

**Tourism Development Authority**

**Minutes – June 6, 2006**

**The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, June 6, 2006 at 8:00 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernie Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Lynn Drury, Phil Pickett, Keith Tester and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Margaret Pierce. TDA Executive Director Shawn Miller and Councilmember Bobbie Ball were also present.**

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes – May 2 & 15, 2006**

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the May 2 & 15, 2006 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to approve the May 2 & 15, 2006. Unanimously approved.

**FY 2006-07 TDA Budget – Public Hearing**

Chairperson Keele stated that the TDA would be holding a public hearing on the proposed FY 2006-2007. Chairman Keele then opened the public hearing for comments from citizens stating that the proposed FY 2006-07 TDA budget totals \$710,320.

Dick Goosman encouraged the Authority to be open to more radio/TV media that may prove more successful than print media. He also suggested more tracking of ad effectiveness and compiling comparative data once a week (possibly every Friday) to measure success. He stressed the need to collect data from as many properties as possible to gain a better measure of the entire hotel market.

Member Drury mentioned that the advertising campaign had not yet been finalized and that it was the hope of the Authority that all media avenues could be explored.

Blowing Rock Art & History Museum Executive Director Joann Mitchell commented on the status of any carry-over funds available in FY 2005-06 and the monies allocated to town infrastructure.

Finance Officer Pierce stated that any unspent funds available at year-end roll into TDA fund balance. She stated that the Local Government Commission required a minimum of 8% fund balance and the TDA policy was the reserve should equal 50% of actual allocated occupancy tax revenues from previous year. Presently, the fund balance is approximately 18%. Member Tester stated the FY 2005-06 estimate revenue/expense numbers were year-end projections based on a flat revenues for May and June.

Member Tester then reviewed the reasoning why 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the TDA funds are allocated to the Town for infrastructure. He reminded the Authority that the Town had historically utilized occupancy tax dollars to provide downtown tourism infrastructure and that the new 6% occupancy tax continues to provide a funding mechanism. Items funded include sidewalks, paving, beautification, signage, the property for the location of the future BRAHM museum, etc.

Ms. Mitchell encouraged the TDA to promote the fact that tourism provides funding for town infrastructure.

Ginny Stevens complimented the TDA on the new downtown signage in FY 2005-06 and including the word "historical" as a signage component.

Hearing no additional comments, Chairman Keele entertained a motion to close the public hearing. Motion by Member Tester, seconded by Member Pickett to close the public hearing on the FY 2006-2007 TDA Budget. Unanimously approved.

Member Tester encouraged the Marketing Committee to continue to look at other forms of media in addition to print. Both Member Drury and Vice-Chair Tarbuton agreed that all marketing avenues would be explored and tracking effectiveness was vital.

Motion by Member Pickett, seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbuton to approve the FY 2006-2007 TDA Budget as recommended. Unanimously approved. (**Attachment #1**)

## **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 April 2006. She stated that April revenues, totaling a gross of \$35,645.29, were up compared to April 2005. Ms. Pierce also advised that revenue has been up for the past twelve months and that expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

### **Executive Director Report**

Chairperson Keele requested Executive Director Miller to update the Authority on Visitor Center activities.

Executive Director Miller reviewed her Monthly TDA Report, including visitor inquiries. (**Attachment #2**) She advised that TDA website hits appear to be down, but she would further investigate the usage numbers.

Member Drury noted the increase in ad reader response labels and the increase walk-in traffic to the Visitor Center. Chairperson Keele suggested that the Monthly Visitor Inquiry Statistics Report include year to year comparative data.

### *Staffing*

Executive Director Miller updated the Authority on staffing and advised that the two new part-time staff were doing great.

### *Visitor Guide*

Executive Director Miller discussed the need for a more comprehensive and informative Visitor Guide for visitor inquiries. She advised that she has obtained costs estimates – 100,000 copies of a 32 page guide will run approximately \$15,000-\$17,000. The guide would not include any advertising. Member Tester suggested that the guide be focused on area happenings and be event driven.

After a brief discussion, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Drury to authorize production of a visitor guide and fund the project with the current budget or the FY 2006-07 Budget, as recommended by the TDA Auditor. Unanimously approved.

### *Website*

Executive Director Miller stated that the integration of the TDA and Chamber websites was continuing and that a launch date would be very soon. She apologized for the delay in completion. The Authority discussed the need to move forward with the TDA portion, and if necessary, provide a temporary link for the Chamber to the old Chamber website.

#### *Visitor Center Office*

Executive Director Miller updated the Authority on the construction of the additional TDA office (in the area formerly leased to the Chamber of Commerce across from the Visitor Center Desk). She thanked Chairperson Keele and Member Tester for their work in the installation of a wall and stated the project was moving ahead.

#### *Assistant Director Salary Range/Job Description*

Executive Director Miller advised with the recent departure of Lindsay Galvin that the Board had requested a salary range review for the position. Member's Drury and Tester reviewed data from the area for a similar entry-level position with no experience. The average range was determined to be \$25,500-\$29,000. In addition, the Authority briefly discussed a job description for the position.

Motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Drury to establish a salary range of \$25,500-\$29,000 for the Assistant Director position and approve the job description (**Attachment #3**), all subject to the Fair Labor Standards Act. Unanimously approved.

#### *Advertising Plan/Marketing*

Executive Director Miller briefly reviewed upcoming co-op advertisements that would be taking place and pending travel writer visits.

The Board briefly discussed the co-op opportunities and the lack of participation due to increased local area competition.

