

**Boone Tourism Development Authority
Board Meeting Minutes**

**Boone TDA / Explore Boone Office
Wednesday, May 20, 2026**

PRESENT: Sheri Moretz – Chair

Tara Brossa

Jerry Lamonds

Lynne Mason

Elisha Brown

Brian Crutchfield

ABSENT: Todd Carter

Brian Williams

Lenny Cottom

TDA Staff: Wright Tilley, Hope Thingelstad, Emily Neeley

GUEST: Kayla Trivette, Town of Boone Finance

Call to Order: *The meeting was called to order by Sheri Moretz at 3:09 p.m.*

Approval of the May 20, 2026 board meeting agenda:

Lynne Mason, seconded by Jerry Lamonds, moved to approve the May 20, 2026 board meeting agenda.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Review and Approval of March 4, 2026, board meeting minutes:

Lynne Mason, seconded by Tara Brossa, moved to approve the May 4, 2026, board meeting minutes.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Treasurer's Report by Kayla Trivette

Starting March 5, 2025 through May 20, 2026, the beginning checking balance was \$327,898.30. Total revenue was \$323,158.63. Total expenses were \$413,048.26. Ending checking balance was \$238,008.67. The beginning money market balance was \$2,268,196.67. Total interest earned was \$11,781.10. Ending money market balance of \$2,279,977.77. The ending cash balance was \$2,517,986.44. The current interest rate is 3.15%

Brian Crutchfield, seconded by Lynne Mason, moved to approve the Treasurer's Report.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Old Business

Wright provided an update on Howard Knob Park progress. The opening had to be delayed as the sod died due to lack of water and the drought. Also, they are patching the parking area and will restripe. A plaque has been ordered and will be placed when it arrives. Once the sod problem is corrected, a new soft opening date can be selected. The opening and closing dates for the park this year are still to be determined. The board discussed the idea of a “selfie spot” to be designated at the park.

New Business

i. Audit Contract

Increase from \$5500 to \$6000 for contract with Combs, Tenant and Carpenter. FY ends on 6/30/2026 and price will increase.

Jerry Lamonds, seconded by Elisha Brown, moved to accept the increase from \$5500 to \$6000 for the audit contract for new FY.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

ii. Daniel Boone Native Gardens (DBNG) Sponsorship Request

DBNG has submitted two sponsorship requests: 1) \$3000 for the summer concert series, *Roots in the Garden*, held throughout the summer of 2026, and 2) \$1500 for “Fairy Day in the Garden” held on July 11. Discussion was held regarding promotions and return on these events and others that have been held at DBNG. Most of their events are fundraising oriented, with monetary donations being utilized for upkeep of the garden. The DBNG does employ a paid staff. DBNG is showing positive signs of growth and upkeep as an attraction. The growth and recent funding of the adjacent *Horn in the West* outdoor drama facilities is encouraging, as it pertains to the positive future of this area of Boone. The summer concert series has opportunities for branding exposure in the last 4 shows. Discussion also focused on the topics of possible competing events, expected attendance and future possibilities to attract a broader tourism reach through DBNG events.

Lynne Mason, seconded by Brian Crutchfield, moved to sponsor these events in the amount of \$2000 for the concert series and \$500 for the fairy day event, for a total of \$2500.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

iii. TDA Board Seats and Officers

Wright reported on the upcoming board restructure regarding board seats and leadership positions. Sheri Moretz and Jerry Lamonds will have to roll off of the board, due to term limits. Tara Brossa and Lenny Cottom have terms that expire in June of this year, but they can apply for new terms. Four other positions have terms expiring in January and February of 2027. Brian Crutchfield and Lynne Mason hold seats that are set to expire, however, it is being recommended to extend their terms through June 30, 2027. The town council chooses the board chair and vice chair. Board applications are online for those who want to apply or need to reapply.

iv. Review of Preliminary FY 2026/2027 Budget

Wright provided the preliminary, first draft of the proposed budget. All admin costs are shared 50/50 with the Watauga TDA. Occupancy tax numbers were pulled from current to date statistics with projections for the remaining months of the calendar year. Wright reviewed budget line items, noting changes in dental and medical insurance costs. Dental increases were nominal, however medical insurance increases were significant enough to ask the insurance broker to provide some options to review. These options will be forthcoming. New to the Watauga TDA budget is a line item for maintenance to the Explore Boone facility, including the building and the grounds. Wright reviewed travel expenses, subject to changes due to instability in fuel costs. Professional memberships are mostly remaining consistent, with the proposed addition of a Destinations International membership.

PR/Social Media Report

Emily worked with a freelance writer to coordinate a Grandfather Mountain article in *National Geographic* on the topic of the best parks in the U.S. to visit in the spring. She is working with them on swapping out a photo for this article to improve the content. PR efforts have shown good results with several hosts and deliverables. LHG found a writer interested in a stay at Blue Ridge Tourist Court and the *Horn in the West* outdoor drama, which should yield great coverage for both. Another writer is coming to the cycling event, Gran Fondo, and will also be visiting Grandfather Mountain. Social media posts remain positive in terms of reach and engagement. Followers on social media continue to grow, yielding e-newsletter and visitor guide requests from paid ads.

Tourism Outreach Report

Hope reported that visitor guide requests have shown growth since this same time last year. Bulk visitor guide distribution is ongoing, with guides being shipped to interstate highway welcome centers, other regional visitor centers, and delivered locally to many businesses. Our new guide has some imbedded data gathering features that we are beginning to look at for planning the future guide production. The QR codes within the guide allow for users to jump to specific topics of interest, which allows for targeting information on the website versus the older “search” methods. The website shows good performance data overall. The impact of AI in searches still relies on website content to present searched information to users. So, while AI has impacted organic searches, the integrity of the website information is informing AI. The monthly e-newsletters are continuing to have good open rates, and the subscribers list continues to grow. Partnership listings are steady, with numbers staying consistent as some businesses close, while new ones come aboard. AudioEye has been implemented into the website, which facilitates compliance with federal accessibility standards and helps with SEO.

Executive Directors Report

i. Occupancy Tax Report

Occupancy tax numbers show Blowing Rock still down for the year overall. Boone and Watauga County were up for the year, but recent months were down. There is anticipation of a boost from summer regional travel, and plans to market accordingly are underway.

ii. Marketing and Promotion Update

Final edits to the advertising plan for 2026/27 are underway. It is a well-rounded media plan with some “tried and true” marketing avenues as well as some new efforts. The TDA will have a new social media intern starting next week. A new photoshoot with the advertising agency is planned before the end of the fiscal year to provide new assets.

Wright attended the Blue Ridge Parkway Association meeting recently. Closures to the parkway are underway. The information provided, as well as the detour signage, has been helpful. Closures along the parkway clearly affect travel in the area and the region. Wright is attending Marketing College the first week of June.

Updates to the cycling and paddling adventure maps are underway. These maps have been very well-received and utilized by many businesses and visitors.

Meeting Adjourned: 5:00 pm