

**Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority**  
**Regular Meeting Minutes**  
**May 8, 2023, 8:30 a.m.**

A Regular Meeting of the Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority Board of Directors was held in the Catawba River Boardroom at the Hickory Metro Convention Center on Monday, May 8, 2023, at 8:30 a.m., with the following members present:

	Bruce Eckard; Chair	
Tom Hart	Patricia Hatch	Renee Keever
Lindsay Keisler	Mark Seaman	Warren Wood

A quorum was present.

Also present were Rick Beasley; Assistant Hickory City Manager, Terry Taylor; Counsel, Mandy Hildebrand; CEO, Sarah Jones; Director of Sales and Marketing, and Amber Howard; Director of Events/TDA Clerk.

I. Chair Eckard called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m. All Board Members were present except for Leroy Lail and Phil Yount.

II. Persons Wishing to Be Heard (None Appearing)

III. Approval of Minutes

A. Regular Meeting of April 10, 2023.

Mr. Seaman moved, seconded by Chair Eckard, that the Minutes of April 10, 2023, be approved. The motion carried unanimously.

IV. Approval of Financial Report

A. April 2023 Event Revenue - Ms. Howard

Ms. Howard presented the Event Revenue Report for April 2023. There were 19 events in April, with four of those events being new. Event Revenue has exceeded what was budgeted for FY 2-22-23 with the \$562,168 collected, which is 160% more than the budgeted number of \$350,000.

B. March 2023 Occupancy Tax - Ms. Hildebrand

Ms. Hildebrand presented the Occupancy Tax numbers through March 2023. For nine months \$1,846,897 has been collected, which is 88% of the budgeted amount.

C. April 2023 Finance Report - Ms. Hildebrand

For the tenth month of the Fiscal Year, income and expense should be at 83% of the year. Overall, income is at 98.3% of what was budgeted without April occupancy tax, and expense is at 57.54% of what was budgeted.

Ms. Hildebrand reported that on April 26, 2023, \$1 million was moved into the North Carolina Capital Management Trust Management from the Truist Money Market account. The reason why is that NCCMT had a higher rate of return when compared to the current rate of return with Truist. Ms. Taylor recommended looking in to another Truist Money Market with a larger interest return account as well.

Mr. Wood moved, seconded by Ms. Hatch, that the Finance Report for April 2023 be approved. The motion carried unanimously.

V. Old Business

A. Update on Construction - Ms. Hildebrand

Reported that Groundbreaking was a successful event and has been pushed out to dozens of media outlets and thus far have gotten great press. The VisitHickoryMetro website will be up to date as the project progresses.

As staff works through parking during construction and after, Exodus Works has been hired to shuttle attendees, vendors, etc., from the "yellow" lot (old J&S lot) and the "blue" lot (upper lot behind convention center) during events where parking will be exceeded.

Mr. Beasley said that the City of Hickory is working on the on-street parking in front of the convention center and Caroline Kone (City of Hickory Transportation and Engineering Manager) is also working on reducing speed limit on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue and adding crosswalks.

The next construction meeting is on May 11.

## VI. New Business

### 1. Updated Personnel Handbook for Full & Part Time Employees - Ms. Hildebrand

HCTDA has had policies in the past, but this is a complete handbook where all policies are together in one document. These documents (one for full time staff, one for part time staff) have been reviewed by attorney's office and was created with help from the retired HR Director at the City of Hickory. The Board was sent these policies to review last week.

Four new areas of the handbook include:

1. For non-exempt (hourly employees), compensatory time (which can be earned in place of paid overtime) is explained.
2. Vision Insurance to be added in November 2023, as a tool to keep and attract full-time employees.
3. Maternal (6 weeks) & Paternal (3 weeks) paid leave added, as a tool to keep and attract full-time employees.
4. Tuition reimbursement of up to \$2,000 per fiscal year included, as a tool to keep and attract full-time employees.

