

Boone Tourism Development Authority Meeting Minutes
February 14, at 3:00 pm
Hampton Inn & Suites – Boone, NC

Present: Sheri Moretz, Lenny Cottom, Lynne Mason, Elisha Brown, Tara Brossa, Tim Futrelle, and Brian Crutchfield (Virtual Via Zoom)

Absent: Jerry Lamonds and Brian Williams

TDA Staff: Wright Tilley and Emily Neeley

Guests: None

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 3:15 pm.

Approval of the February 14, 2024 meeting agenda:

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Brian Crutchfield, moved to approve the February 14, 2024 meeting agenda. The motion passed (5/0).

Approval of the November 15, 2023 meeting minutes:

Lynne Mason, seconded by Elisha Brown, moved to approve the November 15, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. The motion passed (5/0).

Treasurer's Report

Wright presented the Treasurer's Report in Kayla's absence. There was a beginning balance of a little over \$179,000 on November 10, 2023. The total revenue was \$612,304.52 between that time and February 2024. Expenses during that period totaled \$600,000. The ending checking balance was \$190,645.58. The beginning money market balance was \$1,862,163.32, and interest gained was \$23,304.74 leaving the ending money market balance at \$1,885,468.06. The ending cash balance for this time was \$2,076,113.64.

Board members asked about an updated breakdown of infrastructure TDA funding available for specific town projects from the past few years. They also asked about occupancy tax revenue discrepancies between December and January, which were due to a couple of late payments.

Tim Futrelle entered the meeting.

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Lynne Mason, moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion passed (6/0).

Old Business

None.

New Business

Tara Brossa entered the meeting.

- Approval of New PR Firm

After sending out an RFP to several PR agencies and individual professionals, Wright and Emily both agree that one full-service firm would be the best fit for Explore Boone. The Lou Hammond Group has 39 years of experience and 6 nationwide offices, specializing in DMOs. The group's strategic partnerships, influencer and media vetting systems, and stakeholder program are especially valuable to Explore Boone's PR and Tourism Partners programs. This agency would also be on hand in the event of a crisis and would help the TDA complete its crisis communications plan.

Emily provided a presentation for the board of directors to review in detail the group's proposal and reporting mechanisms. Additionally, Wright mentioned that funds could be moved from the marketing agency's budget to this new PR firm in the new fiscal year, so there would be minimal "additional" costs. The Watauga TDA Board has already conditionally approved this, but the Boone TDA board would need to approve this contract as well due to the joint operating agreement.

Sheri Moretz, seconded by Elisha Brown, moved to approve the approval of the contract with LHG PR Firm. The motion passed (7/0).

- Jazz Festival Sponsorship 2024

The 3rd annual High Country Jazz Festival is set to occur June 7 – 9, 2024 with 3 main headliners at the Appalachian Theatre.

Lynne Mason, seconded by Tim Futrelle, moved to approve the \$10,000 sponsorship for the 2024 High Country Jazz Festival. The motion passed (6/0).

Sheri Moretz recused herself from the vote due to a conflict of being on the Jazz Festival committee.

- An Appalachian Summer Festival Sponsorship – 40th Anniversary

The Boone TDA has been a sponsor of the Appalachian Summer Festival for many years. This year will be the 40th Anniversary festival and the lineup is expected to be outstanding.

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Tara Brossa, moved to approve the \$10,000 sponsorship for An Appalachian Summer Festival. The motion passed (7/0).

PR & Social Media Report

Emily reviewed recent media coverage of the Boone area, including articles in *Conde Nast Traveler* and *Travel + Leisure*. Emily also recapped the media missions she attended and went over social media highlights and metrics for both organic and paid social. In 2024, Emily will be working on onboarding the new PR agency, prioritizing media visits and a FAM trip alongside Visit NC with influencer visits. She also highlighted the top social media posts for the past months.

Executive Directors Report

- **Marketing & Promotion Update**

The new 2024 Visitor Guides have been delivered and distribution will continue through the month. Wright attended the Travel & Adventure show in NYC in January, which had incredible attendance. Wright will also be at the DC show with Visit NC in late February, and Hope will be attending the Atlanta show in early March. Tom Hardy distributed Explore Boone Guides for us at a Travel and RV show in Florida in January. High Country Host will be doing an NC Welcome Center FAM soon to help the Welcome Center managers learn about new things in the area. The TDA Staff will be attending the Visit NC Tourism Conference in March. Wright outlined several upcoming digital and print advertising placements.

- **Occupancy Tax Report**

Boone was up a little over 2% in December, while Blowing Rock was up about 5% and Watauga County was up 3.48%. Since the Sleep Inn went offline during the summer and Rhodes Motor Lodge came online in October, the occupancy tax collections are recovering in the town of Boone. Additionally, two boutique hotels downtown and a Home 2 Suites are under construction. Another hotel, the Spring Hill Suites, has applied to start construction in East Boone, pending town approval. Board members asked about any increase in demand. Wright noted there is an increase in demand at certain times, but not throughout the whole year. The STR report was included in the packet for board members to review average occupancy, average daily rate, and more at local chain hotels.

- **Infrastructure Update**

The new office building renovations are going smoothly inside, while outside renovations are waiting on permitting. Rocky Knob Park expansion construction is underway. Additional parking spots will be added and a new picnic shelter and fencing will be added to the pump track area. A new trail is currently being built to access the Crab Orchard Falls trail in Valle Crucis. Howard Knob Park upgrades and improvements have begun.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.