

**Watauga County District U  
Tourism Development Authority – Board Meeting Minutes  
Watauga County Administration Building Conference Room  
Tuesday, November 14, 2023**

PRESENT: Matt Vincent – Chair  
Kim Rogers  
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  
Tony Gray

GUESTS: Charlie Brady, Blue Ridge Conservancy  
Eric Heigl, Blue Ridge Conservancy  
Eric Woolridge, Destination by Design  
Case Neal, Destination by Design  
Greene’s Construction Staff  
Wilkie Construction Company Staff

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

**Approval of November 14, 2023 board meeting agenda:**

*Tony Gray, seconded by Lisa Cooper, moved to approve the November 14, 2023 board meeting agenda. VOTE: AYE – 5 / NAY – 0*

**Approval of September 12, 2023 board meeting minutes:**

*Tony Gray, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the September 12, 2023 board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 5 / NAY – 0*

**Update on New Building Purchase**

The Grand Blvd. property is officially owned by the Watauga County TDA. Work via subcontractors will start once building permits are issued. The team has started measuring for new furniture with WJ Office.

## **Rocky Knob Park Bids**

The Rocky Knob Park picnic shelter and fencing construction project received four bids, and two low bidders. Since there is an alternative decorative fencing option in the bids, the lowest bidder is different depending on if the decorative fencing is chosen. With the decorative fencing, Greene's Construction is the lowest bidder. Without the decorative fencing, Wilkie Construction is the lowest bidder.

## **Monthly Financial Update:**

### i. Occupancy Tax Report

Blowing Rock and Watauga County collections have had a strong first quarter of the fiscal year. The town of Boone has seen a slight decrease year-over-year, which is expected since the Sleep Inn hotel is being utilized by Appalachian State for the year and will not be remitting occupancy tax. The Rhodes Motor Lodge in Boone opened in October, so ideally Boone collections will even out at that time.

### ii. Budget Amendment

To cover the cost of the new building a budget amendment is needed. The additional funds will be taken from the appropriated fund balance and added to the TDA Offices line item.

***Kim Rogers, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the budget amendment. VOTE: AYE – 5 / NAY - 0***

## **New Business**

### i. Rocky Knob Park Bid Approval

The board discussed wanting to see an alternative logo design.

***Tina Houston, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to approved the Rocky Knob Park Bid from Greene's Construction with changes to the logo on the decorative fencing. VOTE: AYE – 5 / NAY - 0***

### ii. Blue Ridge Conservancy Funding Request

The Blue Ridge Conservancy's newest Watauga River access in Valle Crucis ran into some unforeseen construction issues while building the parking lot and ramp, and therefore requires a little more funding to get the river access project completed.

*Tina Houston, seconded by Kim Rogers, moved to approve up to \$16,500 in additional funding to complete the Watauga River access.*

*VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0 (Lisa Cooper recused herself from the vote)*

iii. VPC Agreement

*Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the agreement with VPC Builders to coordinate Grand Blvd. building repairs.*

*VOTE: AYE – 4 / NAY – 0 (Matt recused himself from the vote)*

iii. Boone Area Cyclists Funding Request

*Lisa Cooper, seconded by Tina Houston, moved to approve the funding request of \$25,000 from the Boone Area Cyclists. VOTE: AYE – 5 / NAY – 0*

iv. Howard Knob Park Project

Destination by Design reworked the plans for the Howard Knob Park project to include the tranquility garden along the accessible trail. The new plans also include a built platform to cover port-a-johns. The picnic shelter will be enhanced and a smaller, wheelchair accessible table will be added near the accessible parking spaces.

v. TDA Infrastructure Priorities/Budget

The board went over the infrastructure priorities/budget document, which is a fluid document that often changes with increasing costs or changing decisions, based on the Imagine Watauga Plan. The plan will be wrapping up and sent out to the board members following the meeting.

vi. TDA 2024 Meeting Schedule

The board approved the January 9 and February 13 meeting dates, and will approve the rest of the year's meeting schedule at the next meeting.

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

Emily reviewed recent media coverage of the Boone area, including articles in *Outside Magazine*, *Our State Magazine*, and *Medium.com*. Emily assisted with planning media trips for representatives from Our State Magazine and Fodor's. Emily also attended a Media Mission with Visit NC to pitch the area to national publications. An RFP was sent to 5 PR entities and will be due back by the end of the year. Emily also went over social media highlights and metrics for both organic and paid social.

### **Tourism Outreach Report**

Individual physical Visitor Guide requests decreased year-over-year in both September and October. Bulk visitor guide and adventure map distribution has slowed near the end of the year, and should pick up again in the new year. E-newsletters continue to show great engagement compared to the industry and audience size average. A new interactive map will be added to the website by the end of the month. The Discover Watauga Tourism Summit was on November 9<sup>th</sup>, and our partners who were able to attend have had great feedback about the event.

### **Executive Directors Report**

The Miles Partnership team has made some changes to both our account supervisor and paid social/search analysts on the media team. The TDA team will be monitoring the changes to make sure everything is still working smoothly.

**The board entered a closed session at 10:22 am.**