

Town of Blowing Rock

**Tourism Development Authority**

**Minutes – October 20, 2006**

**The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Friday, October 20, 2006 at 9:00 a.m. in a follow-up meeting with the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee at Chetola Resort. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Vice-chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Lynn Drury, Phil Pickett and Keith Tester, and Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran. Ex-officio member Margaret Pierce was absent due to a death in the family.**

Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee members present were President Pam Vines, Vice-President Bill Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President Tracy Brown, and Treasurer Barbara Wright. Boardmember Nancy Santay was absent due to a prior engagement.

**Call to Order**

Chairperson Keele called the meeting to order and welcomed the Authority members and Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee members.

He stated that the meeting was a follow-up to the earlier joint planning meeting with the Chamber of Commerce Executive Board to discuss a joint tourism-related effort and to hear from Chamber Director/TDA Director Beth Carden from Brevard/Transylvania County Chamber/Tourism Authority.

**Joint Meeting**

Chamber Vice-President Hall distributed highlights from a conversation with Bill Basham (President - North Augusta Chamber of Commerce and formerly with the Highlands, N.C. Chamber of Commerce) regarding memberships (Attachment #1). He stated this issue would be discussed later in the meeting.

Mr. Hall then introduced Ms. Carden for her remarks. Ms. Carden provided the following comments/suggestions/recommendations/thoughts –

She oversees a staff of four and twenty volunteers in her position with Brevard/Transylvania County. In her position as Chamber Executive Director, she serves a board of 28 members. In her position as TDA Director, she serves a board of 7 members. She also formerly worked for a county recreation department in the Atlanta area for 10 years.

She stated she was present today to assist both the TDA and Chamber as they discuss “partnering” and to eliminate duplication of services.

She asked the attendees what would they describe as their mission? – most all attendees responded – “Promote Blowing Rock”. She suggested that the mission was basically “economic development”.

She advised that the Board should set policy and hire the director to “run the day to day operations” of the organizations. The Board should evaluate the director as least annually and constantly provide feedback. Also, she recommended that the board be visionary and set goals and the staff develop strategies to meet those goals. The executive director should be the quarterback, with great flex skills in wearing numerous hats. She stated the director position is a people-oriented profession.

In her operation, the telephone system consists of four lines – (2) Chamber and (2) TDA. They utilize two separate budgets, where the TDA provides salary funding and tourism/advertising funding. The Brevard/Transylvania County TDA occupancy revenue totals approximately \$300,000 with a 4% tax rate.

The three most important TDA projects underway include – 1) Travel Marketing Trend Research (contracted with Randall Market Research), 2) Downtown Master Plan, with funding for wayfinding and parking, and 3) Multi-Media Video Streaming, an interactive video utilized on the website as well as in marketing mailings. (She stated they sold the compact disc video for \$5.00.)

The Brevard/Transylvania County Chamber of Commerce has 560 members. In addition to membership dues revenue, they receive \$6,000-\$7,000 in miscellaneous sales, trinket memorabilia, coffee cups, drinks, etc. In their new location, they plan to open a visitor center store to generate revenue for the Chamber. They also plan to sell packets of information (above a minimum level of information) to inquiries and also begin a relocation subscription service to chamber members. Further, they sell advertisement opportunities for sponsorship of their website, which creates around \$35,000 in revenue.

The Chamber of Commerce membership provides networking opportunities, business seminars, support, referrals, brochures, business advocacy, events, business recruitment, industry meetings, familiarization tours and education. Seminars have included – identity theft, customer service, buying trends. They host a tourism conference to discuss issues or problems of common interest – such as market trends, bulk buying and information sharing. They have created a wedding guide and a camp industry guide. She stated the Chamber nurtures its members.

The Chamber membership dues must create a “value” for their members.

The TDA focuses on promotion/marketing, quality of life, and co-op advertising. Most advertisement is conducted regionally in a 5-hour radius of Brevard. They utilize web advertisement on the State of N.C. – [www.VisitNC.com](http://www.VisitNC.com) website, and have developed a 48-page visitor guide. The visitor guide include 28 ads @ \$450 per ad and is updated and reprinted annually. Also, the TDA develops and distributes over 100,000 brochures annually.

She advised that they do not restrict membership in the Chamber of Commerce due to location of business. However, they do separate Chamber/TDA information in the Visitor Center, with the TDA information including attractions, things to do and accommodations placed in the front the building.

