

**Watauga County District U  
Tourism Development Authority – Board Meeting Minutes  
Watauga County Administration Building Conference Room  
Tuesday, March 12, 2024**

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

ABSENT: Missy Harrill  
Tina Houston

GUESTS: Charlie Brady, Blue Ridge Conservancy

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

**Approval of the March 12, 2024 board meeting agenda:**

*Kim Rogers, seconded by Lisa Cooper, moved to approve the March 12, 2024 board meeting agenda.*                      **VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0**

**Approval of January 23, 2024 board meeting minutes:**

*Tony Gray, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the January 23, 2024 board meeting minutes.*                      **VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0**

**Monthly Financial Update:**

i.            Occupancy Tax Report

Watauga County District U occupancy tax collections are up almost 6% for the FY23/24 year. Blowing Rock collections are also strong for the fiscal year, and has a few new hotels adding to that. Mr. Tilley also included the STR report, which mainly pertains to chain hotels in the town of Boone, but contains useful information about ADR, occupancy, and more.

ii.          Revenue and Expenditure Report

The expenditures and revenues are tracking correctly, other than a couple of line items previously discussed with the TDA Board of Directors. In the next fiscal year, there will be a new line item for the Annual Meeting (the Discover Watauga Tourism Summit.) Expenses for that event have previously been taken from other line items over the past two years.

## **New Business**

i. **Interim Finance Director Appointment**

*Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tony Gray, moved to officially adopt Deron Geouque as the Interim Finance Director for the Watauga County TDA. The motion passed (4/0).*

ii. **New Office Update**

Exterior changes to the office space, including the parking changes and signage is pending approval by the Town of Boone planning department's COA. The interior plumbing for the new office building is finished. Creekside Electronics is in the process of wiring the building. Wright is working with a VPC designer and WJ Office for decorations and furnishing recommendations.

iii. **Doc & Rosa Lee Watson MusicFest Proposal**

Last year the TDA expressed interest in a "presenting" sponsorship for the festival if it were two days instead of just one. This year, the festival has moved to a two-day format and has offered different sponsorship packages.

*Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tony Gray, moved to approve Mr. Tilley to negotiate the best benefits (ie. stage sponsorship) for a \$10,000 sponsorship for the Doc & Rosa Lee Watson MusicFest. The motion passed (4/0).*

## **Tourism Outreach Report**

Individual physical Visitor Guide requests decreased year-over-year in January but rose in February when the 2024 guides were delivered. Bulk visitor guide distribution has begun and 74.5 cases have already gone out to regional visitor information centers. E-newsletters for January and February showed great engagement compared to the industry average open rates and click-through rates. Hope also reviewed the number of partner accounts and pages on the website, as well as the recent partners newsletter which had the best engagement yet. Hope also reviewed the website analytics from GA4 for January and February.

## **PR/Social Media Report**

Emily reviewed recent media coverage of the Boone area, including an article in *Our State Magazine* about the Doc & Merle Watson Folk Art Museum. Emily also went over social media highlights and metrics for both organic and paid social. The board asked Emily to look into the Dark Sky designation for the town of Boone and promotional information.

## **Executive Directors Report**

### **i. Infrastructure Updates**

Rocky Knob Construction has begun for the new picnic shelter, pavilion, and fencing. Howard Knob Park is also working on grading the site but the project should go to bid in late April, once all the designs, plans and bid specs are received from the engineers. The project will include refurbishing the current picnic shelter, new signage, and the curved ADA accessible overlook.

The scope of the Crab Orchard Falls trail building project has changed, to include replacing the current wooden boardwalk near the falls. The project would require an additional \$22,700 to replace the boardwalk with stone steps. The board would like to have more information about the replacement, so there will be an additional virtual meeting in early April. Wayfinding (phase 2) sign installation is scheduled to begin in June.

Watauga County TDA's annual retreat is planned for April 16<sup>th</sup> at Blue Ridge Conservancy's Campus.

**The board entered a closed session per GS:143-318.11.A(6) at 9:22 am on a motion by Tony Gray and second by Lisa Cooper.**

**The board ended closed session at 9:34am on a motion by Lisa Cooper and a second by Tony Gray.**