

**Watauga County District U
Tourism Development Authority – Board Meeting Minutes
Watauga County Administration Building Conference Room
Tuesday, September 12, 2023**

PRESENT: Matt Vincent – Chair
Kim Rogers
Missy Harrill
Tony Gray
Lisa Cooper
Tina Houston
Brad Moretz
Samantha Brown, Watauga County Finance
Wright Tilley, TDA Executive Director
Emily Neeley, TDA Director of Social Media and PR

ABSENT:

GUESTS: Charlie Brady, Blue Ridge Conservancy

Call to Order: *The meeting was called to order by Chairman Vincent at 8:28 a.m.*

Approval of September 12, 2023 board meeting agenda:

Tony Gray, seconded by Lisa Cooper, moved to approve the September 12, 2023 board meeting agenda. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Approval of August 8, 2023 board meeting minutes:

Tony Gray, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the August 8, 2023 board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Approval of August 8, 2023, closed session board meeting minutes:

Tony Gray, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to approve the August 8, 2023, closed session board meeting minutes. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Closed Session: G.S. 143-381.11 (a)(3)

Tony Gray, seconded by Lisa Cooper, moved to open the closed session at 8:30 a.m. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Tony Gray, seconded by Brad Moretz, moved to close the closed session at 8:49 a.m. VOTE: AYE – 7 / NAY – 0

Monthly Financial Update:

i. Occupancy Tax Collections

The beginning of the fiscal year started strong in July with increases year-over-year in both Blowing Rock and Watauga County District U. Boone occupancy tax collections fell year-over-year in July by around 6%. Looking at the STR report, Boone chain hotels' ADR was up while actual occupancy has been down, which may be the reason for a decrease in demand.

New Business

i. SimpleView Contract Renewal

The TDA's website company, SimpleView, has two contracts up for renewal, CRM and SimpleSupport. The CRM is a database of all tourism partners, events, and visitor inquiries, and the SimpleSupport contract covers website development support. The board will not need to vote on the contract renewal since the amount is under \$5,000.

ii. Wayfinding Update & Damage Claim

A wayfinding sign, on the 105 extension, was damaged by a hit-and-run accident. A police report was filed, the person was caught, and the DOT alerted us of the damage. The sign was picked up by Signs, etc. to assess any damage and reinstall the sign. Wright is in the process of making a claim on the insurance of the person who hit the sign to recover the costs of the damage and reinstallation. In the future, an action plan for recovering the sign itself will need to be established with the town or county.

iii. PR Services RFP

As the PR contract with Eleanor Talley came to an end in June, the TDA is now in need of PR services. The contract will include story creation, regular reporting, research and analytics, and identifying distribution channels. Emily will be posting an RFP and sending it out to several potential PR firms.

iv. Robert Marsh Rocky Knob Update

The head of Watauga County maintenance, Robert Marsh, has reached out about needing new posts, pickets, and fencing for the back of the playground at Rocky Knob. This will need to be taken care of this year while other projects at Rocky Knob are under construction.

PR/Social Media Report

Emily reviewed recent media mentions of the area, including a locals' guide in August's issue of *Our State Magazine*, followed by additional features about the area in September. *Southern*

Living Magazine also had several articles about the area in their August issue. PBS featured the Daniel Boone Scout Trail for the Year of the Trail. Ingrid Lemme-Chalut visited the area again and wrote another great article about her stay in the *Montauk Sun*. Her article also mentioned the “A Taste of History” episode all about the Boone area coming out in mid-October on Amazon Prime. Emily will be accompanying the associate editor of *Our State Magazine* on a visit in late September. Emily will also be attending a Visit NC media mission in November and she will be busy planning a 3-day pre-adventure FAM tour with Visit NC scheduled for early June. She also reviewed organic and paid social media metrics and top-performing posts.

Executive Directors Report

i. **Marketing & Promotional Update**

The Antlers & Acorns Songwriters Festival showed a lot of growth from the first year to the second. Jordan, a creative director and photographer on our team at Miles Partnership, will be in the area for several weeks with his family in October to capture fall colors. Trip Scout is an influencer and social media content marketing company the TDA will be working with along with Miles. Wright also shared the tourism impact report for 2022, showing Watauga County as #12 in visitor spending.

ii. **Outreach Report**

Hope is out of town but provided a Tourism Outreach Report for board members to review on their own.

iii. **Infrastructure Update**

Rocky Knob Mountain Bike Park’s fencing and picnic shelter near the pump track is out to bid, bids will be due to the TDA on the 3rd of October.

Charlie Brady also updated the board on the Middle Fork Greenway and Watauga River Access that the board has helped to fund. The contract for the Tweetsie underpass connection is moving forward. The Watauga River access in Valle Crucis is under construction.

The meeting was adjourned at 10 a.m.