

**Watauga County District U
Tourism Development Authority – Board Meeting Minutes
Watauga County Administration Building Conference Room
Tuesday, August 20, 2024**

PRESENT: Matt Vincent – Chair
Kim Rogers
Lisa Cooper
Tina Houston (Virtual)
Brad Moretz
Missy Harrill
Wright Tilley
Emily Neeley

ABSENT: Tony Gray – Vice Chair

GUESTS: Charlie Brady, Blue Ridge Conservancy

Call to Order: *The meeting was called to order by Chairman Vincent at 8:32 a.m.*

Approval of the August 20, 2024 board meeting agenda:

Kim Rogers, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the August 20, 2024 board meeting agenda. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Approval of June 11, 2024 board meeting minutes:

Kim Rogers, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the June 11, 2024 board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Approval of Closed Session Minutes from April 16, 2024 & June 11, 2024:

Brad Moretz, seconded by Missy Harrill, moved to approve the April 16, 2024 closed session minutes. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Kim Rogers, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved approve the June 11, 2024 closed session minutes VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY - 0

Monthly Financial Update:

- i. Revenue and Expenditures Report

The completed 2023/2024 fiscal year revenue and expenditures report reflected a little over 4.3 million in occupancy tax revenue. Expenses were under budget, mostly because large infrastructure projects scheduled for the fiscal year haven't started yet.

ii. Occupancy Tax Report

Blowing Rock ended the fiscal year 8.32% above the previous year's collections. Watauga County District U occupancy taxes were up 5% for the fiscal year. Boone collections were down in June but finished the fiscal year 1.73% above collections from the previous fiscal year. The board of directors also reviewed the STR report, noting that ADR is steadily dropping month over month for reporting hotels.

New Business

i. Rocky Knob Bike Park Change Orders

Rocky Knob Bike Park construction is wrapping up, with only a few adjustments needed. Flush-mount grates are needed, instead of the large, concrete, elevated grates that were installed. The current grates pose a safety hazard. Additional change orders were proposed, but Wright and Matt would prefer to request bids for the additional projects.

Kim Rogers, seconded by Missy Harrill, moved to approve the change order for the flush-mounted grates. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

ii. MerleFest 2025 Sponsorship

Explore Boone has sponsored the traditional stage at MerleFest for the past several years for \$10,000, split between the Boone and Watauga County TDAs. Wright recommended the TDA continue the sponsorship and no vote was necessary.

iii. Re-schedule September Meeting

Since Wright and Emily will be at the Southeast Tourism Society (STS) Conference during the regularly scheduled September meeting, the meeting will be on September 17th instead.

iv. New Depreciation Module for Accounting Software

Wright briefed the board about the Finance office needing to upgrade our Harris Software to include fixed assets solutions. The total for the software licenses, installation, file conversion, training total \$6,365.

Brad Moretz, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to approve the new accounting software for fixed assets. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

PR/Social Media Report

Emily recapped the recent media coverage about the Boone area, including a few articles covering recent accolades of the Art of Living Retreat Center. Southern Living and Blue Ridge Outdoors also highlighted Boone as a destination. A Charlotte-based influencer was recently hosted in the area and NC Weekend will soon be filming at Rhode's Motor Lodge. Rocky Knob's Ribbon Cutting event will host members of the media on September 21st. Emily also reviewed recent social media posts and paid social media metrics.

Tourism Outreach Report

Wright reviewed the Outreach report. Visitor guide requests have been up compared to the previous year in June and July. E-Newsletter performance was included in the report, as well as partner accounts and pages on the website. The Summer Partners' e-newsletter will go out this week. Finally, analytics were included on the final pages of the report.

Executive Directors Report

i. Marketing & Promotion Update

For the 2024/2025 fiscal year, the budget has decreased spend on traditional marketing tactics in favor of increasing the PR budget with the TDA's new PR agency, LHG. The NC tourism office released its annual study for 2023 visitor spending and Watauga County ranked 15th out of 100 counties. The industry generates in Watauga County over 3,000 hospitality and tourism jobs. The report breaks down visitor spending by category, including restaurants, entertainment, retail, etc. We wrapped up first-round interviews for the Administrative Assistant/Guest Services position and will continue with the second round of interviews in the next couple of weeks. The Destination Development position will be advertised once that position is filled.

ii. Infrastructure Update

The new office building on Grand Blvd. is nearing completion. Wright gave an update on the renovation progress and move-in timeline. As renovations at Rocky Knob Mountain Bike Park wrap up, planning is underway for a grand opening on September 21. The Howard Knob Park project is out for bid and will need to be voted on once they have been opened. Ultimately it will be up to the County Commissioners to approve and move forward. Charlie Brady thanked the TDA for their continued support and notified them that the Tweetsie connector on the Middle Fork Greenway was open. He also shared news about the development of the Blowing Rock side of the Middle Fork Greenway.

The meeting ended at 9:47 am.