

Boone Tourism Development Authority Meeting Minutes
March 15, 2023, at 3:00 pm
Courtyard by Marriott – Boone, NC

Present: Sheri Moretz, Jerry Lamonds, Lynne Mason, Elisha Brown, Jessica Auten, Tara Brossa, and Brian Crutchfield

Absent: Tim Futrelle and Lenny Cottom

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

Guests: Megan Kevorkian, Bettie Bonds, and Kayla Trivette

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 3:04 pm.

Approval of the March 15, 2023 meeting agenda:

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Lynne Mason, moved to approve the March 15, 2023 meeting agenda. The motion passed (6/0).

Brian Crutchfield entered the meeting.

Approval of the January 18, 2023 meeting minutes:

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Lynne Mason, moved to approve the January 18, 2023 meeting minutes. The motion passed (7/0).

Treasurer's Report

Kayla also presented the Treasurer's Report to the board of directors. There was a beginning balance of \$1,151,296.37 on January 19, 2023. The total income was \$416,610.02 between that time and January 18. Expenses during that period totaled \$313,533.11 leaving an ending checking balance of \$1,103,935.08. The beginning money market balance was \$969,643.82, gaining \$6,075.58 in interest, to end at \$975,719.40. The ending cash balance for this time period was \$2,082,654.48. Lenny asked if too much money was being held in the checking account and if Kayla could average out the TDA's monthly spending so they can reduce that amount.

Lynne Mason, seconded by Brian Crutchfield, moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion passed (7/0).

Brian Crutchfield, seconded by Lynne Mason, moved to approve Kayla to look into the process of transferring money from the checking account to the money market account. The motion passed (7/0).

Presentation & Funding Request from SAHA

Marrena Greer, from the Southern Appalachian Historical Association, presented the 2023 marketing plan for the Horn in the West Outdoor Drama and Hickory Ridge History Museum. She recapped the previous year's successes and challenges and mentioned the plans for the upcoming season's events and operations. SAHA is also planning for the 2026 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. She requested \$22,000 from the TDA to supplement the \$9,389 that SAHA is planning to spend on marketing.

New Business

- **Watauga Arts Council Project**

The Watauga Arts Council has received a grant to hire a marketing director and is seeking a match for the grant. Wright is hesitant to begin funding staff positions, but he has recognized several other opportunities the TDA may be better suited to fund like an public arts map, murals, or upcoming events.

- **Sponsorship Requests:**

- **Appalachian Summer Festival**

An Appalachian Summer Festival requested the same amount of sponsorship funding that they have in the past: \$10,000. The festival will feature Leslie Odom Jr., Darius Rucker, John Oates, and many more performers throughout the month of July. Mr. Tilley recommended the board continue this sponsorship.

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

- **Southern Appalachian Historical Association**

The board of directors discussed providing partial marketing funding to SAHA and providing additional funding in the form of digital advertisements trafficked by Explore Boone through Miles Partnership. The board would like Wright to provide additional coaching for the elements of SAHA's marketing plan and collaborate with digital ads.

Lynne Mason, seconded by Lenny Cottom, moved to approve up to \$10,000 in traditional advertising funding with an additional up to \$10,000 in digital advertising assistance from the TDA and their marketing agency.

Tourism Outreach Report

Hope Thingelstad presented the Tourism Outreach Report, outlining the amount of individual visitor guide requests and bulk visitor guide and adventure guide deliveries to local and regional visitor centers. Hope also included the analytics from the past 3 monthly newsletters that went out to over 12,000 subscribers. Open rates remained strong compared to the previous year. Click-

through rates were also reported, which were a little low compared to the industry average of 2.25%. There were 549 partner accounts on the website and 162 web pages, which Hope is currently in the process of updating.

PR & Social Media Report

Emily Neeley outlined the Public Relations & Social Media. Southern Living Magazine recently featured Boone as one of the Top 50 best towns in the South. She also recently participated in the media marketplace at the Visit NC conference, pitching the area to regional and national journalists. The top-performing posts for the year on Facebook and Instagram were also included in her report. Paid & organic social media metrics were also included in her report.

Executive Director's Report

- Occupancy Tax Report

Occupancy tax collections are leveling off after extremely high collections in 2021 and 2022. Considering the historic collections post-COVID, these numbers falling is expected.

- Marketing & Promotion

The whole team attended the Visit NC conference, with record numbers attending and some great sessions. Merlefest is coming up at the end of April, and Explore Boone will be tabling at the traditional stage again this year. Explore Boone is also going to attend the town of Boone's Earth Third Friday celebration with sustainable travel-focused swag and information. The brand anthem is nearing completion, and will likely be ready for the board retreat in April. There is a cover feature coming up with Good Grit magazine's May issue, and a March Madness TV placement coming up with Spectrum.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:14 pm.