

Tourism Development Authority

Minutes – October 2, 2007

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, October 2, 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 members Scott Hildebran and Nicole Norman. Executive Director Tracy Brown and Dave Tomsy, of WC&T, were also present.

Member Lynn Drury was not present due to a family member surgery.

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes – July 3, 2007

Chairperson Keele entertained the approval of the July 3, 2007 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Tester to approve the July 3, 2007 meeting minutes as presented. Unanimously approved.

Financial Report

Chairperson Keele introduced new Ex-officio member Finance Officer Nicole Norman and welcomed her to the meeting. He requested that Ms. Norman review the FY 2007-08 budget to date.

Ms. Norman then reviewed the monthly financial statement and the FY 2007-08 Occupancy Tax collections year-to-date through August 2007. She stated that August revenues, totaling a gross of \$110,457.88, were up compared to August 2006. Ms. Norman also advised that revenue and expenditures for the year were in line with projections.

Ex-officio Member Hildebran stated that over the previous quarter occupancy tax revenue had fluctuated but overall the revenue was up compared to the same quarter last year.

The Authority agreed that September occupancy tax revenue should reflect a strong month.

Budget Amendment

Ex-officio Member Hildebran then reviewed a proposed budget amendment which finalizes year-end FY 2006-07 revenue to the town (\$4,990) and recognizes miscellaneous co-op advertisement revenue (\$1,935) for Authority consideration (**Attachment #1**).

Upon motion of Vice-Chair Tarbutton and second by Member Tester, the Authority approved the budget amendment as presented. Motion unanimously approved.

BRAHM Sub-lease Agreement – Amendment

The Authority briefly reviewed a proposed amendment to the TDA sub-lease with the Blowing Rock Art and History Museum. Executive Director Tracy advised that BRAHM needed additional temporary workspace up to 12 hours per week in the downstairs common area. He stated that he supported the request and that an administrative amendment to the sub-lease was in order. As proposed, the current monthly rental income would increase \$41 per month making the monthly rental \$350 per month.

Upon motion of Vice-Chair Tarbutton and second by Member Pickett, the Authority approved the Sub-lease Agreement – Amendment with BRAHM as presented. Motion unanimously approved. (**Attachment #2**).

Operations Activity Report

Executive Director Brown reviewed the Operations Activity Report on Visitor Center activities - web site usage, telephone and email requests, walk-in traffic, etc. (**Attachment #3**). Mr. Brown began by introducing Assistant Director Amanda Fife to the Authority and announcing the recent death of High Country tourism developer Harry Robbins.

Executive Director Brown discussed –

- Visitor Center Staffing – overall in good shape.
- New TDA *Tattler Newsletter* – getting great reviews.

- Visitor Center designated as a Fall Leaf Color Reporting Station for media.
- TDA sponsoring 5 musical events on Friday evenings (\$2,500 total expense).
- Visitor Center indicators as compared to September 2006 - telephone calls up, email hits down, walk in traffic up, and brochure mailings up.
- Website – includes new photography and Fall Leaf Color Report.
- Marketing – Fall/Holiday print and radio ads have been placed, two co-ops ads in *Signature Magazine* and *Charlotte Observer* upcoming, working with WNCW – NPR radio on promotions for Hayes Center, and hosted five travel writers.
- Created new press kit, new visitor maps revised and reprinted, and new local photography.
- Appointment to High Country Host board

WC&T Update

- Dave Tomsky advised the TDA staff is doing a great job, new TDA *Tattler Newsletter* is a wonderful addition for local communications.
- Blowing Rock is seeing the results of hosting travel writers with recent media articles in publications (*Blue Mountain Living*, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, *Points North Magazine* out of Gwinnett, Ga. and *Piedmont Parent*).
- Upcoming seasonal press release to be distributed in the coming weeks.

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

Member Tester asked Mr. Tomsky to briefly review the overall marketing strategy. Mr. Tomsky responded that some of the marketing is focused on unique items of the area – such as culinary, arts, galleries, etc. The remainder of marketing is geared to general areas which works to create an ambience that Blowing Rock is a great place to visit and has many things to do every season of the year. He stated that the goal is to maintain and expound on our strong reputation and put heads in beds.

