

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – December 6, 2005

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, December 6, 2005 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were 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.

Chairperson Bernie Keele was absent.

Call to Order

Vice-Chairperson Tarbutton called the meeting to order and welcomed the members and guests. He advised that Chairperson Keele was out of the town.

Approval of Minutes – November 1, 2005

Vice-Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the November 1, 2005 meeting minutes (including the November 1, 2005 closed session). Motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Pickett to approve the November 1, 2005 meeting minutes (including the November 1, 2005 closed session). Unanimously approved.

Report - Advertising/Marketing/Web site

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated the next item was an update on various projects of the Advertising/Marketing/Web Site Committee.

Advertising Plan

Member Drury updated the Authority on the TDA Advertising Schedule and reviewed several recent ad pieces with the TDA. She stated that upcoming advertisement included focus on Choose & Cut Trees, High Country Skiing and 2006 Winterfest.

WC&T Agency Update

Vice-Chairperson Tarbutton introduced Dave Tomsy, Director of Public Relations with Wilson, Coman & Taylor, to update the Authority on his efforts for the Authority.

Mr. Tomsy advised he had mailed out over 50 Blowing Rock press kits to tourism media outlets and had received very positive responses. He stated that he had been contacted by writers from *Tampa Bay Magazine* and *Women's Day*, and from travel writers in New York and Atlanta. He also mentioned that *Charlotte Taste Magazine* has scheduled a visit to Blowing Rock in January for their upcoming Valentine edition.

He concluded his report by stating that he was excited about the responses thus far.

TDA/Town Calendar

Vice-Chair Tarbutton announced that the 2006 TDA/Town Calendar was now ready for distribution. Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated that the 2006 Calendar focused on tourism-related venues this year and also included a listing of all Blowing Rock accommodations.

Members agreed to distribute the calendars upon request at both Town Hall and the Visitor Center. And, if hoteliers desired to mail calendars to their preferred guests, they could mail them at their expense.

Video

Vice-Chair Tarbutton introduced Tom Santay to review a draft copy of the 15-minute TDA tourism video (offered by the Village Inns and Chetola Resort). At this time, Mr. Santay provided opening remarks and requested Authority feedback after viewing the first cut of "Where the Wind Takes You" video. The Authority viewed the video.

Upon conclusion of viewing the video, Donna Summers, of the Hemlock Inn, asked why certain hotels were shown in the video and others were not. Mr. Santay responded that due to the number of hotels in Blowing Rock that including all in the video would be difficult due to time constraints. He stated that those hotels included had a cinematic appeal – attractive signages & entrances, landscaping, etc.

Member Drury stated lodging, retail and restaurant establishments would all desire to be included in the video and that the TDA would need to develop a policy on what is included in the video. She also suggested including skiing and holiday activities in the video.

Member Tester asked the Authority the intention of the video. Vice-Chair Tarbutton responded for Visitor Center and Internet viewing.

Member Tester suggested indexing the video and additional lodging, retail and restaurant establishments could be included in such a format and edited on an ongoing basis. He also mentioned use by individual hoteliers and suggested including the new Arts Center upon completion.

Chamber of Commerce President Pam Vines mentioned adding the Stage Company to the video.

Dick Gooseman, of the Meadowbrook Inn, suggested changing the opening to what brings you to Blowing Rock.

Member Tester stated that Trade Shows may require more detailed information in the video. Mr. Santay suggested that targeted marketing might be a use for the video as well.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton recommended sending the video to the Marketing Committee for suggestions on the overall use of the video and website/internet usage. Member Picket concurred with the recommendation.

Mr. Santay stated that he would like to meet with the committee to review the video and discuss additional video ideas , such as video billboards, etc.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that an index approach would also allow opportunities for more individualized videos. He suggested that that the merchants could pay for these detailed marketing opportunities, with the TDA focus on a general approach.

After a brief discussion, a meeting of the Marketing Committee to review the video and provide guidance to the Authority on the video was scheduled for Wednesday, December 21st at 10:00 a.m. at the Visitor Center.

The Authority thanked Mr. Santay for his efforts.

Marketing Special

Mr. Gooseman suggested that the Authority work to establish hotel marketing specials, such as buy 5 room nights and get one free. Jim Smith stated that buy two room nights and get one free might be preferable. Vice-Chair Tarbuton referred the item to the Monthly Hotel Meeting for further discussion.

