

Boone Tourism Development Authority – January Board Meeting Minutes
Boone TDA / Explore Boone Office
Wednesday, January 21, 2026

PRESENT: Sheri Moretz – Chair

Jerry Lamonds
Lynne Mason
Elisha Brown
Brian Crutchfield
Lenny Cottom
Tara Brossa
Todd Carter
Brian Williams

TDA Staff:

Wright Tilley
Hope Thingelstad
Emily Neeley

GUESTS: Amber Bateman, Watauga Arts Council
Kayla Trivette, Town of Boone Finance

Call to Order: *The meeting was called to order by Sheri Moretz at 3:00 p.m.*

Sheri welcomed new board member Todd Carter, who is stepping into the Boone Town Council seat.

Elisha Brown and Lynne Mason entered the meeting.

Approval of the January 21, 2026 board meeting agenda:

A motion for an amendment to add closed session meeting minutes to the meeting agenda was made. Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Tara Brossa, approved the amended agenda motion.

VOTE: AYE – 9 / NAY – 0

Review and Approval of November 19, 2025, board meeting minutes and closed session minutes:

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Jerry Lamonds moved to approve the November 19, 2025 board meeting minutes.

VOTE: AYE – 9 / NAY – 0

Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Lynne Mason, voted to approve the closed session meeting minutes.

VOTE: AYE – 9 / NAY – 0

Treasurer's Report by Kayla Trivette

Starting November 19th, 2025 through January 1st, 2026, the beginning checking balance was \$124,785.84. Total revenue was \$528,312.58. Total expenses were \$359,733.34. Ending checking balance was \$293,325.08. The beginning money market balance was \$2,244,803.32. Total interest earned was \$12,056.43. Ending money market balance of \$2,256,859.75. The ending cash balance was \$2,550,184.83. Chair opened the floor for questions. Kayla noted that the current interest rate is 3.25%, down from the previous year.

Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Elisha Brown, moved to approve the Treasurer's Report.

VOTE: AYE – 9 / NAY – 0

Old Business

The Watauga Arts Council's request for support regarding the Bloomberg Connects project presented at last meeting was revisited. Amber referenced examples provided in a submitted packet, and provided a demonstration of the app. She showed the Bloomberg Connects website, which features guides to art related places worldwide. The Bloomberg Connects presence would include listings on their website, and the user will be able to see local art and info with written descriptions, audio and video. Amber is hoping to hire someone with a local accent to describe the art and components featured in the guide. Initially, support is for 10 featured art placements in the county. The Watauga TDA will be supporting the overall Bloomberg Connects presence as well. The funds are needed to build out the assets such as photography, audio and video, showcasing the art and the area in a professional and attractive way. The time frame for initial launch is Spring 2026, with the building out of the presence of Watauga County on this digital platform to be ongoing as more public art projects are completed.

Amber left the meeting.

New Business

i. An Appalachian Summer Festival / Appalachian Arts Sponsorship

There is a long-standing relationship between the TDA and Appalachian State regarding these sponsorships. The request is for \$10,000 for An Appalachian Summer Festival and \$5,000 for the Appalachian Arts performing arts series. They have combined the requests for this year, as they did last year, with the actual funds delivered in the new fiscal year.

Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Lynne Mason, moved to approve this sponsorship of \$10,000 for An Appalachian Summer Festival and \$5,000 for the Appalachian Arts series.

VOTE: AYE – 9 / NAY – 0

ii. Doc and Rosa Lee Watson MusicFest Sponsorship

For the second year in a row, this is being held at The Appalachian Theatre. The original event site in Cove Creek was damaged by Hurricane Helene in 2024 and is still being repaired. It is anticipated that the event will move back to the original Cove Creek site in 2027. Data from last year showed that the event was a sell-out with 45% of attendees coming from out of town. They are requesting \$5,000 in sponsorship. Last year the amount requested and approved was \$2,500. After discussion, the board agreed to sponsor at last year's rate of \$2,500. The board is open to revisiting the sponsorship amount again closer to the event time and consider an additional \$1,000 once the performing line-up has been announced.

Brian William, seconded by Lynne Mason, moved to sponsor this event in the amount of \$2,500 with the possibility of an additional \$1,000.00.

VOTE: AYE – 9 / NAY – 0

iii. Boone Docs Film Festival Sponsorship

This event is requesting the same as last year; an “award sponsor” in the amount of \$500. This request is a little different in that they request support for the end of the event, as opposed to funds to put the event on. It’s a local theme, all films are based on the region, but it does bring viewers from out of town at about 50% of attendees.

Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Elisha Brown, moved to approve the sponsorship in the amount of \$500.

