

**Watauga County District U Tourism Development Authority
Board Meeting Minutes
Explore Boone Meeting Room - Tuesday, June 10, 2025**

PRESENT: Matt Vincent – Chair
Tony Gray – Vice Chair
Lisa Cooper
Tina Houston (Virtual)
Brad Moretz
Missy Harrill
Wright Tilley
Hope Thingelstad

ABSENT: Kim Rogers

GUESTS: Wendy Patoprsty, Blue Ridge Conservancy

Call to Order: *The meeting was called to order by Chairman Vincent at 8:29 a.m.*

Approval of the June 10, 2025 board meeting agenda:

Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tony Gray, moved to approve the June 10, 2025 board meeting agenda.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Approval of May 6, 2025 board meeting minutes:

Tony Gray, seconded by Lisa Cooper, moved to approve the May 6, 2025 board meeting minutes.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Public Budget Hearing - 2025/2026 TDA Budget:

Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tony Gray, moved to open the public budget hearing at 8:30 am.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

There was no public comment.

Tony Gray, seconded by Lisa Cooper, moved to close the public budget hearing at 8:31 am.

VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Financial Update:

i. Occupancy Tax Report

Occupancy tax collections were nearly flat in April, bringing the total fiscal year collections to almost \$3 million (down 19.67% from FY 23/24). Inventory has been down compared to last year, likely due to damage, road closures, and demand for long-term rentals after Hurricane Helene.

ii. Revenues and Expenditure Report

Most expenditures and revenues are tracking as expected, but there will be budget amendments needed for four line items. Mr. Tilley informed the board about a recent personnel change in the county administration office.

New Business

i. Approval of FY 2025/206 Budget Ordinance

Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tony Gray, moved to approve the FY 2025/2026 budget ordinance, projecting a balanced budget with expenditures and revenues totaling \$5,428,997. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

ii. FY 2024/2025 Budget Amendments

Brad Moretz, seconded by Missy Harrill, moved to approve a budget amendment to increase the Capital Outlay line item by \$185,000, using funds from the Appropriated Fund Balance. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Lisa Cooper, seconded by Missy Harrill, moved to approve a budget amendment to increase the Rocky Knob Park line item by \$186,000, using funds from the Appropriated Fund Balance. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Brad Moretz, seconded by Tony Gray, moved to approve a budget amendment to increase the trade shows/PR line item, using funds from the Appropriated Fund Balance. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tony Gray, moved to approve the budget amendment increasing the office rent line item by \$7,700, using funds from the Appropriated Fund Balance. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

iii. Audit Contract Approval

Mr. Tilley recommended the board continue to use Cindy Randolph, CPA for the FY 24/25 audit. The one-year contract comes to a total of: \$4,585.

Brad Moretz, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the audit contract with Cindy Randolph for FY 24/25. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0

iv. TDA Staff Update

After receiving over 40 applicants and interviewing 7 applicants in two rounds of interviews, Lisa Clements has been hired as Explore Boone's new Administrative and Guest Services Representative.

Outreach Report

Visitor guide requests have started to pick up again in May, with over 900 individual requests for paper guides. Bulk distribution has continued to regional visitor centers and local shops and attractions. E-Newsletter performance continues to improve with a big jump in growth between April and May. Open rates are around 35% with an CTR average of 2.1% for the two months. Hope also reviewed the number of partner accounts and pages on the website and partners' newsletter engagement information. She noted some changes and updates with partner accounts on the site, and reviewed website analytics for May.

PR/Social Media Report

Emily was out of the office but included her report in the packets for review.

Executive Directors Report

i. Marketing & Promotion Update

Wright recently attended and taught 3 classes at STS Marketing College and is serving on the board of directors for the organization. Wright gave legislative updates concerning the tourism industry, including proposed federal funding cuts to Brand USA and the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. Additionally, the state's tourism office is facing potential budget cuts on the state level.

Miles Partnership is working on updating campaign creative and finalizing the FY 25/26 media plan, after hosting two virtual workshops to cultivate ideas with our staff. The team at Miles is facing some staff changes, after our long-time media planner and buyer left the company and our creative director is on leave. Photo and video assets are in need of a refresh, so we are working on organizing a photoshoot to rebuild those once the new campaign concept is decided on.

Explore Boone partnered with the Blowing Rock, Beech, and Banner Elk TDAs to promote High Country Summer Road Trip maps, identifying open attractions and roads for folks who remain unsure about visiting. Regional TDA directors are set to meet over lunch in the next week to discuss recovery progress throughout the region. Wright will be attending the Destinations International conference in July.

ii. Infrastructure Update

Rocky Knob will require a professional trail builder to reconstruct the trails that were lost due to the new emergency tower, and reroute a few other trails. Howard Knob park construction is well underway and should wrap up at the end of September. The park will remain closed while construction is happening.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 am.