

For Approval January 19, 2022

**Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau
Virtual Board of Directors Meeting
November 17, 2021**

Meeting Recording:

https://orangecountync.zoom.us/rec/share/z_hggvpxd7e8tMbP7bweYz-CtPOR6vKRB7WP58CRlaJhvS0g23zJ_MaFYK5xKyOL.hbc-6aWe7s7nAZdw?startTime=1637153342000

Board Members Present: Pam Hemminger, Manish Atma, Tanya Moore, Sharon Hill, Mark Bell, Anthony Carey, Lydia Lavelle, Beverly Jo Payne, Mark Sherburne, Spring Council, Jon Hartman-Brown, Matt Gladdek, Lili Engelhardt, and Sally Greene.

Not Present: Aubrey Williams, Kayla Dempsey, and Daniel Mayer.

Staff Attendance: Laurie Paolicelli, Steve Brantley, Marlene Barbera, Patty Griffin, Tina Fuller, Susan Rice, Leslie Wilcox, Katie Murray, and Shannan Campbell.

Also present: Senator Valerie Foushee, North Carolina Senate. Jessica Herrschaft, Clean Design, Inc.

Call to Order

Chair Anthony Carey called the meeting to order at 8:04 a.m.

Approval of Minutes

Chair Anthony Carey requested a motion to approve the October 27, 2021 minutes. Sharon Hill so moved and Mark Bell seconded the motion. With all members in favor, the minutes were approved as submitted.

Executive Director's Report

The Visitors Bureau conducts research to understand why people come here. What we mostly find, aside from the University, that there is a general curiosity about Hillsborough, Carrboro, and Chapel Hill. Therefore, we built a campaign around "Let Your Curiosity Take You Here". We also tried to meet the goal that part of our research shows, outside of the University, that people are really hungry for information on what else there is to do around Orange County. That is where the Visitors Bureau comes in and we are trying desperately to enhance and amplify this message to consumers: people visiting friends and family, interstate travelers, people in our mid-Atlantic market who wonder if we are open and what is open.

Our hoteliers on this board, Anthony Carey, Manish Atma, and Mark Sherburne came to us, as the County, and expressed concern at the lack of midweek business. Orange County, in terms of tourism, will not have a full tourism recovery unless there is midweek business. Our midweek business is really what carries us. What that means is that our weekends are very strong. Our consumers love football, they love what is going on with the arts, they love the expanded sidewalks, they love downtown but that is not enough to keep a sustainable industry. Therefore, what we must do is attract midweek visitors. We must focus very heavily on the business traveler, which brings a higher room rate, room blocks, and greater use of their public space.

The Visitors Bureau currently does not have as much revenue as we do expenses because this industry was hit so hard during this COVID-19 pandemic. We have not been able to roll up our sleeves as a team and go after midweek business. How the Visitors Bureau pursues midweek business is we sell the destination in a three-pronged way. We target meeting planners and corporate decision makers through the major platform, which these days, is social media. We clean out that database because many of those businesses are no longer relevant or open. Therefore, we need a huge commitment to database management. Then labor, our sales person picking up the phone and making sales calls.

Travis Myren, the Deputy County Manager, heard the hoteliers and has allocated \$150,000 in American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds to pursue that midweek business. Jessica with our advertising agency, Clean Design, has created a plan for us and we have hired a prospecting firm to clean out that database and give us better leads, and Marlene and I are strategizing on the plan. The reason we have not pulled the trigger with the plans is that ARPA funds are extraordinarily tough with their rules around purchasing, contracting, and documenting what the funds are used for. We have to provide detail on exactly how we are spending the funds and what metrics we will provide to justify the spend. We just submitted that and should be good to go in January.

We are getting a lot of input from minority-owned businesses that we do not do enough to support them and much of our tourism marketing is very white. We have a committee of this board that met this month, which include a few of our board members, Sharon Hill, Spring Council and Lili Engelhardt, plus Shanekia Weeks, the Town of Chapel Hill's new Diversity Equity and Inclusion Officer. We had a terrific meeting. We created a four-page publication on black-owned businesses and then decided it was not the broad reach that we wanted; we have to focus on minority-owned businesses and create a web presence and additional marketing materials. We have had great success and I will share with you after this meeting the creative on where we have been. I thank this committee. A lot of work around Orange County and this board gets done through committee.

Our move is scheduled for December 19th. We are getting very close on moving into the new digs. That is going to be a destination in and of itself with our James Taylor exhibit.

I want to just give you a few key learnings I received from the State conference this past weekend in Asheville because I think you will find these interesting.

