

**Watauga County District U
Tourism Development Authority – Board Meeting Minutes
Watauga County Administration Building
Thursday, February 14, 2023**

PRESENT: Matt Vincent – Chair
Tony Gray – Vice Chair
Kim Rogers
Tina Houston
Lisa Cooper
Wright Tilley, TDA Executive Director
Hope Thingelstad, TDA Director of Tourism Outreach
Emily Neeley, TDA Director of Social Media and PR

ABSENT: Brad Moretz

GUESTS: Eric Woolridge, Destination by Design

Call to Order: *The meeting was called to order by Chairman Vincent at 8:30 am.*

Approval of February 14, 2023 board meeting agenda:

Lisa Cooper, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to approve the February 14, 2023 board meeting agenda. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0

Approval of January 19, 2023 board meeting minutes:

Kim Rogers, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the January 19, 2023 board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0

Approval of Closed Session board meeting minutes:

Lisa Cooper, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to approve the Closed Session board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0

Tony Gray entered the meeting.

Monthly Financial Update

i. Occupancy Tax Report

Watauga County District U occupancy tax collections have continued to increase from the start of the fiscal year in July through December. Watauga collections are up 5.06% year over year, and Boone is up 1% compared to the previous year. Blowing Rock is down -3.14%, but they have also cut advertising year over year.

Rocky Knob Park Update - Eric Woolridge

Eric Woolridge presented the board with an update on Imagine Watauga before covering the updates at Rocky Knob Park. Deep Gap Ruritan is interested in acquiring a large tract of land for an event, bike trail, and disc golf course facility in the area. Green Valley Park has also okayed the plan for their park. Wright, Matt, Tina, and Eric met to outline a 10-year prioritized roadmap for the upcoming Imagine Watauga projects. Cove Creek store owners have been notified about the plans for their area and DOT has also been contacted about those plans, both are excited about the ideas. The Imagine Watauga Summit will take place at the North End Zone on Appalachian State's Campus, sometime in April.

Rocky Knob Park's new pump track has been completed and is in use. The phase 2 implementation will include a courtyard with room for seating and a sculpture near the entrance of the park. A picnic shelter will also be constructed near the pump track and fencing is needed between the pump track and the parking lot. Eric presented the

New Business

i. Approve Wayfinding Phase 2 Signs Bid

The TDA received two bids for the Wayfinding Project Phase 2. The company that manufactured and installed the first phase bid again for Phase 2, which is the least expensive option out of the two bids. To keep things consistent, the board would like to stay with Signs, etc.

Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tony Gray, moved to approve the bid from Signs, etc. for Wayfinding Phase 2. **VOTE: AYE – 5 / NAY – 0**

PR & Social Media Report

Emily Neeley outlined the Public Relations & Social Media report. There was a good mix of print and digital media coverage regarding the area for the past couple of months. Emily also outlined the top posts for Instagram and Facebook and include the social media metrics for the past few months.

Tourism Outreach Report

Hope Thingelstad presented the Tourism Outreach Report to the board. She outlined the visitor guide requests both from individuals and welcome centers requesting bulk orders of the guides – both of which were significantly increased from the previous year. E-Newsletter subscribers continue to grow, in March the subscriber count just surpassed 12,000, and click-through rates are also on the rise.

Executive Directors Report

i. Marketing Update

Lisa Cooper, Tina Houston, and Matt Vincent were reappointed to their seats on the TDA board by the Watauga County Commissioners. Carvertise results were so wonderful that the company is using the campaign as a national case study. Recently, Wright attended the “faces” photo shoot for the next phase of the “Inspiring Awe Since 1849” ad campaign. A March Madness TV campaign is coming up, which will hopefully include a version of the Brand Anthem video – also in progress. The final marketing opportunity of the fiscal year will be a Good Grit magazine cover feature.

ii. April Board Retreat

Mr. Tilley proposed changing the scheduled date of the April Board retreat to ensure presenters and board members would be able to make it. The new dates proposed are April 13th or April 18th. Wright will follow up with a final decision.

The meeting entered a closed session at 9:38 am.