

**Watauga County District U
Tourism Development Authority – Board Meeting Minutes
Watauga County Administration Building Conference Room
Tuesday, September 17, 2024**

PRESENT: Matt Vincent – Chair
Tony Gray – Vice Chair
Kim Rogers
Lisa Cooper
Tina Houston (Virtual)
Brad Moretz
Missy Harrill
Wright Tilley
Emily Neeley

ABSENT:

GUESTS: Charlie Brady, Blue Ridge Conservancy
Alex Gotherman, Destination by Design
Case Neal, Destination by Design

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

Approval of the September 17, 2024 board meeting agenda:

Kim Rogers, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the September 17, 2024 board meeting agenda. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Approval of August 20, 2024 board meeting minutes:

Brad Moretz, seconded by Missy Harrill, moved to approve the August 20, 2024 board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Financial Update:

i. Occupancy Tax Report

The July 2024 occupancy tax collections were slightly down in Watauga County compared to 2023. The towns of Boone and Blowing Rock were both up for occupancy tax collections in July compared to the previous year.

ii. Revenues and Expenditure Report

The Watauga County finance office has completed transferring all of the revenues and expenditures into a new software system but has not generated a report yet. Mr. Tilley reviewed the Fund Balance history and projections from FY 13-14 through the previous fiscal year.

New Business

i. Howard Knob Park Bids

Case Neal and Alex Gotherman from Destination by Design presented plans and alternate options for Howard Knob Park construction and the bids received for the project. The project will include a beautiful new overlook for the park, new signage, picnic shelter enhancements, and additional ADA parking spaces and paths. The lowest bidder is MBI Construction, and the project including alternates totaled about 2.1 million, with a 20% contingency built in. An “accessibility in parks” grant will cover about 16% of the budget, at \$362,000. The TDA will contribute the rest of the funding for the project, and the county will continue to maintain & manage the park.

Tony Gray, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the recommendation for the Watauga County Commissioners to approve the bid with alternatives from MBI for Howard Knob Park upgrades. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

ii. Rocky Knob Park Ribbon Cutting and Event

Explore Boone, the Boone Area Cyclists, and Mountain Biking Alliance are hosting a ribbon cutting and community celebration at Rocky Knob Mountain Bike Park on September 21. TDA Board members and the public are invited to see the upgrades to the pump track area.

iii. Rugs and Blinds for Grand Blvd.

Most of the renovations at the new Grand Blvd. office have been completed. Some windows will require blinds, which weren't originally in the plans. Additionally, a few rugs have been ordered for the offices and hallways.

iv. Open House / Ribbon Cutting

The TDA plans to host an open house/ribbon-cutting event for our partners and the community in December around the holidays.

v. Choose & Cut Funding Request

The board discussed the Watauga County Christmas Tree Association's funding request for the 2024 season. The board had concerns about the limited inventory of Choose and Cut Christmas Trees available but is very supportive of the “slow” seasonal activity. Some of the online and print advertising options in the plan included local publications that would not drive travel to the area. Instead of funding those local advertisements, the board would like to support the website redesign

and VisitNC app. The board will also consider funding the full amount of the website if it is completed in time for the 2024 season.

Tony Gray, seconded by Missy Harrill, moved to approve funding half of the website redesign and the VisitNC Farms App. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Tourism Outreach Report

Physical visitor guide requests and digital views are up compared to the previous year in August. Hope also reviewed the visitor guide and adventure map distribution. E-Newsletter performance was incredible in August, with a 44.8% open rate and a 1.9% click-through rate. Hope also reviewed the number of partner accounts and pages on the website and partners' newsletter engagement information. She noted that the Discover Watauga Tourism Summit "Save the Date" has been sent out. The annual event is scheduled for November 19th. Finally, analytics were included on the final pages of the report.

PR/Social Media Report

Emily recapped the recent media coverage about the Boone area, including a great article published in *Outside*. Several news outlets covered local conservation efforts for the Hellbender Salamander throughout the month and included mentions of a new mural in downtown Boone. Lou Hammond Group PR efforts were included in the report, including an overview of upcoming hosted trips with journalists and influencers. Emily also reviewed the top recent social media posts, notable trends, and paid social media metrics.

Executive Directors Report

i. Marketing & Promotion Update

Wright noted some important milestones, including Emily's three-year and Hope's five-year mark with the TDA. Wright also notified the board that Emily has completed STS's Marketing College certification program and that he has been elected to the STS board of directors for a two-year term.

ii. Infrastructure Update

Wright recommended that the board allocate the undesignated fund balance of around \$700,000 to infrastructure.

Brad Moretz, seconded by Tony Gray, made a motion to allocate the undesignated fund balance to infrastructure. The motion passed (7/0).

The meeting was adjourned at 10:11 am.