The Board then reviewed the list of upcoming travel writers' visits as outlined in the Executive Director Report. Ms. Miller discussed the need for a standard media kit for use for travel writers, media inquiries, press packets, etc.

#### *WC&T Agency Update*

Executive Director Miller advised that she and Member Drury had met with Dave Tomsy, Director of Public Relations with Wilson, Coman & Taylor, on a proposal for FY 2006-07 professional services. Member Drury requested approval of proposed contract with WC&T for FY 2006-07 would cost \$24,000, which includes a six-month evaluation (**Attachment #4**).

After a short discussion, Motion by Member Drury, seconded by Member Pickett to approve the FY 2006-2007 contract with WC&T for \$24,000 as recommended. Unanimously approved.

### *Photography*

Ms. Miller stated that she received a proposal for photography services with a retainer of \$1,000/month, which would include 8 to 12 pictures for each photo event, with two events per month. She advised that the Board has discussed for some period the need for updated photography.

Councilmember Bobbie Ball stated it was important to have photography of all critical events. Vice-Chair Tarbutton suggested that the TDA be specific in what was needed in photography. Ms. Miller stated that having a TDA stock of photography was important in order to control the Blowing Rock image.

It was the consensus that the funding for this service would come out of the FY 2006-07 purchased services line-item with the remainder from advertising allocation.

Motion by Member Tester, seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to move forward with a contract for FY 2006-07 photography services with funding up to \$12,000, with a three-month review and the TDA owns the photography. Unanimously approved.

### *BRAHM Request*

Executive Director Miller advised that the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum had a funding request for the Authority consideration. Joann Mitchell presented a request for funding of \$5,000 to be utilized for BRAHM's Summer Event to be held July 7-8 (**Attachment #5**).

Member Tester stated the goal of the TDA was to put heads in beds; and, the request did not meet that criteria. He also stated that the other function of the TDA was to create an environment for tourism and he advised that this project might eventually lead to that concept. He said it was his belief that both the Community Arts Center and the future BRAHM Museum would provide vital year-round tourism.

Member Pickett stated that July was the heart of tourist season and the proposed BRAHM event would not increase hotel occupancy and as such had reservations about funding the project. Dick Goosman concurred with the comments of Member Pickett.

Member Drury advised that the event would continue to bring an art perspective for the community and lead to arts tourism.

Councilmember Bobbie Ball stated that she supported what BRAHM would do for the future of tourism in the Town.

Member Tester asked the cost of the mural. Ms. Mitchell advised around \$15,000.

Chairperson Keele advised that he couldn't support the request due to other pending TDA priorities. Member Tester stated that the Board has in the past year shifted their funding approach from events to more of promotion/advertising.

Motion by Member Drury to approve the \$5,000 request to the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum. Motion died for lack of second.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton reiterated that Board had made it a practice to focus on marketing related funding requests and not event & capital related funding requests.

#### *Community Events Committee*

Executive Director Miller updated the TDA on the proposed Community Events Committee. She stated that the following parties contacted had agreed to serve – Community Arts Center Executive Director, Stage Company Executive Director, Arts & History Museum Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, and the TDA Executive Director. Ms. Miller requested that the Authority provide some clarification and direction of the role and scope of the Community Events Committee.

Board comments included:

- Not a TDA Committee
- Committee not going to run events

- Committee to provide planning assistance to events and oversees professional events planner
- Committee determines advertising needs and events planner support
- Committee recommendations will influence TDA marketing efforts
- TDA will not micromanage committee
- Committee would develop community calendar of events
- Committee would be a clearinghouse of event information

After some discussion, it was the consensus of the Authority that the Community Events Committee would have availability to TDA funding for ad/marketing/promotion efforts and event planning assistance. The main function of the Committee would be overall coordination/scheduling of events and development of a community-wide calendar of events. The Authority requested that the Committee develop their role and duties/responsibilities.

## **Other**

Vice-Chair Tarbuton updated the Authority on the final phase of the tourism survey. He stated the final survey results would be compiled in the next month. Once completed, the TDA would have survey information from four independent sources in the High Country (High Country Host, Watauga Arts Council, Art in the Park and the TDA Survey). He told the Board that Grandfather Mountain had requested permission to use the TDA survey results in development of a compilation of all tourism survey data.

Motion by Member Tester, seconded by Member Pickett to authorize the TDA survey data to be shared with Grandfather Mountain. Unanimously approved.

The Authority then agreed to review a future TDA meeting schedule at the July Board meeting.

## **Master Signage Plan**

Ex-officio Member Hildebran updated the Authority on the status of the Master Signage Plan. He advised that the next phase would include installation of approximately 30 regulatory signs (stop, speed limit, school zone, etc.). These signs would have uniformly painted posts and sign backing and model the elements of the overall sign plan.

He then advised that, later this fall, installation would begin on the kiosk directory signage. The kiosk design and location of the signs would be finalized in the next several months. He shared copies of the design elements suggested for the kiosks (**Attachment #6**). He stated that the final phase would include parking signage.

Chairperson Keele requested that Executive Director Miller meet with town staff to become familiar with the project.

Chairman Keele thanked everyone for the work on behalf of the Authority.

## **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 10:40 a.m.

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Bernard Keele, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

## **Attachments**

**#1 – FY 2006-07 Annual Budget**

**#2 – TDA Executive Director Monthly Report TDA**

**#3 – Assistant Director Job Description**

**#4 – WC&T Agency FY 2006-07 Contract**

**#5 – BRAHM's Summer Event Funding Request**

**#6 – Master Signage Plan Concepts**