

**Tourism Development Authority**

**Minutes – July 3, 2007**

**The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, July 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 – June 5 and 27, 2007**

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the June 5 and 27, 2007 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Tester and seconded by Vice-Chair Tarbutton to approve the June 5 and 27, 2007 meeting minutes with the correction of the June 5 minutes adding “Executive Director Brown” in lieu of “Executive Brown”. Unanimously approved.

**Financial Report**

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

Ms. Pierce then reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2006-07 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through May 2007. She stated that May revenues, totaling a gross of \$56,637.83, were up compared to May 2006. Ms. Pierce also advised that revenue and expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

Member Tester asked for clarification on line-item expenses related to lease payments and website. Ms. Pierce responded that lease payment line-item expense was under-budgeted but was covered at the departmental level. She also advised that the website line-item expense included funds designated for fund balance that were approved at the last TDA meeting and would not be expended

## 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**).

Executive Director Brown discussed –

- Visitor Center indicators as compared to June 2006 - telephone calls down, email hits up, walk in traffic down, and brochure mailings up.
- the success of the TDA Google/Yahoo buy in increasing website hits.
- 56% of days in June 2007 experienced rain or rain threatening conditions.
- Blowing Rock named mountain destination finalist by *Southern Living Magazine*.
- Blowing Rock article to appear in upcoming *Southern Living Magazine* issue.
- Upcoming website upgrades to include new photos, online press kit and streaming video.
- 2007-08 Media/Marketing Plan are in place.
- Entertained international travel writers last week.

## WC&T Update

- Dave Tomsy advised he had spent time in Blowing Rock on two occasions since the last quarterly TDA meeting.
- Two press releases have been prepared – long weekend release & artist release (Gaines Kiker, Kevin Beck, and Bolick Pottery).
- Travel Writer Jane Garvey provided some feedback regarding judging process at Wine Festival.
- Travel Writer Constance Richards article on Blowing Rock appears in *Blue Mountain Magazine*.
- International Food Writers visit in advance of conference in Charlotte in April 2008.
- Blowing Rock article on “Women’s Getaway” to appear in *Southern Living Magazine* September issue.
- Utilized Blowing Rock Arts Center, Blowing Rock Art & History Museum and Blowing Rock Equestrian Preserve in press releases on Blowing Rock.

The Authority thanked Executive Director Brown and WC&T Consultant Dave Tomsy for their work on behalf of the TDA.

## **Wine Festival Report**

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin provided a report on the 2007 Blue Ridge Wine Festival. (**Attachment #2**)

He reviewed attendance, attendee origin, occupancy rates, Wine Maker dinner totals, event weather and budget totals with the Authority. Mr. Hardin made the following overall remarks:

- Attendance was up 9% over last year.
- 78% of attendees were from North Carolina.
- Occupancy rates were mixed with some up and some down.
- The event did make money this year (a little over \$8,000).
- Attendance was disappointing considering the advertising dollars leveraged.
- Weather impacts event.
- Fire on the Rock event was a success.
- Chamber will continue to support wine event financially and organizationally in the future, but they plan to find or create another organization to take on responsibility for event.
- Chamber has learned from experience and has ideals for the future to make the event even greater.
- Thanked the TDA for the \$10,000 in advertising expenses.

Member Pickett stated that even though some hotels had poor occupancy during the event, without the event the numbers could have been worse. Member Drury asked Executive Director Hardin if any group has expressed interest in the event. Mr. Hardin advised that several groups might be interested.

Chairperson Keele asked if the Watauga County Tourism Authority made any contribution to the event. Executive Director Hardin responded that Watauga County TDA provided a \$5,000 grant.

Pat Sumner (Cliff Dwellers Inn) expressed two concerns regarding the Wine Festival – 1) a winner of one of the drawings was never notified of the award, and 2) the tent for the wine tasting was very crowded and limited sales.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton reminded the audience of the tent collapse due to high wind and that the replacement tent was smaller. The first concern was referred to the Chamber of Commerce for resolution.

Dave Tomsy stated that the Wine Festival was an important event for the community and that it was important to build momentum for such an event. He cautioned that the Chamber should verify that if the date is changed from April until another month that it would not conflict with other statewide wine events.

With no further comments, Chairperson Keele thanked Mr. Hardin for his report.

### **Master Signage Plan Update**

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran advised that the Town had placed an order for the balance of the new regulatory signage as well as the parking signage. He also stated that the next phase of the Master Signage Plan would be to have information kiosks designed and manufactured by mid-summer. Mr. Hildebran stated that three (3) kiosks would be manufactured in the initial order – two (2) to be located downtown and one (1) to be located at Tanger Outlet.

The Authority expressed their satisfaction with the new regulatory signage installation and the positive feedback from the community.

### **TDA Map**

Chairperson Keele thanked Executive Director Brown on his efforts to produce a new Visitor Map. (**Attachment #3**)

Member Tester asked about the distribution method for the map. Executive Director Brown responded that 1,500 maps were initially printed and placed at hotels, Town Hall, Visitor Center and in the Memorial Park Hut. He also advised that most feedback on the initial map included – visual aspects, listings on same side as map, categorize colors, include grid, etc.

Member Tester requested that the map be placed in shops throughout downtown similar to the old Merchants Map. He also suggested that the next iteration of the map include -one side focused on the walking shopper and

the other side focused on services. Vice-Chair Tarbutton recommended that the number of colors representing services be minimized. Member Tester thanked Mr. Brown and stated that the initial Visitor Map was a good start.

Member Drury suggested that Executive Director Brown utilized a small focus group to receive feedback prior to the next printing of the map.

## **Other**

Chairperson Keele requested that Executive Director Brown review his request for additional funding of tourism projects from the TDA promotion reserve. Executive Director Brown provided a detailed list of proposed projects/activities for funding. (**Attachment #4**)

The proposed list included - event support (Wine Festival and Winterfest), Arts Center Playbill advertising, Secret Shopper/Customer Service Training, Sunday Concerts in the Park, additional concerts (possibly on Fridays), and TV/Streaming Video package material. The estimated costs were \$28,600.

The Authority discussed customer service training needs and stressed the importance of providing training throughout the year. Due to lack of consensus on a secret shopper program, the Authority suggested eliminating the secret shopper component and increasing the proposed funding of customer service training by \$3,500 to make the allocation \$5,000. The Authority suggested that training be geared to a small local retailer/restaurant to meet our downtown needs.

Items briefly discussed included the TDA advertising in the Appalachian State Summer Festival Program and the Football Program. In addition, the Authority expressed support for a TV/Streaming Video package.

Chamber of Commerce Vice President Bill Hall commented prior to his exiting the meeting that the TDA fund advertising with a rifle approach and not a shotgun approach.

After some discussion on customer service training needs, motion by Member Drury and seconded by Member Pickett to allocate \$32,100 to provide additional funding to tourism projects from the TDA promotion reserve and approve the subsequent budget amendment. Unanimously approved.

Chair Keele suggested that Chamber of Commerce use available Wine Festival profits as seed money for next year's event. He stated this recommendation was similar to the concept utilized by Winterfest. Chamber Executive Director Hardin responded that the Chamber would consider that request.

## **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 9:50 a.m.

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Bernard Keele, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

## **Attachments**

**#1 – Operations Activity Report**

**#2 – 2007 Blue Ridge Wine Festival Report**

**#3 – TDA Visitor Map**

**#4 – 2007-08 Budget Amendment**