She commented that the key is no personal agendas or favoritism. All parties must have integrity and trust their staff. Workers must give customers what they are looking for – from a visitor perspective.

She stated the importance of both the Chamber and TDA keeping their identities. She also advised that both the Chamber and TDA have separate websites – [www.brevardncchamber.org](http://www.brevardncchamber.org), which is membership driven and [www.visitwaterfalls.com](http://www.visitwaterfalls.com), which is tourism driven. She recommended that both websites be dynamic and constantly maintained.

Ms. Carden mentioned that the Chamber website has also recently added sections to include member job opportunities and member lease space. Also, they distribute a weekly e-news brief to members.

She then commented on the Brevard/Transylvania County joint organization –

- Cross-train all staff
  - Executive Director
  - Public Relations Coordinator (Marketing)
  - Customer Service Coordinator (V.C. Manager/Fulfillment/Volunteers)
  - Special Services Coordinator (Budget/Membership/Events)
  - (2) Part-time – weekend workers
- (2) budgets

- Trust/Integrity are key
- Be flexible
- Data Collection & Analysis – don't over dissect
- Look at trends from expert & compare locally
- Conduct economic impact studies/surveys (in-house/interns & university)
- Place advertising where you get leads
- Mini-grants
  - \$20,000 total budget
  - \$2,000 maximum grants in some form of advertising
  - Mainly for new or growing events, though some repeat requests
- Invest in Training (S.E Marketing School & Chamber Institute)

Ms. Carden then developed a chart looking at both the Chamber and TDA organizations:

Nuts & Bolts – Chart of Major Functions

	<u>Chamber</u>	<u>TDA</u>
Advertising	X	X
Fulfillment	X	X
Bulk Mail	X	X
Product Development	X	X
Economic Development	X	X
Website	X	X
Education	X	
Special Events	X	X
Membership	X	
Collateral	X	X
Familiarity Tours	X	X
Board Meetings	X	X
Business Advocacy	X	X
Visitor Center Operation		X

Government Relations	X		
Staff Management	X		X
Budgeting	X		X
Public Relations	X		X
Seminars	X		X
Networking	X		X
Tax Collections			X
Data Collection	X		X
Evaluation	X		X
Strategic Planning	X		X
Maintaining Calendar	X	<u>X</u>	X
Packaging Product			X

Based on the review of the major functions, Ms. Carden advised that there were few holes in the total product. She stated that if the efforts were combined that both parties could “get more bang for the buck”.

She recommended that the boards set major goals and let the staff set strategies to reach those goals – all of which would take strong leadership, openness, and no turf battles.

Chairman Keele and President Vines thanked Mr. Carden for her comments/suggestions/recommendations/thoughts.

#### Visitor Center Operation

At this time, Vice-President Hall distributed a proposal for operation of the Visitor Center from October 23, 2006 until December 31, 2006 (Attachment #2). Mr. Hall stated that the TDA had requested that the Chamber develop an interim plan for the management of Visitor Center and come back as soon as possible for formal consideration. Mr. Hall proposed that the Chamber of Commerce Executive Director would assume supervisory responsibility for the Visitor Center until the end of the year. The proposed cost would be \$500 per month. After a brief discussion on staffing, motion by Vice-Chair Tarbutton and seconded by Member Pickett approve the

proposal for visitor center operation until December 31, 2006 at \$500 per month, as presented. Motion unanimously approved.

### Next Steps

The Authority and Chamber Executive Board then begin discussions on the next steps of moving forward. After a lengthy discussion, the TDA requested a formal commitment from the Chamber of Commerce on the business model suggested – a combined organization with one director similar to the Brevard/Transylvania County model. Both groups briefly discussed personnel and the need for commitment on the model.

Also, both groups then discussed Chamber membership and any restrictions that would apply. Based on the handout provided by Mr. Hall at the beginning of the meeting and the comments received from Ms. Carden, the Authority agreed that Chamber membership would not be a problem, as long as TDA accommodations were identified and placed prominently in the visitor center, on the website and in the directory.

The Chamber Executive Board stated they needed meet to further discuss the model and would have a response by early next week.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business, motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Pickett to continue the meeting until Monday, October 23, 2006 at 3:00 p.m. at Town Hall for further discussions on this issue. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele recessed the meeting at 1:05 p.m.

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Bernard Keele, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

### **Attachments**

**#1 – Basham Handout - Membership**

**#2 – Chamber Proposal - Visitor Center Operations**