

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – April 12, 2007

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Thursday, April 12, 2007 at 1:00 p.m. in a special meeting at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Bernard Keele, Vice-Chair Kent Tarbutton, Authority members Lynn Drury, Phil Pickett and Keith Tester, and Ex-officio members Scott Hildebran and Margaret Pierce. Executive Director Tracy Brown was also present.

Call to Order

Chairperson Keele called the meeting to order and welcomed the Authority members. He stated the purpose of the meeting was to review the draft of both the updated 2007 TDA Strategic Plan and the proposed FY 2007-08 TDA Business Plan.

Marketing Strategy

The Authority began with a general discussion of what the TDA considered “the season” in Blowing Rock and where marketing efforts should be focused.

Comments included –

- 3 overall seasons in Blowing Rock – Peak Season (Summer and October), Shoulder Season (September, March, April, May) and Winter Season (November – February).
- Target the core marketing resources during “Peak Season” (Summer/October) when you get the greatest return on investment. (i.e., Asheville and Boone)
- Target marketing resources to increase mid-week (Monday-Thursday) occupancy during “Peak Season”.
- Regardless of marketing resources expended, Winter Season is too dependent on weather to have any great impact.
- Target small-medium corporate meetings and group travel for mid-week occupancy.
- Target university-related visitors for occupancy.

- Market activities as well as events (Performing Arts Center, Tweetsie, Grandfather Mtn., Moses Cone, etc.)
- Market with other area events (i.e., Woolly Warm Festival, Highland Games, etc.) and encourage stays in Blowing Rock.
- Create collateral to distribute to small-medium corporate meetings and university-related visitors.
- Monitor what other TDA's are doing in marketing their area.
- Work and collaborate with Blowing Rock retail business (i.e., retail hours, closed for winter, abbreviated operating days during week, etc.).
- Monitor the impact of new gated communities in the area.

After an extended discussion, it was the consensus of the Authority to – 1) emphasize marketing efforts during the Peak Season, 2) develop a strategy to concentrate on corporate/group travelers during the Peak Season mid-week and the Shoulder Season and 3) limit marketing resources to specific events/activities during the Winter Season.

Event Strategy

The Authority then had a brief discussion on the TDA role with events and where to focus their efforts.

Comments included –

- Do not provide a cash outlay to events but instead aid with marketing.
- Consider providing financial assistance to employ an Events Coordinator.
- Encourage the private sector to put on events (Antique Show, Blue Grass Music, etc.).
- Encourage and assist those already in the marketing events/activities business (Performing Arts Center, Art & History Museum, Charity Horse Show, etc.).
- Place emphasis on frontline training, customer service, familiarization tours, and improving relationships with retail merchants.
- Help coordinate dialogue with local event providers to improve communication, planning, and scheduling.

After a brief discussion, it was the consensus of the Authority to encourage the Executive Director to continue to build relationships with the local event providers and to develop a strategic approach for Authority consideration later in the year.

Funding Request

Based on previous action by the Authority to encourage the Chamber of Commerce to develop events, the Authority discussed a funding request for the Blue Ridge Wine Festival and Mitford Days. After discussion, motion by Member Tester and seconded by Member Drury to appropriate up to \$10,000 to the Blue Ridge Wine Festival and up to \$15,000 to Mitford Days for actual reimbursement of marketing expenses. The motion included that actual receipts must be presented within a maximum of 60 days of the event for TDA reimbursement consideration. Motion approved 4 to 1. (Keele - Nay)

The Authority strongly affirmed that this action was a one-time action based on a previous commitment and was not precedent setting approval.

Visitor Guide

Chairperson Keele requested an update from Executive Brown on the TDA Visitor Guide.

Executive Director Brown stated that the new Visitor Guide was in the final draft review stage – with final selection of photographs, typographical corrections and lodging clarification are all that remains to be completed. He advised that the document should be ready for distribution around Memorial Day.

Visitor Map

Chairperson Keele requested an update from Executive Brown on the TDA Visitor Map.

Executive Director Brown stated that a draft of the base map is complete and that Highland Mapping and Consultant Heidi Lusk would be coordinating the final draft and layout for review. He advised that the map would model the map which would be included in the new information kiosks. Mr. Brown expressed hope that the map would be ready for distribution around Memorial Day.

Member Tester expressed concern about the Chamber of Commerce website having outdated information. Executive Brown responded that he would inform the Chamber of the concern and encourage them to update the site.

Strategic Plan

Member Tester briefly discussed the draft Strategic Plan distributed at the TDA April regular meeting. He advised that he had revised the document to include comments received from Member Drury and Vice-Chair Tarbutton. He requested that the Authority forward any additional comments for inclusion to him in the next few days for incorporation.

Chairperson Keele thanked Member Tester for his efforts on the document. The Authority agreed to consider formal approval of the updated 2007 Strategic Plan at their May meeting.

Executive Director Brown advised that he would take the information gleaned from the afternoon worksession and modify the TDA 2007-08 Business Plan accordingly. The plan will serve as a basis for the proposed FY 2007-08 Budget to be presented at the May TDA meeting.

Other

The Authority agreed to hold a FY 2007-08 Budget worksession during mid to late May to review the proposed budget. The meeting date and time will be established in the near future.

Adjournment

Upon motion of Member Pickett and second by Vice-Chair Tarbutton, the Authority adjourned the meeting at 3:45 p.m. Motion unanimously approved.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

