

# Board of Commissioners/Tourism Development Authority

## Joint Meeting

Minutes – March 6, 2007

A joint meeting of the Town of Blowing Rock Board of Commissioners and the Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority (TDA) was held on Tuesday, March 6, 2007 at 4:00 p.m. at Town Hall. Attending were Mayor J.B. Lawrence, Commissioners Bobby Ball, Keith Tester, Terry Lentz, Rita Wiseman and Tommy Klutz. TDA members included Chairperson Bernie Keele, Vice Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Keith Tester and Lynn Drury. Others in attendance were Town Manager Scott Hildebran, Finance Director Margaret Pierce, TDA Director Tracey Brown, Town Engineer Doug Chapman, Public Works Director Johnny Lentz, and Town Clerk Sharon Greene.

TDA member Phil Pickett was unable to attend.

### Call to Order

Mayor Lawrence called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and welcomed those in attendance.

### Council/TDA Annual Meeting

Mr. Bernie Keele, TDA Chairperson began by stating how happy the TDA Board was to have Tracey Brown as the new TDA Director and what a good job he was doing. Mr. Keele also stated that occupancy tax for the past 19 consecutive months had continued to increase. Council also received a handout showing monthly occupancy tax totals up to the present time. **(Attachment #1)**

Mr. Keele discussed the proposed wayfinding signage program, which would include new directional signs and kiosks to be placed throughout several areas in town. He stated that a map of all businesses in town would be placed in the kiosks at no cost to the merchants.

Mr. Keele informed Council that the TDA website and the Blowing Rock Chamber of Commerce website had now been combined improving navigation of both sites.

He also advised the Blowing Rock area had been honored in several publications and that Lynn Drury and Kent Tarbutton were continuing to work on the advertising campaign promoting the Blowing Rock area in conjunction with TDA Marketing Consultant Dave Tomsky.

TDA plans for the upcoming year were discussed next, with Mr. Keele stating the town needed a coordinated economic development plan. He stated the village character of Blowing Rock could change quickly especially if small locally owned motels were unable to continue to stay open. Members of the TDA felt that small motels were at a disadvantage due to the tourist demand for higher-end amenities.

Mr. Keele also expressed a need for more parking, which remains a priority of the TDA.

Mr. Keele again stated how excited the TDA Board was about the upcoming year and with the leadership they now had.

Commissioner Wiseman commended the TDA on the job they were doing and stressed Council's desire to assist them in any way they could.

Commissioner Klutz expressed his concern for older motels and the cost that would be incurred by the owners for renovations to keep up especially with real estate costs in Blowing Rock. Mr. Keele stated that people were looking for places to go that had upscale facilities, larger rooms and great dining and there was a lot of competition.

Commissioner Ball concurred that some party needed to take the lead in the economic development of the Town. Commissioner Tester stated the Chamber of Commerce was in the process of getting a group together with respect to economic development but before a specialist could be hired to assist in this issue the town needed to know exactly what they wanted. There were three major issues that needed to be focused upon - the need for more upscale facilities, more things to do (i.e. events) and getting merchants to work together with regard to events.

Commissioner Tester stated downtown Blowing Rock needed to be treated as if it were a mall with all businesses being coordinated as one unit. He felt the Chamber of Commerce should be the one to work on that.

Mr. Keele stated that someone needed to create an interest for merchants to want to stay open later and more on-going events were needed to draw people to Blowing Rock.

Commissioner Tester stated that other organizations needed to be included such as the Art Center, etc. as well as merchants working together on this effort. Mr. Keele felt there was some conflict since the Chamber had so many outside members that they also promoted, not just Blowing Rock businesses, with money being the biggest reason and the TDA had offered to help with funding. Commissioner Klutz felt it was pertinent that the Chamber work together with the economic development group.

Mayor Lawrence inquired if a portion of occupancy tax funds could be used in a revolving loan process for small motel owners to do renovations in order for them to increase their occupancy rates, which in turn would mean higher occupancy tax. Commissioner Tester agreed this was a good idea and a good way to maximize how TDA money is spent. Town Manager Hildebran stated the town might be able to work with the High Country Council of Governments or Advantage West to get planning assistance on this issue.

Commissioner Wiseman commended the TDA on their many hours of hard work and for the progress they had made. She also advised if there was anything that Council could do to assist them to please let them know. Mr. Keele stated their top priority was parking and asked that Council continue to pursue this.

Mr. Tarbutton spoke of the positive results in getting the TDA and the Chamber to work together since Tracey Brown had become the TDA director. Commissioner Klutz asked Mr. Brown how well things were progressing in that respect. Mr. Brown stated a meeting had taken place earlier that day with TDA members and Chamber members and he thought they were making a lot of progress.

With no further comments, Mayor Lawrence thanked the TDA for their attendance at the meeting.

## Adjournment

With no further business to discuss the joint meeting between Council and the TDA adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

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Bernard Keele, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

**Attachment**

**#1 - Occupancy Tax Totals**