- I was surprised at how many hotels have put their staff through how to deescalate today's consumer. What that means is that the consumer is being nasty.
- Of the ARPA funds approved at the State level, the part that is going towards Tourism & Travel is \$30 million for State tourism marketing over three years. That means, when you are watching television or perusing media, you might see a lot of ads for West Virginia, for South Carolina, for Virginia but you are not seeing many for North Carolina. There is a trickledown effect there, the more they market the better we do.
- Also, there is \$500 million package was approved for the North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association. That is designed to help hotels and restaurants hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the borders are back open, business travel is trickling back up. We are seeing a huge spike in people visiting our Visitors Center of people from California and Florida wanting to relocate here. We are very proud of Clean and the work they are doing. I also want to thank the Visitors Bureau staff.

Lastly, Lydia Lavelle has been one of our huge champions. The other day I was interviewed and asked what were some of the things the Visitors Bureau is most proud of. One of the things I said right away was, when HB2 happened and our State was catapulted into a bad reputation, Lydia came out with her wife, Alicia Stemper, and asked us to do a campaign that "All Are Welcome in Orange County". We did and we had tons of coverage on it. I even framed a photo of Lydia and Alicia from the campaign that I think was in New York Times and Times Square there for a while. I am extraordinarily grateful for her voice and that legacy that she leaves us. We can't thank you enough.

Presentations

Senator Valerie Foushee

"I served on the Visitors Bureau advisory board for many years and believe in the role that tourism plays in economic development. Getting outsiders to visit our county, bolsters our hotels, restaurants, and our retail stores. When they go home, that is a good match for us. We know a lot of them want to stay; many of us are guilty of that. I am a native and I am proud of our community. When I was a commissioner, I came on right after the commissioners started the Visitors Bureau in the early 1990s, with an occupancy tax that could have been used for anything. They saw potential for tourism and they were spot on. Tourism has become a competitive industry in North Carolina. Our neighbors in Durham, Chatham, and Alamance have all increased their efforts to vie for tourism dollars. To this end, we are lucky to have a Visitors Bureau that is working hard to build and maintain this investment that was started so many years ago. When I look at the occupancy taxes in Orange County, I note that they steadily rose until 2020. Let us be frank, 2020 was bigger than all of us. All of the marketing and sales in the universe was not going to get people to get on an airplane, to eat in an indoor restaurant, attend a convention, or peruse retail shops. They were at home, online and hopeful for a healthier future. Our healthier future is on the horizon. I would say to all of us, let us just hang on and work towards building back this industry. I am happy to note that yesterday the budget that passed out of the senate does include \$187,000,000 from the state fiscal recovery fund to address various programs that will fund rural downtown transformation grants, workforce assistance, and travel/tourism/business marketing. We know that has passed the senate. It is my belief that it indeed pass by the house. Governor Cooper has already indicated that he will sign the budget that passes out of the General Assembly. Let's look forward to those funds that will be coming our way."

Jessica Herrschaft, Clean Design, Inc.

[Curiosity Campaign presentation](#)

Winter Campaign – Clean is working with Laurie and the Visitors Bureau team, Jon with Carrboro, Shannan Campbell with Hillsborough, and Matt Gladdeck with Chapel Hill to come up with a way to get people downtown during the winter months. We are presenting those creative ideas to the team tomorrow.

New Business/ Roundtable

- Mayor Lydia Lavelle – Town of Carrboro

Anthony Carey thanked and said goodbye to Lydia as Mayor of Carrboro and a long-standing member of this board. “The Mayor that I’ve always known for Carrboro. What great work you have done. It has been a lot of fun getting to know you and watching Carrboro grow and evolve. As you step away and become a private citizen and enjoy the community that you helped grow and develop, what are your hopes and dreams for Carrboro?”

Lydia – “One biggie is getting the [203 Project](#) off the ground. I think that is going to bring a lot of extra vitality and help bring back Carrboro. Really, I tell folks, when you serve in an elected office, it is kind of like being on a train, the train is moving and you jump on it for a while and do what you can, and you jump off and someone else takes it onward. We have a great Council, wonderful staff and great advisory boards. I imagine we will carry on the way we usually have. I am happy I have been a part of making Carrboro grow. I will still be around. You will see me riding my bike around and eating and drinking and spending as much as I can around town.