VOTE: AYE – 9/ NAY – 0

Note; The board suggested adding a budget line item for future years for smaller, local marketing sponsorships to support the Preserve the Awe campaign.

iv. High Country Jazz Festival Sponsorship Request

The sponsorship request for this event is in the same amount as 2025; \$10,000. The stated use of this financial sponsorship is to promote the festival off the mountain. This funding helps them reach markets throughout North Carolina. They expect over 1,200 attendees, with 35% of visitors to the festival coming from out of town. Zip code data shows that these visitors typically have overnight stays of 1 to 3 nights. It was noted that the line-up for this festival has been extended to 5 days.

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Brian Williams, moved to approve the request for sponsorship of the High Country Jazz Festival in 2026 in the amount of \$10,000.

VOTE: AYE – 9 / NAY - 0

v. Watauga Arts Council – Bloomberg Connects Sponsorship Request

This request is for the support to procure assets, in the form of photography, video, and audio, to have a presence on the Bloomberg Connects digital platform. Noting that this is a new type of media to promote the area through the use of art, the group discussed the impact this could have overall on attracting guests to the area. The consensus is that this is a valid opportunity for promotion of art and the area.

Lynne Mason, seconded by Jerry Lamonds, moved to approve the request for sponsorship of the Watauga Arts Council’s Bloomberg Connects project in the amount of \$28,000.

VOTE: AYE – 9 / NAY - 0

Sheri Moretz left the meeting and turned over Chair duties to Vice Chair Jerry Lamonds.

PR/Social Media Report

Emily presented a year-end review, summarizing social media and PR efforts for 2025. The year had a great mix of both proactive and reactive pitches. The goal of reaching audiences in the shoulder seasons was met. We had a huge year overall in regards to impressions, hosting media and marketing impact. All of the social media posts performed very well regionally. The metrics show upward growth trends in likes, follows and views. Emily also referred to the trends data provided in the meeting packet for an in depth look at these metrics. When reflecting on all the efforts made in this year of recovery, 2025 was very successful.

Tourism Outreach Report

Hope reported that visitor guide requests were good for November and December of 2025. For the entirety of 2025, there was an increase in single visitor guide distribution and in bulk shipments. The 2026 newly redesigned guide will be available soon. This new guide is lighter in weight, which will save

some on postage. The guide will include QR codes that will allow data to be gathered on usage and engagement. These codes will also be very helpful for visitors to get good up-to-date information on everything in the area. This new format is more visually attractive, more editorial, and will not have advertising. The monthly e-newsletter performance continues to grow in subscribers and open rates. The partners e-newsletter is getting good feedback. The exploreboone.com website has 580 partner listings which get updated on a regular basis. The website is performing consistently, with metrics showing some down trends industry wide. This is due to the use of AI, which provides summaries and overviews of content to users, thus the user doesn't have to click through to the website. Voice search is contributing to this as well. Therefore, we optimize the website content in structure and formatting to work with this new AI paradigm. March 31st is the tentative date for the yearly partners meeting.

Executive Directors Report

i. Occupancy Tax Report

Occupancy taxes for December should be available within two weeks. For November 2025, Boone and Blowing Rock's numbers were down slightly. Watauga County's were bouncing back. Some of this is due to inventory loss or changes, some still due to 2024 hurricane impact, and some is due to timing. The Appalachian State football games in late November and December were near holidays and there was colder weather, affecting turnout and out of town stays. Even with occupancy rates down some, the average daily rate was up to help offset the revenue numbers.

ii. Marketing and Promotion Update

Our ad buy with FanDuel at the Spectrum Center has been very encouraging. Wright attended a Hornets game and the Explore Boone deliverables were impressive. The logo was displayed prominently and in many places. The ad buy that is allocated with Spectrum for the "March Madness" basketball tournament games shows good potential as well, offering the ability for targeting specific zip codes and adjusting as needed as the games progress.

We are doing Travel and Leisure shows again in 2026. Hope recently attended the one in Washington, DC and found it to be well attended with many participants showing great interest in our area. Wright will be going to New York the weekend of Jan. 23rd for the show there. Staff will also be attending the Visit NC conference in March in Asheville this year – The dates for it are March 16-19, which is why the next Boone TDA board meeting was moved to March 25th.

Sports Commission update: We are considering resurrecting the Boone Roundball basketball tournament for 2027. It was always a positive event for the area. Decisions will have to be made in how to format and manage it due to the last partnership stepping back. There is also some due-diligence to be done to look at the trends and see if this type of tournament is still viable. It has been some time since we hosted this, and preferences for attending this type of event may have changed.

Explore Boone plans to tour the new Summit Pickleball arena soon. Located in the Watauga Industrial Park, this indoor facility offers indoor courts, instruction, leagues, outdoor greenspace and entertainment areas that include beer on tap. They plan to offer outdoor entertainment at some point in the near future. This would be another great offering for visitors looking fun activities.

Meeting Adjourned: 5:05 pm