Mr. Tomsky and Mr. Brown mentioned their good working relationship with the Hayes Center. They both also advised that they share the feedback/impressions received from visiting travel writers with local businesses/lodging in order insure a quality product.

Mitford Days Report

Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Charles Hardin provided a report on the 2007 Mitford Days. **(Attachment #4)**

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

- Event brought many first time visitors.
- Received overwhelmingly positive comments from visitors.
- Attendance included international visitors as well as 37 states.
- 65% of attendees were from North Carolina.
- Occupancy rates were near capacity for the 4 night event. (note: included ASU Family weekend & football game)
- Restaurants reported strong numbers, but expressed concern with non-profit organizations selling food.
- Retail sales were mixed – some strong and some bordering negative.
- Blowing Rock Stage Company has an outstanding three week period with ticket sales.
- Weather was excellent except on Friday – rain.
- Event was at least a breakeven venture for the Chamber.
- Not an annual event and may not be repeated.
- Thanked the TDA for the up to \$15,000 in marketing expenses.

Member Tester asked if the event met expectations. Mr. Hardin responded that the pre-event forecast of visitors by the media was overblown, but the event accomplished the intended purpose – bringing visitors in during the lull between summer and fall.

Vice-Chair Tarbutton relayed that the visitors staying at Chetola Resort seemed pleased with their visit.

Chairperson Keele requested that Mr. Hardin work with Executive Director Brown regarding the TDA reimbursement of marketing expenses and that a check would be delivered as soon as possible.

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

Master Signage Plan Update

Ex-Officio Member Hildebran advised that most of the new regulatory signage and parking signage had been erected and that there may still be a few remaining signs to be replaced.

Town Planning Director Kevin Rothrock reviewed with the Authority the proposed information kiosk signage – detailing the map layout, size and kiosk locations. Mr. Rothrock and TDA Director Brown will continue to work together on the ongoing maintenance of the display map once erected.

Mr. Rothrock advised that one side of the information kiosk will have a business display map and other side of the kiosk will be for event display. He also 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 goal is to have the kiosks in place by the end of the calendar year.

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

Due to the numerous event posters needing display, the Authority also discussed the merits of a seasonal poster including all community events. Executive Director Brown advised that he and staff would evaluate the concept and how this might relate to the kiosk event display.

Newspaper Racks

Ex-officio Member Hildebran reviewed with the Authority the action of Town Council prohibiting newspaper & real estate racks in the Central Business area to improve downtown aesthetics. In lieu of the racks, the Town Council authorized the placement of modular racks at several downtown locations. Mr. Hildebran sought Authority interest in covering the costs of the racks – estimated between \$5,000-7,500 per rack unit. The Town implemented a \$100 annual rental fee which would recoup approximately \$2,400 a year.

After some discussion, the Authority agreed to consider funding of these units once the annual TDA financial audit is received.

Mr. Hildebran also reviewed with the Authority the proposed American Legion parking structure under consideration by Town Council. He advised that the total comprehensive parking plan for this area would result in a net increase of 68-69 parking spaces.

The Authority also agreed to consider additional funding for parking once the annual TDA financial audit is received.

With parking and downtown beautification as goals for the TDA, it was the consensus of the Authority to hold a special meeting in the near future to discuss these new funding initiatives.

Other

Chairperson Keele requested that the Authority consider changing the meeting date of the January 2, 2008 TDA meeting due to member scheduling conflicts. After a short discussion, the Authority agreed to reschedule the January 2, 2008 TDA meeting to December 4, 2007 and at the same time hold their annual strategic planning retreat at Chetola Resort.

Adjournment

With no further business, motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Member Tester to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Keele adjourned the meeting at 9:50 a.m.

Bernard Keele, Chairperson

Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

Attachments

#1 – Budget Amendment

#2 – BRAHM Sub-lease Agreement - Amendment

#3 – Operations Activity Report

#4 – Mitford Days Report