

**Chapel Hill/Orange County Visitors Bureau**  
**Advisory Board Meeting at Carolina Inn**  
**April 17, 2024**  
**8:00 – 9:15 AM**

**Board Members Present:** Sharon Hill, Karen DeHart- Chair, Heidi Werner-Dawson, Anita “Spring” Council, John Hartman-Brown, Wendy Smith, Jeri Lynn Schulke, Matt Hughes, Randee Haven-O’Donnell, Donald “DR” Bryan, Shannan Campbell, Sam Vadgama, Steve Peck, Tanya Moore, Anna Richards

**Not Present:** Grace Holtkamp, Paris Miller-Foushee, Meredith Saybe

**Staff Attendance:** Laurie Paolicelli, Marlene Barbera, Hannah Hemphill, Katie Murray, Steve Brantley

**Guests:** Karen Tessier, Mark Sherburne, Tim Hoke

**Call to Order**

Karen DeHart, Chair called the meeting to order 8:11 AM.

**Welcome by Mark Sherburne**

**Round Table Introductions**

Special Guest Karen Tessier, visiting from Asheville. Has a background in downtown development, consulting, and more.

**Approval of Minutes**

Karen Dehart requested a motion to approve the March 20, 2024 minutes. Spring Council made a motion to approve the minutes and Jeri Lynn Schulke seconded the motion. With all members in favor, the minutes were approved as submitted.

**Executive Director’s Report**

**Presentation**

- Hotel demand remains strong, and occupancy has increased 6 points, from 57.8% to 63.9% for the month of February.
- Room rates are starting to level off.
- Short term rentals in Orange County had a growth in supply 32.4%. Demand also grew but by a lesser margin. Average Daily Rate (ADR) has shown the greatest decline so far this year.
- Key projects:
  - Redesigning visitchapelhill.org website
  - Management of chapelhilldiversity.org website
  - Outbound media trips with VisitNC
  - Inbound travel blogger hosting
  - Travel tradeshow participation
  - Advertising in online and traditional publications
  - In production for new longform video and 10 Sneak Pique’s at area attractions.
- July Soccer Tournament

## For Approval May 15, 2024

- Event organizers will be in Chapel Hill on April 24 and 25<sup>th</sup> to conduct media visits with major media outlets.
- Photo opportunities with town leadership with mascots.
- Task force – Direct outreach to businesses in Chapel Hill/Carrboro, toured Raleigh Trolleys to have them run a loop between Chapel Hill/Carrboro. Hotel outreach to find out minimum night stays vs. not. Only 3 hotels have a minimum night stay. Activation of businesses Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday with Trolleys from 1-9pm.
- Our goal is to boost restaurant sales during summer soccer game via trolley tour.
- Tourism happenings:
  - Generating PR for Orange County Historical Museum
  - Seeing an increase in leads for group business to our office
  - Supporting April and June Pride activities on campus and other areas
  - Marketing preparation for Manchester City v. Celtic game at Kenan Stadium
- Other announcements:
  - The Visitors Bureau applied for a grant with America 250 to showcase increased access to accessibly.
  - Request to Department of Transportation for signage advertising attractions.
  - Walking tours available on Saturdays from the Welcome Center. Heart of the Hills tours with groups of up to 12, including residents and visitors.
  - Internal Staff Retreat to discuss research results from Destination Next survey.
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Open House May 16, 2024 from 4-6 pm at 308 W. Franklin Street

## New Business

**Steve Brantley (Orange County Economic Development)** reports that small business grant activity has rebounded, with demand currently 2-3 times higher than available funds. Additionally, there is increased interest in recruiting larger-scale businesses, with promising prospects in both Hillsborough and the Buckhorn economic development district. Over the last four years, half a million dollars have been invested, and the level of companies currently showing interest suggests that this figure could double easily.

**Shannan Campbell (Town of Hillsborough):** River Park concert this weekend (April 20th), Handmade Parade and Arts Council weekend of art announced, Climate Action Challenge concluding, potential relocation of Efland Seafood Festival to Hillsborough, high food and beverage tax revenue noted.

**Matt Hughes (Town of Hillsborough):** Outlandish event scheduled for September 28th, observing increased business transitions, including retirements.

**Steve Peck (Historic Alliance):** Announces the 18th Preservation Day and a Derby party on May 4th at the Whitted Center.

### **Katie Murray (OC Arts Commission):**

- Upoar event returning in August 2025, Arts Commission planning a rebrand, involvement in nationwide study on arts impact, 1.5C climate change exhibit at Eno Mill until April 27th.

For Approval May 15, 2024

- A Triangle-wide fundraiser for the arts was a success, featuring an in-person live watch party. Details regarding the Arts Council funds are yet to be determined. They will be used to cover funding for a staff position and exhibits at the mill.

**Anna Richards (Orange County Commissioners):** County Manager retirement announced, Director of DEI program vacancy, encouragement for Juneteenth celebrations with a kickoff event planned at Eno Mill. Top of Form

**Jeri Lynn Schulke (Chapel Hill Downtown Partnership):** Many openings in the 100 block area including Pulp, Playa Bowls, Starbucks relocation, Proxmio opening Ye Olde Waffle space, Cosmic Cantina moving onto the street. Additionally, Moshi Moshi is reopening with a high end gift store, Purple Bowl is relocating to the 500 block of East Franklin and Well is in the old Visitors Center. Plans for strategic retreats to plan for Downtown Partnership's future.

**Randee Haven O'Donnell (Town of Carrboro):** Highlights upcoming festivals including CD and Vinyl Show, Freight Train Blues, Small Town Pride, and a Community Dinner on the 28th.

**Jon Hartman Brown:** Flying Pierogi opening, significant business transitions including two loans for businesses, OC Southern Branch Library opening in August.

**DR Bryan (Southern Village):** Announces a June 14th Symphony event and the arrival of a new Mexican restaurant.

**Heidi Werner-Dawson (Carolina Inn):** Fridays on the Front Porch starting this Friday. Celtic group going to be in town May 15th for a few days for PR purposes.

**Wendy Smith (ArtsCenter):** \$130k was raised at the ArtsCenter Gala, which the Visitors Bureau helped sponsor.

**Next meeting:** *Wednesday, May 15, 2024 at the Hampton Inn & Suites*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 AM.