

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – February 13, 2006

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Monday, February 13, 2006 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernie Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Lynn Drury, Keith Tester and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Margaret Pierce. TDA Interim Executive Director Lindsay Galvin was also present.

Member Phil Pickett was absent.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – January 9, 2006

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the January 9, 2006 (including the January 9, 2006 closed session) meeting minutes. Motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Drury to approve the January 9, 2006 (including the January 9, 2006 closed session) meeting minutes, with the following corrections: change the meeting date from February “14” to “13”, correct name spelling from “Sean” to “Shawn” and word spelling from “seek” to “week”. Unanimously approved.

Financial Report

Chairperson Keele introduced Finance Officer Margaret Pierce to review the FY 2005-06 budget to date.

Finance Officer Margaret Pierce then reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2005-06 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through December 2005. She stated that December revenues, totaling a gross of

\$52,011.03, were up compared to December 2004. Ms. Pierce also advised that expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

Report - Advertising/Marketing/Web site

Chairperson Keele requested an update on the status of various projects of the Advertising/Marketing/Web Site Committee.

Advertising Plan/ WC&T Agency Update

Member Drury advised that the TDA Advertising Schedule was well underway, with upcoming advertisements in March/April highlighting the Blue Ridge Wine Festival. She stated that upcoming articles on Blowing Rock would be appearing in *Charlotte Taste Magazine* and *Women's Day Magazine*. She also mentioned that a reporter based in the Tampa, Florida area would be in the area in the near future.

Member Drury stated that Dave Tomsky, Director of Public Relations with Wilson, Coman & Taylor, was unable to attend the meeting due to weather.

Website

Interim Executive Director Galvin advised that the integration of the TDA and Chamber websites was continuing and that a launch date would be forthcoming.

Video

Member Drury stated that the final draft of the new TDA tourism video (offered by the Village Inns and Chetola Resort) would be completed very soon. She informed the Authority that the video would be broken into sections (lodging/restaurants/retail) and include a listing of all Blowing Rock lodging/restaurants/retail at the end of each respective section. The Authority agreed by consensus that this was a good approach.

Chairperson Keele thanked everyone for the work on these issues. He then suggested that the Marketing Committee consider advertising on Ray's Weather Website. Member Drury responded that the committee would look into the matter.

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.

Mr. Hardin provided an update on the status of the joint TDA/Chamber website and a unified Merchants Association/Chamber/TDA Village Map. He mentioned that planning for the 2006 Art in the Park had been finalized. He informed the Authority that 17 wineries have committed to the inaugural Blue Ridge Wine Festival and that additional downtown activities are being planned to increase traffic during the event.

Chairperson Keele thanked Mr. Hardin for his attendance.

Report - TDA Executive Director

Chairman Keele stated the TDA Executive Director monthly report was available in their packet for review. **(Attachment #1)** Interim Executive Director Galvin discussed the status of brochure quantities and asked if any Boardmember had questions.

Members' Tester and Drury suggested that, due to the frequent change in businesses and the dynamic nature of the brochure, staff project their brochure needs over an 18 month period.

Report - Visitor Center

TV/Monitor & Visitor Computer

Chairperson Keele advised that Member Tester had researched both the TV/Monitor & Visitor Computer issues. Member Tester then reviewed his recommendations with the Authority, both short-term and long-term needs related to a Visitor Center Computer and TV and the related benefits/costs. After some discussion, it was the consensus that the Authority pursue an intermediate strategy – purchase a Notebook Computer and Flat Screen LCD TV/DVD with a budget not to exceed \$3,000. Member Tester agreed to move forward with the project.

Other – Arts Center Advertising Partnership Grant Request

Chairperson Keele stated that several other items had come before the Board for consideration. The first item was a \$15,000 funding request from the Blowing Rock Stage Company & Hayes Performing Arts Center for an advertising partnership grant. **(Attachment #2)**

Ken Kaye, Stage Company Artistic Director, presented a grant request for a media collaboration opportunity, which would include four pieces - Spring 2006 Newsletter, Rack Card, Fall/Winter Tack Card, and Fall 2006 Newsletter. The total project cost would total \$30,000, with both the Stage Company and Arts Center providing

\$7,500 each. He stated that 73% of Stage Company attendees are from out of the county and 33% are from out of state.

Cullie Tarleton, Stage Company President, stated that such a request was the perfect example of what the TDA was intended to do – market Blowing Rock and encourage overnight stays.

Chip Williamson, Arts Center Chairman, announced that the Arts Center would be opening in August and invited the Authority to a building tour sometime in Spring. He stressed the importance of marketing the opening of the new venue.

Jeff Clark, Arts Center Executive Director, stated that the request provided a unique opportunity to combine resources and allow greater marketing.

Bob Miller, Stage Company General Manager, stated this was a great opportunity for all entities to work together to promote Blowing Rock.

The Authority then discussed background on the previous TDA marketing efforts - Year 1 focused on branding and image, Year 2 focused on event marketing and Year 3 provides an opportunity for venue/attraction marketing.

Member Tester stated that he felt this facility, along with the future Blowing Rock Art and History Museum, would have an enormous impact on tourism in Blowing Rock, especially aiding in off-season and mid-week travel.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton concurred and stated that this opportunity was beneficial to all entities.

Member Drury expressed concern about the request not following the TDA approved grants process and the fact that other organizations had followed such process. She also stated that the Authority needed to review their current commitments and future commitments prior to authorizing funds.

Member Tester and Vice-Chair Tarbutton concurred that the process needed some review but that this request warranted immediate consideration.

Motion by Tester, seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to partner with the Hayes Arts Center & Blowing Rock Stage Company with a grant of \$15,000 (\$7,500 from FY 2005-06 Fund Balance & \$7,500 from FY 2006-07 Budget) to participate with the collaborative mailing. Motion passed. Ayes – Tester, Tarbutton & Keele. Abstain – Drury.

Chairperson Keele requested that the Member Drury and the Marketing Committee review the TDA grant/advertising process and bring recommendations back to the Authority for improvements.

Other – Watauga County Historical Book Request

Member Tester stated that Ginny Stevens had submitted a \$15,000 funding request on behalf of the Watauga County Architectural Survey. (Attachment #3) The monies would be used for consultant and republication expenses for a Watauga County Inventory Book. The book would document and inventory the significant historical resources in Watauga County (and Blowing Rock portions of Caldwell County).

It was the consensus that the request be referred to the Marketing Committee for review.

Other – Santay CD Request

Member Tester stated that Tom Santay (Cabin Fever) had approached him about an opportunity for the TDA to participate in an endeavor to produce a Blowing Rock music CD and then sell the disc commercially. (**Attachment #4**) The CD would then be sold at a mark-up at the Visitor Center and provide a memento for the Blowing Rock traveler.

It was the consensus of the Authority that they were not interested in the project at this time and to table the project until the TDA Planning Retreat for further discussion.

Planning Retreat

After a brief discussion, the Authority agreed to hold a TDA Planning Retreat on Monday, February 27, 2006 at 8:30 a.m. at Chetola Resort.

Closed Session

Upon motion of Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Tester, the Authority convened at 10:00 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 11:00 a.m.

Recess Meeting

With no further business, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Drury to recess the meeting until Monday, February 20, 2006 at 8:00 a.m. at Town Hall. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele recessed the meeting at 11:02 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 - TDA Executive Director Monthly Report

#2 - Hayes Arts Center/Stage Company Grant Request

#3 - Watauga County Inventory Book Grant Request

#4 - Santay Blowing Rock CD Opportunity