Report - Visitor Center

Vice-Chairperson Tarbuton requested an update on the TV/Monitor acquisition for the Visitor Center.

TV/Monitor

Ex-officio Member Pierce stated that she had discussed various options for the TV/monitor with Appalachian TV Service. The television would allow guests to view a Blowing Rock tourism video or the weather channel. Additional research is being acquired at this time.

Vice-Chair Tarbuton suggested that staff contact Audiovision for consultation as well.

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 was installed prior to Thanksgiving and the Town has received many compliments regarding their placement. He also stated that the total costs for the signage was slightly higher (\$2,520) than budgeted due to the TDA desire to allow flexibility in change-out of the leaf emblem brand in the signage. He advised that a budget amendment would be brought forward for Board approval at a future date to cover those costs.

Jim Smith, of Village Inns, inquired about the additional signage phases.

Mr. Hildebran responded that future phases will include downtown traffic signage - including parking signage, regulatory sign consistency, informational kiosks, public non-profit message sign, and town property signage. Staff will begin discussions with Southwood Corporation about the next phase and funding considerations.

Discussion of Watauga County Occupancy Tax

Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated that the Watauga County Board of Commissioners conducted a public hearing on the proposed county occupancy tax on November 15, 2005 and plan implementation of the tax on July 1, 2006. He advised that dialogue would continue with the county in regard to the feasibility of out-of-town Blowing Rock area hoteliers be included in Blowing Rock tourism.

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 October 2005. She stated that October revenues, totaling a gross of \$101,704.60, were up compared to October 2004. Overall, monthly occupancy tax revenues have been up since May 2005.

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

Report – Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce

Vice-Chairperson Tarbutton welcomed Chamber of Commerce President Pam Vines to provide an update on Chamber of Commerce activities. She requested that Chamber Executive Director Charles Hardin provide an update.

Mr. Hardin stated that the Chamber had a very successful Christmas Parade and was continuing work on the 2006 Blue Ridge Wine Festival. At present, 10 restaurants have agreed to participate with the wine/dine event and 17 wineries have confirmed for the wine tasting event. And, a packaging meeting will be held in the near future.

He also mentioned the upcoming Gallery Stroll to be held on December 13, 2005 and the 2006 Winterfest website was now operational.

Vice-Chairperson Tarbutton thanked Mr. Hardin for his report.

Report - TDA Executive Director

Vice-Chair Tarbutton 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 #1**).

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 had recently retained new building maintenance/cleaning providers. Ms. Galvin also reviewed upcoming ad placement, winter website photo updates and announced an upcoming media meeting with TDA Consultant Heidi Lusk.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that the website committee was proceeding with implementation of the TDA/Chamber of Commerce joint website. A final target date for the website conversion will be determined once the contract is executed with Consultant Heidi Lusk in the near future.

Old Business

Vice-Chair Tarbutton brought to the attention of the Authority that the TDA had been invoiced for baskets received last year for a promotional activity. He stated that the Authority had assumed that the baskets were being donated after several attempts were made requesting an invoice for the baskets were made. Member Tester suggested that Finance Officer Pierce pay the invoice of \$1,038.00 and that the Authority consider a budget amendment for the payment at a future meeting. The Authority agreed by consensus to follow the suggestion.

U.S. 321 Project

Ex-officio Member Hildebran provided an update on the U.S. 321 Improvement Project. He advised that the 6.57-mile road widening project from Kirby Mountain Road to Blackberry Road was approximately 16 percent complete. The project is on schedule at this time, with an estimated completion in August 2008. He also mentioned that the Watauga County Board of Commissioners have placed the new U.S. 321 permanent-mounted N.C. Department of Transportation Information Signs on their upcoming agenda. The Commissioners have expressed dissatisfaction with the sign appearance.

Other

Chamber of Commerce President Vines asked that the Authority to consider closing the ditch located adjacent to the Visitor Center building. The Authority agreed to look into the matter.

Member Drury informed the Authority that Appalachian State University had delayed the Winter Commencement until 6:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 10, 2005 due to the ASU Football participating in the NCAA II-A Semifinals at Noon in Boone. She stated that all of the High Country should recognize increased tourism over the weekend.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Drury to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Vice-Chairperson Tarbutton adjourned the meeting at 9:40 a.m.

Kent Tarbutton, Vice-Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - TDA Executive Director Monthly Report