

**Boone Tourism Development Authority
Board Meeting Minutes**

**Boone TDA / Explore Boone Office
Wednesday, March 4, 2026**

PRESENT: Sheri Moretz – Chair
Jerry Lamonds
Lynne Mason
Elisha Brown
Lenny Cottom
Tara Brossa
Brian Williams

ABSENT: Todd Carter
Brian Crutchfield

TDA Staff: Wright Tilley
Hope Thingelstad
Emily Neeley

GUESTS: Kayla Trivette, Town of Boone Finance
Jason Carpenter, CPA
Marrena Greer, SAHA Executive Director

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

Approval of the March 4, 2026 board meeting agenda:

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Jerry Lamonds, moved to approve the March 4, 2026 board meeting agenda.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Review and Approval of January 21, 2026, board meeting minutes:

Lynne Mason, seconded by Lenny Cottom moved to approve the January 21, 2026 board meeting minutes.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Treasurer's Report by Kayla Trivette

Starting January 22nd, 2025 through March 4th, 2026, the beginning checking balance was \$293,325.08. Total revenue was \$363,254.37. Total expenses were \$328,681.15. Ending checking balance was \$327,898.30. The beginning money market balance was \$2,256,859.75. Total interest earned was \$11,336.92. Ending money market balance of \$2,268,196.67. The ending cash balance was \$2,596,094.97. The current interest rate is 3.125%

Brian Williams entered the meeting.

Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Tara Brossa, moved to approve the Treasurer's Report.

VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Annual Audit Presentation

The Annual Audit was presented by Jason Carpenter. Jason referred to the unmodified opinion statement of the independent auditor's report. He noted comparative data from 2024 to 2025, reflecting the revenue and expenses. The budget statements were reviewed favorably. The audit process was performed smoothly with no issues or concerns. A new contract will soon be entered into with Jason's firm; Combs, Tennant and Carpenter, P.C.

Jason Carpenter left the meeting.

New Business

i. Audit Report Acceptance

Lenny Cottom, seconded by Elisha Brown, moved to accept the Annual Audit Report with no modifications.

VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Kayla Trivette left the meeting.

Marrena Greer entered the meeting.

ii. Sponsorship requests from SAHA; Southern Appalachian Historical Association

Marrena reviewed recent upgrades to the *Horn in the West* outdoor drama facilities. This includes new landscaping, accessibility, and new restrooms. They are excited for the production this year in light of the 250th Anniversary of America. She asserts that this will enhance the interest of attending. After an altered schedule in 2025, they are back in 2026 to a regular schedule of June 26 - August 8. They have changed the start time to 7:30 pm. The request the SAHA is making for this year is in the amount of \$15,000. It would be utilized for marketing *Horn in the West* through targeted digital platforms, print advertising, and highway billboards. They would like to expand the geographic reach through this sponsorship. Ideas were discussed regarding learning from other outdoor dramas and attracting special interest groups.

Marrena Greer left the meeting.

Sheri Moretz, seconded by Lynne Mason, moved to sponsor this event in the amount of \$15,000 with \$10,000 to be managed by the TDA to facilitate digital marketing and \$5,000 direct to SAHA.

VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

iii. Sports Commission Update

Wright reported that the Watauga TDA made a decision at its last meeting to discontinue funding the Sports Commission in its current format. To continue to support sports tourism in the area, the events and sports marketing role will become part of the TDA and be housed at Explore Boone. It will become a year-round, full-time, position working to promote events and local sports tourism.

Tourism Outreach Report

Hope reported that visitor guide requests are staying consistent through the late winter months. Overall, requests are increasing year over year in both physical and online requests. The new 2026 visitor guide is available digitally now, with link updates implemented on a continuous basis. The printed guide delivery was held up due to winter weather and mail delays. It is expected to be delivered before the end of March. The visitor center hit a milestone; 500 in person guest visits. The e-newsletters, public and partner, are showing positive subscriber and click-through rates. We have 578 partners currently listed, which are updated as needed. We are transitioning to a new CRM and are overseeing all content and changes. The annual partners meeting will be held on March 31, at the Mill at Rock Creek from 11 to 2 pm. We have received 105 affirmative RSVPs. The meeting will include partner awards, a new advertising campaign presentation and a catered lunch.

PR/Social Media Report

Emily reported that social media engagement remains consistent. Both Facebook and Instagram had the same top performing reel; 2026 events round-up. The recent Ski FAM that Emily hosted resulted in 2 Travel + Leisure articles. Other coverage has been positive, including Matador Network. Despite the snow storm that occurred during the Ski FAM weekend, it was a great experience. Some of the writers may return again later in the year. Other media visits reached a wide audience in a variety of outlets. Tie-ins for “America 250”, related to tourism marketing for the area, are being explored for this year.

Executive Directors Report

i. Occupancy Tax Report

Occupancy tax numbers through December 2025 showed positive trends. Complete January 2026 numbers are still to come; delayed due to some property’s late submission. Some concerns were expressed in the down numbers for January that are in. Consensus is that this was likely due to the winter storms and related dangerous travel conditions. The storms consistently fell on weekends, impacting what typically is a good “weekend visit” season. Public perceptions were affected by weather reporting and a state of emergency declaration discouraging visitors to the area. It also was an unusually bad winter, with sub-zero temperatures and more snow and ice, compared to recent years. The storms were also widespread over the state, keeping people from traveling to the mountains to see snow.

ii. Marketing and Promotion Update

After the partners meeting at the end of March, the next big event that Explore Boone is participating in is Merlefest. We will be sponsoring the Traditional Stage again this year, and Explore Boone will have a sponsorship tent in front of the stage.

Wright met with a representative from the Daniel Boone Native Gardens regarding funding requests. Some of the events they are hosting this year could be impactful to tourism. They will be submitting sponsorship requests.

The Visit NC Conference later this month will be attended by Explore Boone. One session of particular interest is a discussion about occupancy. Also, the recent primary elections, and results therein, could have impacts on state level decisions related to tourism, occupancy tax, school calendar

laws and other initiatives.

The Howard Knob Park is in final stages of completion. As a result of the initial product being rejected by the contractor, new flooring material is being ordered and installed. Grading for the concrete walk is complete, with the concrete to be poured as soon as weather conditions permit.

Wayfinding signage has had recent problems which are being addressed. Four signs fell over the past few months. The sign company has been notified in writing of an intention to activate the 5-year warranty on the signs. Mounting hardware was changed from the original specifications, and some of them failed. The sign company responded that the first set of signs, "phase one", that were erected have not failed. The later ones installed as "phase two" included the fallen ones. They acknowledged the fault of using different hardware mounts in "phase two."

Meeting Adjourned: 5:00 pm