Ms. Keisler moved, seconded by Mr. Wood, that the Full Time Employee Handbook be approved. The motion carried unanimously.

Ms. Keisler moved, seconded by Mr. Wood, that the Part Time Employee Handbook be approved. The motion carried unanimously.

## VII. Sales & Marketing Report - Ms. Jones

Sports Destination Magazine picked up the press release from the groundbreaking.

UNCTV made a last-minute visit to Hickory to film segments that will air June 16 at 9pm on NC Weekend Show; segments will focus on downtown Hickory, Cranford Hospitality Group, and Cowa-sake restaurant.

Hosting NC Sports Association Annual Membership Meeting (June 25-27); meeting will be at convention center with an offsite event at Dive Bar in downtown Hickory.

Working with Inspire PR, a firm out of Asheville, which is responsible for pulling in freelance writers such as the one who recently visited from North Georgia and works for several Georgia publications. The writer attended the Crawdads Game, visited Rock Barn Spa, etc. She stayed at Sweet Tea Bed and Breakfast and did a great reel on social media.

Our State Magazine is still one of the best print publications we work with and even though we are pushing towards more digital ads, staff will continue to work with Our State on print pieces. Recent numbers have come in for one the newsletters sent out by Our State, and the digital ad about Hickory's culinary scene received 421 clicks. Staff will continue to push stories and work with Our State. Also working with Our State on a pictorial of City of Hickory's mural.

National & Travel Tourism Week is this week (May 7-13). Staff will be highlighting "Hospitality Heroes" throughout the week and doing "pop ups in the park", the first of which will be in Conover.

Recently signed up to work with Local Palette on a digital level. Made that contact from attending VisitNC. Although the advertising rates for this platform are rather expensive, we were offered a generous discount for a few social media spots.

Partnerships for Partners is a new partner buy in program we are starting to offset cost of programming for our Hospitality Partners.

Mr. Wood mentioned that the Wall Street Journal is coming to do a story on Hickory.

#### VIII. CEO Report - Ms. Hildebrand

Spoke about new additions to staff and how well they are working out so far.

April was a busy month, and the next year will be busy as well. Ms. Keverer said that the hotels have been constantly full.

Mr. Wood asked what football teams will be coming to Hickory this fall. Ms. Howard reported that we have signed contracts with Marshall University, East Carolina University, and University of Southern Mississippi. Waiting on Coastal Carolina and Georgia Southern to make their final decisions, but confident they will choose to stay in Hickory as well.

Showed sample of Event document that staff is sending to all customers with parking info, emergency info, etc.

Still working on draft FY 2023-24 budget numbers and the board will see the budget at a little more than \$3 million, which is about 15% more than last year, but still conservative. Budget does include the interest payable to the City of Hickory for the construction loan. The goal is to have final draft to the board by May 26. Ms. Hildebrand hopes to know the marketing appropriation from cities and county by then, which will in part go to sports

tourism and marketing in general. The draft budget could change due to external appropriations requested from Catawba County, Conover, and Hickory. The Public Hearing for FY 2023-24 Budget will be June 12, 2023. Ms. Howard will connect with Hickory City Clerk Debbie Miller on how to put an ad in the paper, as the Hickory Daily Record will go to three days a week in print, starting June 6, 2023, so want to make sure that the advertisement is in the paper for the appropriate amount of time as legislation states.

Within the next year we are going to be spending some of our money to purchase tarp for gym floor, screens, projectors, etc.

Ms. Keever mentioned accolades the hotels have recently received and Hickory's Hampton Inn is in the top 5% in the world.

IX. Adjournment


The next HCTDA Board Meeting will be held on June 12 at 8:30 a.m. at the Hickory Metro Convention Center.

There being no further business, Ms. Keever adjourned the meeting at 9:18 a.m.

Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority

By: 

Chairman Bruce Eckard

Attest: 

Clerk to the Board