

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – April 3, 2007

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, April 3, 2007 at 8:30 a.m. in a regular meeting. Present were Chairperson Bernie Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Phil Pickett, Keith Tester, Lynn Drury, and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Margaret Pierce. Executive Director Tracy Brown and Dave Tomsy, of WC&T, were also present.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – January 2 and 11 and March 6, 2007

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the January 2 and 11 and March 6, 2007 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Drury and seconded by Member Pickett to approve the January 2 and 11 and March 6, 2007 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

Member Tester suggested that Executive Director Brown create a checklist of action items from the January 11 TDA Planning Retreat for Board follow-up.

Financial Report

Chairperson Keele introduced Finance Officer Margaret Pierce to review the FY 2006-07 budget to date.

Finance Officer Margaret Pierce then reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2006-07 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through February 2007. She stated that February revenues (excluding 1 establishment), totaling a gross of \$34,847.59, were slightly down compared to February 2006. Ms. Pierce noted that this was the first decline in the last nineteen months. She also advised that revenue and expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

The Authority briefly discussed the need for data that delineates occupancy tax versus occupancy rates. They requested that Executive Director Brown continue to encourage all lodging establishments to participate in Smith Travel Research reporting. Currently, the larger properties provide data to Smith Travel Research.

Master Signage Plan Update

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran advised that the Town had received delivery of the new regulatory signage (40 signs). He stated that public works staff hoped to have the signage erected in the next month depending on weather. He also stated that the next phase of the Master Signage Plan would be to have information kiosks designed in the near future, which would replace the few remaining street business directory signs. He advised that Highland Mapping was in the final mapping design phase and hopefully the signs would be manufactured by mid-summer.

The Authority expressed their desire to the kiosks in place as soon as possible.

Strategic Plan Update

Chairperson Keele thanked Member Tester for drafting an update to the TDA Strategic Plan (**Attachment #1**) and requested that he review the draft with the Authority.

The Authority discussed the need for further definition of “quality” and clarification of our tourism audience (i.e., the type of visitor versus the number of visitors). The Board also mentioned the need for more specific goals and that the strategic plan should mesh with the draft business plan (**Attachment #2**) prepared by the Executive Director.

After some discussion, the Authority scheduled a worksession for Thursday, April 12, 2007 at 1:00 p.m. at Town Hall to further review the draft Strategic Plan and draft Business Plan.

Operations Activity Report

The Authority briefly reviewed the Operations Activity Report on Visitor Center activities -web site usage, telephone and email requests, walk-in traffic, etc. (**Attachment #3**). All Visitor Center indicators are up.

Executive Director Brown discussed –

- the need for additional part-time and administrative help.
- the success of the TDA Google/Yahoo buy in increasing website hits.
- the need for some update/tweaks to the TDA website.
- the previous quarter marketing/advertising activities, which has led to the increase in Visitor Center traffic.
- the recent meeting with advertising partners to receive feedback in order to create a strategic advertising plan.
- the status of the new Visitor Guide, which should be ready in the next week. (he will forward a PDF copy for the Authority to review late this week).
- the status of the new TDA Map, which is being prepared by Town Planning staff and Highland Mapping.
- the need to continually update the Visitor Guide and place an on-line version on the website.
- the need for high-end press kit with digital/DVD/streaming video components.

He advised that all of these items were touched on in the draft business plan.

Member Tester agreed that the TDA should maximize resources on a strategic/comprehensive advertising plan that benefits all and would allow other partners to reduce their advertising cost to spend on other opportunities. He stated that if all work together in a coordinated manner and avoid overlap this would be a way to help everybody without writing a check to each group.

Chairperson Keele and Member Drury expressed the need to complete the Visitor Guide and Town Map as soon as possible.

WC&T Agency Update

Dave Tomsy began by complimenting new TDA Director Brown on his cooperative and timely response to information requests. He then updated the TDA on the marketing activities underway. He mentioned the following new marketing opportunities –

Go Carolinas – article on Wine Festival dinners

N.C. Signature Magazine – article on Wine Festival

Western N.C. Magazine – article on Blowing Rock

South Florida CEO Magazine – article on Blowing Rock

He also mentioned upcoming visits by Jane Garvey and representatives of the LKM agency, which was awarded a contract with N.C. Travel & Tourism. He discussed a new 750-word marketing piece he prepared for use in several potential publications and an upcoming press release on Gallery Strolls/Art in the Park.

Member Drury suggested that the press release include information on the Blowing Rock Art & History Museum Antique Weekend and activities at the Hayes Performing Arts Center. Member Tester suggested including summer attractions such as Tweetsie Railroad and Grandfather Mountain as well. He also mentioned that the Performing Arts Center had hired a new marketing person and requested that Mr. Tomskey approach the Center about collaboration.

Mr. Tomskey concurred and also stated that he is working collaboratively with the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation on the 75th Anniversary of the Parkway (i.e. Textile Denim King).

The Authority briefly discussed the need for continued communication with the various Blowing Rock events (ex. - Wine Festival and Mitford Festival) and requested Director Brown to continue to work toward those interests. Mr. Tomskey made two observations about the Mitford Festival – the demand on services (too many people) and visitor experience (meeting visitor expectations) – could have an effect on event success. He stated that the event might be the largest in the Town's history, but if the event is only a one-time festival that would limit travel writer articles.

The Authority thanked Mr. Tomskey for his efforts.

Other

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran mentioned that the City of Lenoir had a bill introduced in the N.C. General Assembly to establish a Tourism Development Authority and that in the bill Caldwell County would tweak their occupancy tax boundary. He suggested that Executive Director Brown further research the issue and its possible effect on the Gideon Ridge area. He stated that the Town had begun the annexation process of the Gideon Ridge Inn, but the effective date would not be until July 2008.

The Authority expressed their appreciation to Mr. Brown for his new TDA bi-weekly update, which they found very informative.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Drury to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 9:45 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 – TDA Strategic Plan

#2 – TDA Business Plan

#3 – Operations Activity Report