

**Tourism Development Authority**

**Minutes – May 1, 2007**

**The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, May 1, 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 and Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran. Executive Director Tracy Brown was also present.**

Authority member Lynn Drury and Ex-officio member Margaret Pierce were absent.

**Call to Order**

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

**Approval of Minutes – April 3 and 12, 2007**

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the April 3 and 12, 2007 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Tester and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to approve the April 3 and 12, 2007 meeting minutes. Unanimously approved.

**Financial Report**

Chairperson Keele introduced Ex-officio member Scott Hildebran to review the FY 2006-07 budget to date.

Mr. Hildebran then reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2006-07 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through March 2007. He stated that March revenues, totaling a gross of \$29,435.55, were slightly down compared to March 2006. Mr. Hildebran noted that this was the first decline in the last twenty months. He also advised that revenue and expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton stated that he observed that group sales were down as well. Ex-officio member Hildebran informed the Authority that Horton's Lodge was recently sold and would not continue as a motel establishment.

## **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 #1**). All Visitor Center indicators are up as compared to April of 2006 – telephone calls (20%), email hits (419%), walk in traffic (18%), and brochure mailings (572%)

Executive Director Brown discussed –

- the hiring of Amanda Fife, a former intern with the TDA, as the new TDA assistant (start date May 7).
- the success of the TDA Google/Yahoo buy in increasing website hits.
- the previous quarter marketing/advertising activities, which has led to the increase in Visitor Center traffic.
- the status of the new Visitor Guide, which should be ready by Memorial Day.

Member Tester commented on the necessity to maintain a current and regularly updated TDA website. He also reminded the Authority that the Chamber website as well was still out of date. The Authority agreed to offer the Chamber assistance on website maintenance for a nominal fee. The Authority also agreed to consider event website maintenance services for local events such as Winterfest, Mitford Days, Wine Festival, etc. Executive Director Brown advised that he would discuss this website assistance proposal with the appropriate parties and would work toward keeping the TDA website current.

The Authority also suggested that Mr. Brown seek cost information on obtaining a link from the [www.blowingrock.org](http://www.blowingrock.org) website to [www.blowingrock.com](http://www.blowingrock.com) website.

Member Tester requested that Executive Director Brown provide a breakdown next month on the content of TDA advertisement – general ads versus event specific ads, or both.

## **Master Signage Plan Update**

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran advised that the Town had received delivery of the new regulatory signage (40 signs) and public works staff had begun the signage installation. 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 and asked if they could be updated regularly as businesses change location of ownership. Mr. Hildebran stated that the kiosk design would allow for regular updates.

The Authority discussed the need for a regular TDA update to be placed in the *Blowing Rocket* to keep citizens informed of TDA activities and tourism spending on town infrastructure, i.e. signage, parking, sidewalks, etc.

### **FY 2007-08 TDA Budget**

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran and Executive Director Brown distributed a copy of the proposed FY 2007-08 TDA Budget for Authority review. (**Attachment #2**). The proposed budget totals \$748,065. Chairperson Keele suggested that a budget worksession be held and the Authority schedule a session on May 16<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 p.m. at Town Hall to review the draft document. A public hearing on the proposed budget is scheduled for the June 5, 2007 TDA meeting.

Ex-officio member Hildebran provided an overview on the town portion of the proposed budget with the Authority – i.e. streetscape (sidewalk, paving, utilities, parking in the downtown area, an ambassador program of utilizing town park staff to police the downtown for litter and provide information, and proposed recreation special events. It was the consensus of the Authority that town portion of the FY 2007-08 budget was in keeping with their efforts and to allow the Town budget planning to go forward.

Executive Director entertained questions regarding the TDA portion of the budget. Vice-Chair Tarbutton made inquiries regarding staffing funding and event support. Mr. Brown responded that both were included in the proposed budget. The Authority discussed the need to develop a coordinated marketing plan with area event promoters and activities and suggested a joint meeting with key Arts Center staff. Mr. Brown will follow-up on the matter.

The Board also discussed the need to take advantage of event opportunities as they arise and the various avenues the TDA had to fund such opportunities.

The Authority requested additional information regarding investment earnings and TDA fund balance. They agreed to discuss the issue further at the upcoming worksession and the desire to budget interest income.

Member Tester asked about the allocation for the tourism marketing survey line-item. Mr. Brown responded that the funding would be utilized to hire ASU tourism research professionals to provide return on investment survey data on TDA ad placement.

## **Other**

Ex-officio member Hildebran advised that State House Member Cullie Tarleton had researched with the State of North Carolina the TDA requested monthly or annual sales tax data for cities less than 5,000 in population. The N.C. Department of Revenue, due to limited staff resources, lengthy analysis requirements and the associated costs, responded that they are unable to provide the data (**Attachment #3**).

## **Strategic Plan Update**

Member Tester briefly discussed the draft Strategic Plan distributed at both TDA April meetings. He advised that he had revised the document to incorporate the comments received from TDA members and the document was ready for Authority consideration.

Chairperson Keele thanked Member Tester for his efforts on the document. The Authority deferred consideration of the updated Strategic Plan until the May worksession in order to allow for participation of Member Drury.

## **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 10:05 a.m.

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Bernard Keele, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

## **Attachments**

**#1 – Operations Activity Report**

**#2 – TDA Draft FY 2007-08 Budget**

**#3 – N.C. Department of Revenue Sales Tax Response**

