

Watauga County District U
Tourism Development Authority – Board Meeting Minutes
Watauga County Administration Building Conference Room
Tuesday, June 13, 2023

PRESENT: Matt Vincent – Chair
Kim Rogers
Tina Houston
Brad Moretz
Samantha Brown, Watauga County Finance
Wright Tilley, TDA Executive Director
Hope Thingelstad, TDA Director of Tourism Outreach
Emily Neeley, TDA Director of Social Media and PR

ABSENT: Lisa Cooper

GUESTS: Charlie Brady, Blue Ridge Conservancy

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

Monthly Financial Update:

i. Occupancy Tax Charts

Occupancy tax collections have continued to fall compared to the historically high visitation over the past two years. In response, the TDA does have plans to ramp up advertising in new emerging markets and should be finalizing a full-funnel media plan for FY23/24 in the coming weeks. This plan also includes adding additional research partners such as AirDNA or Key Data, which will provide insights about short-term rental occupancy and average daily rates.

ii. Revenue / Expenditure Report

Operational expenses are getting close to the amount budgeted, so Wright has prepared two budget amendments for the travel subsistence line by \$5,000 and the salaries line item by \$4,000. The full amounts of these budget amendments will likely not be used but will provide a cushion. All other line items should be well within the budgeted amount for the rest of the fiscal year. The Watauga County Christmas Tree Growers Association has not yet billed the TDA for their sponsorship, but that is expected before the end of the month.

PR/Social Media Report

Emily reviewed recent media coverage of the area including several articles from NC Tripping and a piece in *Garden & Gun*. She mentioned the top-performing posts on Facebook and Instagram and showed the metrics for the past 90 days on both. Emily also included paid social media metrics for April and May, including the well-performing boosted organic posts. Emily also mentioned a “Preserve the Awe”-focused influencer trip planned for mid-July.

Tourism Outreach Report

Visitor Guide requests have fallen YoY, -34.75%, which is expected as demand decreases in the market. This decrease could also be attributed to web users opting to use the digital .pdf version of the guide as opposed to requesting a physical copy. This is a new addition to the website this year, and the clicks on that were also included in Hope's report. Nearly 50 cases of bulk visitor guides have been distributed for the year and will continue as needed. June's "Preservation in Practice" newsletter is performing well in both open and click-through rates. Website updates continue, and new pages have been in development in the hiking section of the site. The Discover Watauga Tourism Summit, or annual partners meeting, has been scheduled for November 9th to take place in the morning/early afternoon at Grandfather Mountain's classroom in the clouds.

Executive Directors Report

i. Marketing & Promotional Update

Summer seasonal creative has been approved and is being trafficked out to digital and print vendors. The Explore Boone paid search account with Google was suspended for a period of time in May, but that is back up and running and the June/July budget will be supplemented to make up for the lapse. *Good Grit* magazine's team has a photo/video shoot scheduled for mid-June to complete that deal. Miles Partnership has submitted the past year's OOH campaign for an award through ESTO, as well. Doc & Rosa Lee Music Fest already had this year's festival materials printed, and the board was not receptive to "title sponsorship. They offered main-stage sponsorship and in-person announcements. Wright suggested getting an earlier start with conversations about next year's festival.

ii. Infrastructure Update

The TDA is awaiting an update from Destination by Design and Stitch Architecture on the Howard Knob design. Rocky Knob Mountain Bike Park is progressing, but waiting on the final designs and bids for the picnic area with decking. Wayfinding is also progressing but had some delays in deciding what certain signs directing to Daniel Boone Park should indicate.

Tina Houston entered the meeting.

Approval of June 13, 2023 board meeting agenda:

Brad Moretz, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to approve the June 13, 2023 board meeting agenda.

VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0

Approval of May 9, 2023 board meeting minutes:

Kim Rogers, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the May 9, 2023 board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0

Approval of May 30, 2023 board meeting minutes:

Brad Moretz, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to approve the May 30, 2023 board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0

Public Budget Hearing

Tina Houston, seconded by Kim Roger, moved to open the public budget hearing at 9:09 am. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY - 0

Wright noted for the record that the meeting was advertised through the newspaper of record in print and online. Charlie Brady commended the TDA board of directors on their thoughtfulness and planning for the future.

Kim Rogers, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to close the public budget hearing at 9:11 am. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY - 0

New Business

i. Approval of FY 2023/2024 Budget Ordinance

Tina Houston, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the FY 2023/2024 as presented. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY - 0

ii. FY 22/23 Budget Amendments

Wright has prepared two budget amendments for the travel subsistence line by \$5,000 and the salaries line item by \$4,000. The funds will be moved from the fund balance.

Brad Moretz, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the budget amendment as presented VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY - 0

The board discussed a meeting with a real estate agent about a potential property, which any board member is welcome to attend if they would like.

iii. Liability and Workers Comp Insurance Renewals

Kim Rogers, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve Liability and Property Insurance for \$16,304 through NCACC. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0

Tina Houston, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to approve the Worker's Compensation Insurance for \$2,382 through Lifestore. VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0

iv. Lease Agreement

The TDA will be increasing office space to accommodate the two new employees, so, the FY 23/24 lease with Watauga County for the space has increased by \$500.

Tina Houston, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve Matt Vincent to execute the lease agreement for office space with Watauga County, once it is approved by county commissioners.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34 am.