

## **Boone Tourism Development Authority Meeting Minutes**

**March 19, 2025 at 3:00 pm**

### **Explore Boone Office – Boone, NC**

**Present:** Sheri Moretz, Lynne Mason (virtual), Elisha Brown, Tara Brossa, Brian Williams, Brian Crutchfield (virtual), Edie Tugman, Jerry Lamonds

**Absent:** Lenny Cottom

**TDA Staff:** Wright Tilley, Emily Neeley, Hope Thingelstad

**Guests:** Kayla Trivette (Town of Boone Finance), Marrena Greer (SAHA)

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order by Sheri Moretz at 2:59 p.m.

### **Approval of the March 19, 2025 meeting agenda:**

Brian Crutchfield enters the meeting (virtual).

*Brian Williams, seconded by Jerry Lamonds, moved to approve the March 19, 2025 meeting agenda. The motion passed (6/0).*

### **Approval of the January 15, 2025 meeting minutes:**

*Edie Tugman, seconded Elisha Brown, moved to approve the January 15, 2025 meeting minutes. The motion passed (6/0).*

### **Approval of the January 22, 2025 virtual session meeting minutes:**

*Edie Tugman, seconded Elisha Brown, moved to approve the January 22, 2025 virtual session meeting minutes. The motion passed (5/0) with Brian Crutchfield abstaining from the vote.*

### **Treasurer's Report**

*Tara Brossa enters.*

For the dates of January 16<sup>th</sup> 2025 through March 19<sup>th</sup> 2025, the beginning balance for the Boone TDA was \$314,566.60. Total revenue was \$410,770.77, total expenses were \$274,162.32, leaving an ending checking balance of \$451,175.05. The money market beginning balance was \$1,787,152.68, with a total interest of \$11,156.04, leaving an ending money market balance of \$1,798,308.72. The ending cash balance was \$2,249,483.77.

*Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Brian Williams, moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion passed (7/0).*

### **Presentation & Funding Request from Southern Appalachian Historical Association (SAHA)**

*Lynne Mason enters (virtual).*

Marrena Greer, representing SAHA, provided updates on the Horn in the West production, noting that due to stage damage, the drama will be held around the Hickory Ridge cabins for four weekends this year. She also highlighted SAHA's ongoing campaigning efforts and presented a

breakdown of their budgeting expenses and needs. SAHA is requesting \$8,000 from the Boone TDA to support their 2025 marketing plan.

### **New Business**

- **Audit Report**

Wright provided a brief summary of the Boone TDA's audit report, noting a positive net position with higher revenue and expenditures numbers. Some line items regarding office furniture, equipment, and government computer software raised questions among the board. Wright will follow up and provide additional information as it becomes available. Overall, the audit was clean and positive.

***Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Edie Tugman, moved to approve the audit report. The motion passed (8/0).***

- **Southern Appalachian Historical Association (SAHA) – Sponsorship Request**

The board discussed SAHA's request, noting that \$2,300 had already been allocated last year for digital advertising to avoid overlap. After considering alternative advertising options, the board agreed to provide \$3,500 for a full season digital campaign managed by Miles Partnership, along with \$6,200 for SAHA's other marketing needs.

***Sheri Moretz, seconded by Elisha Brown, moved to approve \$3,500 as well as \$6,200 for SAHA's campaign and marketing efforts. The motion passed (8/0).***

### **Old Business**

There was no old business to report.

### **Tourism Outreach Report**

Hope provided an update on visitor guide requests and online guide views for January and February, noting a significant drop compared to last year, though numbers are improving in March. The Explore Boone 2025 visitor guides have been delivered to the new office, with 77.5 cases sent to regional visitor centers and 32.5 cases distributed to local tourism businesses. She also highlighted e-newsletter data, which showed slower signups in February but growth in March. Additionally, Explore Boone will host the Discover Watauga Tourism Summit on March 25th. Finally, Hope presented website metrics for January and February, including engagement numbers and top traffic by city.

### **Social Media & PR Report**

Boone had a strong mix of media mentions in February, with many local businesses being featured in *Garden & Gun*, *US News & World Report*, *USA Today*, and *Eco Lodges Anywhere*. Emily has been pitching spring travel, sending out spring influencer invites and collaborating with many social media influencers. On March 21st, Explore Boone staff will attend the 1850 Hotel soft opening, offering additional pitching opportunities for Emily. Explore Boone's top-performing social media post featured the Forest Gump curve at Grandfather Mountain. Emily also reviewed Explore Boone's social media metrics and trends, noting some declines in February, but showing recovery after the hurricane event.

## **Executive Director's Report**

- **Occupancy Tax Report**

Wright presented recent STR report data, highlighting an increase in occupancy and average daily rates at the beginning of the year. January occupancy tax figures showed a 37.57% increase for Boone and a 12.20% increase for Blowing Rock, while Watauga County saw a decline of 13.60%. Due to this negative trend, Wright noted that recovery for the county may take longer than anticipated. Potential factors contributing to this decline most likely include lost or damaged property inventory and short-term rentals converting to long-term rentals.

- **Marketing & Promotion Update**

The Explore Boone team recently met with Miles Partnership to discuss their upcoming advertising campaign, which will focus on recovery-related visitation and increased PR efforts. Wright highlighted several upcoming travel shows and meetings, including attending the Destinations International Conference in June and the US Travel Association's ESTO Conference in July. Explore Boone will also participate in MerleFest at the end of April. Additionally, Wright informed the board about the proposed Senate Bill 220, which, if passed, could impact local river outfitters and their ability to legally launch watercraft into local rivers. Wright will provide further details to the board as they become available.

**The board meeting was adjourned at 5:14 p.m.**