- Mayor Pam Hemminger – Town of Chapel Hill

- There is nothing really going on right now. It is really calm and quiet in Chapel Hill.
- Tonight we have our Council meeting and then we have our organizing meeting in December. Tonight we have some last night votes we are taking and we have a work session in there too. Looking forward to a little down time from meetings so that we can get our three new council members oriented and hit the ground running in January.
- On tonight’s agenda is the new extended stay hotel in downtown. There were very positive comments at last week’s meeting. I am expecting it to pass which, if it does, we will have another hotel with a rooftop amenity and green space in Chapel Hill.
- Also on the agenda is the [150 E. Rosemary Street Project](#) that we refer to as the “Wet Lab”. It has some things that the Council is concerned about but we are looking for a path forward. That may continue on until January but the goal is to make it fit within the community better.
- We are going to have construction downtown for quite a while, just to give you all a heads up. We are trying to figure out how to change the situation on E. Franklin to help with the traffic delays we are experiencing.
- I had the privilege of going to an UNC basketball game last week and people are coming back in droves. The stadium filled up pretty well. We are feeling like people are getting back to normal: The new version of normal. Everyone was wearing masks and celebrating and having a good time.
- We had a hiccup with the downtown holiday parade. We won’t be having it this year. It is unfortunate but the Jaycees decided to opt-out but we didn’t get enough warning to pull something else together. I’m sad to share that with you. We will try to do some other smaller events and figure that out.
- Sunday we are trying a new thing, a Food Truck Rodeo, over, though, at American Legion Park. There will be twelve food trucks, lots of non-profits, activities for families and kids, and other folks too. This is programming that we have been doing in smaller batches rather than having a large festival like FestiFall. We have been having smaller activities to pull folks together and gaging the interest and, so far, it has been very well received.
- Matt is going to share with us all the great and interesting things going on downtown.

- Matt Gladdek – Executive Director, Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership
 - We are holding outdoor holiday markets the first three Sundays in December.
 - We are working with Laurie and the other towns to have businesses put lights in storefronts to help bring some interest to the downtowns over the winter, past just the holidays.
 - [Seafood Destiny](#) is opening up at the old Lotsa Stone Fired Pizza location at 100 West Franklin Street on the corner southwest corner of Columbia and Franklin.
 - A lot of other leases that are getting signed so we should have more news that will come out by the end of the year.
 - Thanks to the Mayor’s leadership and all the great projects that are under construction right now.
 - The Mayor and The Downtown Partnership have petitioned the Town to study taking over Franklin Street, which we see as vital to be able to maintain the extended outdoor seating and finding a better solution than the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) will allow us for bikes and pedestrians in downtown. We are really excited and have gotten good feedback on this so far but are hoping the price tag doesn’t scare anybody off. We have never seen so much interest in downtown, over the last decade, as in people coming and eating downtown. Some of our restaurants have had their best summer, in thirty years of existence, this past summer, thanks to the expanded sidewalks. So, we are really excited for the future! Currently, NCDOT owns Franklin Street which means anything that happens on Franklin Street has to meet their requirements. NCDOT’s main interest is getting cars from point A to point B, not the experience along the roadway. We want to be sure that we can design Franklin Street to be great for pedestrians, diners, and visitors and not just for people who need to travel through our downtown to get places. In addition to that, NCDOT takes care of the storm water on Franklin Street, which I think we all know that storm water still floods parts of Franklin Street because NCDOT has not maintained the storm water infrastructure as it should because they don’t have the money to do it. This would give us a lot more local control and ability to make Franklin Street the street that we want as a town and not just as a modern day highway. Mayor Hemminger added that this would allow the Town of Chapel Hill the ability to change out the orange cones, the planter boxes, to bump out the sidewalks to make crossings shorter. Those kinds of things we can do. We have been having these discussions with NCDOT and they are a little loathe to put a planter box in the middle of a crosswalk in the road. But if it works for our transit and our cars, we want the ability to try help keep pedestrians safer and make it prettier downtown. We also want to stripe it ourselves rather than, like Matt said, to get cars from point A to point B. The grab and gos, the loading zones, and all those things we have been trying out with the pandemic experience, we want the opportunity to continue to do that. Franklin Street is scheduled to be repaved and restriped this summer so my guess is we would wait until they do that before taking it over so that that expense is borne by NCDOT. It wouldn’t be for all of Franklin Street, it would be just from Henderson Street to Merritt Mill.
- Tanya Moore – Associate Vice Chancellor, UNC-Chapel Hill
 - PlayMakers is back in action and performing again.
 - UNC had a Mental Health Summit this week and heard from over 700 students, faculty, staff, and parents. It was very candid and people shared their struggles. We are going to be partnering with the Jed Foundation to bring more resources to campus to help our community. We will be adding wellness days. We are going to, at least, bring one in in the spring and as we

plan our calendar for next fall, we may start a little earlier or end a bit later so we can build in that time that people have asked for to take some mental health breaks. We will share that with you as soon as it is available.

