the arts center's budget. Mr. Clark stated that 62.8% of their budget was from individuals, 24% from the foundation, 7.5% from corporations, 4.7% from the federal government, and 1% from local government.

Stage Company Manager Ken Kay mentioned the upcoming schedule for their 20th season. He also addressed future plans once the new arts center was finished; which would include, having the capability of presenting more plays each season, and also being able to present more than one play daily.

Mr. Clark then stated the art center would be used in various other ways, such as, for educational meetings, conferences, festivals, etc. He also stated that organizations within the surrounding area had expressed an interest in renting the arts center for other cultural events.

Wachovia Representative Jason Triplett stated that Wachovia felt very confident in the future of the arts center.

In concluding, Mr. Williamson stated the building was important for several reasons – economic impact, educational opportunity, cultural/art opportunity and civic pride. He asked the Authority for any comments or concerns they would like to share.

Member Tester stressed the importance of marketing and planning collaboration between all parties.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton expressed his excitement that the project was underway and the benefits the venue would bring to the area.

Mr. Williamson stated the opening is scheduled for June 2006 and that the opening date dictated all future marketing. As the date is more clarified, more defined marketing would occur.

Chairperson Keele thanked the Hayes Performing Arts Center for their informative update.

Sweet Potato Queens Presentation

Chairperson Keele introduce Marcia Greene to discuss a possible Sweet Potato Queens event.

Ms. Greene stated that the Blowing Rock Hospital was looking for a fundraising event following their successful fashion show. After some discussion, the group decided to pursue a Sweet Potato Queens event that would also aid in tourism to Blowing Rock. At present, they have tentatively scheduled the event to occur on the first weekend in June (June 2 & 3, 2006).

The Sweet Potato Queens, founded in 1982 by author Jill Connor-Browne, have over 4700 chapters around the world. There are 226 chapters in North Carolina and 19 in Charlotte alone.

The concept would be to bring Ms. Connor-Browne to the area for several ticketed engagements – a lunch event and a dinner event. In addition, other complimentary events would be scheduled. Local hotels and restaurants would then sell packages, with the hospital taking a percentage of the sales.

Ms. Greene mentioned various strategies to market the festival – visiting surrounding Sweet Potato Queen chapters, placing bookstore displays, developing a collateral piece mailed to members, etc. It is hoped that the

new Arts Center would be available to host the event. If not, a large tent would be needed to house the guests for the event.

At this point, Ms. Greene shared a video on the Sweet Potato Queens to better familiarize the Authority on the organization.

After the video, Ms. Greene advised that she would keep the Authority informed as the event as developed.

Chairperson Keele thanked her for presentation.

Closed Session

Upon motion of Vice-Chair Tarbutton and second by Member Pickett, the Authority convened at 9:20 a.m. in closed session pursuant to - N.C.G.S. 143.318.11 (a)(6) for discussion of personnel issues. Motion unanimously approved.

At the conclusion of the discussions, the closed session was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.

Other

After some discussion on a draft TDA Personnel Policy and draft Executive Director Job Description, motion of Member Tester and second by Member Pickett to approve both documents. Motion unanimously approved. **(Attachments #3 & 4)**

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 9:45 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - TDA Press Kit

#2 - TDA Executive Director Monthly Report

#3 - TDA Personnel Policy

#4 - TDA Executive Director Job Description