

**Watauga County District U  
Tourism Development Authority – Board Meeting Minutes  
Watauga County Administration Building Conference Room  
Tuesday, June 11, 2024**

PRESENT: Matt Vincent – Chair

Kim Rogers

Tony Gray – Vice Chair

Lisa Cooper

Tina Houston

Brad Moretz

Wright Tilley, TDA Executive Director

Hope Thingelstad, TDA Director of Tourism Outreach

Emily Neeley, TDA Director of Social Media and PR

ABSENT: Missy Harrill

GUESTS: Scott Elliott, Blue Ridge Conservancy

**Call to Order:** *The meeting was called to order by Chairman Vincent at 8:31 a.m.*

**Approval of the June 11, 2024 board meeting agenda:**

*Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the June 11, 2024 board meeting agenda.*                      **VOTE: AYE – 5 / NAY – 0**

**Approval of May 14, 2024 board meeting minutes:**

*Tony Gray, seconded by Lisa Cooper, moved to approve the May 14, 2024 board meeting minutes.*                      **VOTE: AYE – 5 / NAY – 0**

Brad Moretz entered the meeting.

**Public Budget Hearing - 2024/2025 TDA Budget:**

*Tony Gray, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to open the public budget hearing at 8:32 am.*                      **VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0**

Scott Elliott expressed gratitude on behalf of the Blue Ridge Conservancy for the TDA's continued support for BRC projects included in the 2024/2025 budget. There was nobody else requesting to make public comment on the proposed budget.

*Lisa Cooper, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to close the public budget hearing at 8:34 am.*                      **VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0**

## **Monthly Financial Update:**

### i. Occupancy Tax Report

Watauga County District U occupancy taxes dropped 8% in April 2024 compared to April 2023. County collections are still up 5.12% for the FY23/24 year compared to the previous fiscal year. Blowing Rock collections have not been reported yet. Boone collections were back up in April (+5.29%) after dropping nearly -10.89% in March. Wright mentioned looking into a service that could provide more data about short-term rentals in the county and is currently vetting two options.

## **New Business**

### i. Approval of FY 2024/2025 Budget Ordinance

Mr. Tilley presented and answered questions about each line item in the FY 24/25 Budget Ordinance. He shared that the Boone TDA's contribution for rent would be around \$1,600 each month. The board also discussed using interest income for either infrastructure or marketing.

***Tony Gray, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the FY 24/25 Budget Ordinance. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0***

### ii. FY 23/24 Budget Amendment

The “Memberships and Subscriptions,” “Capital Outlay,” and “Gas, Water and Electric” line items were all over what was budgeted for FY 23/24, equaling around \$505,000. A budget amendment pulling those funds from the fund balance is needed to correct this.

***Lisa Cooper, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the budget amendment to cover Administrative/Operational Expenses of \$505,000, using appropriated fund balance. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY - 0***

### iii. Liability and Property Insurance FY 24/25

The total amount for FY 24/25 liability and property insurance comes to \$16,353. The amount has increased to include coverage for the new office building.

***Tony Gray, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the Liability and Workers Comp Insurance renewals. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY - 0***

### iv. Health Insurance Renewals FY 24/25

Humana dental insurance increased slightly, but only about a dollar per staff member.

***Tony Gray, seconded by Lisa Cooper, moved to approve the FY 24/25 Humana renewal. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY – 0***

Blue Cross and Blue Shield increased just over 9% based on increasing age brackets. However, this remains the best option for health insurance in the area.

*Lisa Cooper, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the FY 24/25 Blue Cross and Blue Shield renewal. VOTE: AYE – 6 / NAY - 0*

### **Tourism Outreach Report**

Individual physical Visitor Guide requests increased year-over-year in April and May. Bulk visitor guide distribution has begun and 77.5 cases have already gone to regional visitor information centers. E-newsletter engagement in May dropped month-over-month and year-over-year, due to new Gmail regulations and seasonality. Hope reviewed the number of partner accounts and pages on the website and the recent tourism partners' newsletter, and notified the board about a website conversion study we have signed on to. Hope also recapped website analytics from GA4 for May.

### **PR/Social Media Report**

Emily was with travel writers for most of the weekend and is out of the office for the board meeting, but she included her PR and Social Media Report for the board to review. The report included recent media mentions, top social media posts, and recent PR efforts with the Lou Hammond Group.

### **Executive Directors Report**

#### **i. Marketing & Promotion Update**

Office renovations have been delayed slightly and are now expected to wrap up around the end of July. The team is finalizing furniture and light fixture options. The EDPNC board of directors recently visited Boone for the first time in a tourism-focused visit. The group visited several attractions and held a board meeting in Boone at the Marriott Courtyard. The TDA hosted the group at Rocky Knob Mountain Bike Park to highlight one successful example of tourism funds being used to benefit both residents and visitors.

**The meeting entered a closed session for 143-318.11(a)(5) and 143-318.11(a) (6) at 9:26 am on a motion from Tony Gray, seconded by Tina Houston.**

**With a motion by Tina Houston and a second by Lisa Cooper, the board ended closed session at 10:20am and the meeting was adjourned.**