- Mayor Pro Tem Mark Bell & Shannan Campbell, Economic Development – Town of Hillsborough
 - Hillsborough is proceeding with our Holiday Parade and December 5th from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.
 - There is the annual gingerbread house competition going on as well.
 - The Holiday Home Tour is not happening this year.
 - All of our downtown merchants and vendors are fixing up their shops and inviting people in. Some of them have extended hours during the holidays.
 - The Lantern Walk is on the Winter Solstice on December 21st starting at 5:30 p.m. This draws one or two thousand people from around the area. It is really spectacular.
 - The Last Fridays Art Walk is going on through November as well.
 - We are doing a big push for “Shop Small” on Saturday after Thanksgiving and we are hoping for good turnout for that.
 - From our tourism marketing standpoint, we are leading with “Share the Glow” and encouraging businesses to put up warm night lights and keep them up through January and in to early February while it is dark and gloomy outside.
 - The Alliance for Historic Hillsborough is trying to put together the annual wreath stroll this year. So we have both the gingerbread and wreath shop on stroll that hopefully makes everything decorative and inviting. There are about 18 locations for the gingerbread houses and last year we had about 12 wreaths.
 - Our revenues continue to be strong. Not as strong as in pre-COVID years but people are still coming out and shopping and dining with us. A lot of that might have to do with the abundance of outdoor seating we still have and the weather has been cooperating. Many of our restaurants are already ready for the colder weather with heaters already having been checked out by the fire marshal. We are better prepared this winter than last.
- Beverly Payne – Alliance for Historic Hillsborough
 - The Orange County Historical Museum’s “Date Night” exhibit is still going on and will continue until the end of the year. In February we start a new exhibit called “Show Flavor” which will display the various china, crockery, earthenware, pottery, silverware, glass, cast iron, etc. We have five or six artists who will be preparing the exhibit and installations to showcase these dinner wares.
 - The Occaneechi Tribe is having village workdays at the Occaneechi Village Replica Site December 4th and 11th from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. depending on the weather. If you would like to help with a village workday and want to confirm it is still on, contact Sarah Sandbeck, Executive Director, The Alliance for Historic Hillsborough. Vickie Jeffries, the Occaneechi Tribal administrator, does demonstrations on tea making, herbs, oils, things that you can make naturally.
- Katie Murray – Program Coordinator, Orange County Arts Commission
 - The Orange County Arts Commission has opened a new space in Hillsborough, The Eno Mill. Combined with the first group of studios we opened last year, we now have 10,000 square feet. We have 15 artist studios, Art Therapy Institute has opened an office in our space, we have a gallery and we have a big classroom, and we have the office. We had our grand opening on October 1st and our second opening the first Friday of November. We had about 300 people in October and a couple hundred in November. We are doing timed entry to keep the crowd spaced out. I invite anyone who would like to see up and I will give you a tour and show you the space. We have started classes and are looking for additional teachers.

- We had an in-person Paint it Orange Plein Air Paint-out November 3rd through November 5th. We had fifty-six participants from five states as far away as Connecticut. We have eighty-five works of art on exhibit in our exhibit space at the mill of locations all over Orange County.
- We are working on a County-wide public art festival. This is a collaborative effort between the County, all three towns and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and fourteen community groups. We applied for a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and received it! It is for \$25,000 which is great but isn't enough for us to start getting this in the works for summer of 2022 so our committee on this decided to push this back to summer of 2023 because we have until the end of 2023 to use the grant funds.
- We just released our "Restart the Arts" grants that the Orange County Board of Commissioners just allocated some American Rescue Plan (ARPA) dollars for. We will be sending out a press release to announce those.
- We just released ten arts educator grants that provide small grants to arts teachers in our school system so that they can pursue professional and artistic development opportunities.
- Jon-Hartman Brown, Economic Development Director – Town of Carrboro
 - We have COVID-19 Business Mitigation Grants that we have are offering to Carrboro businesses to help with the expenses and debts they have been incurring during COVID. Those will close on November 19th.
 - The Carrboro Film Festival is this weekend.

Next meeting: *Wednesday, January 19, 2022*


Meeting adjourned at 9:04 a.m.

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 Minutes reviewed by:
 Laurie Paolicelli, Executive Director

1/19/2022

 Date

DocuSigned by:


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 Minutes accepted by:
 Anthony Carey, Chairman

1/21/2022

 Date