

Hickory-Conover Tourism Development Authority
Regular Meeting Minutes
November 13, 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 of the Hickory Metro Convention Center on Monday, November 13 at 8:30 a.m., with the following members present:

	Bruce Eckard; Chair	
Kimberly George	Tom Hart	Renee Keever
Lindsay Keisler	Leroy Lail	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 8:38 a.m. All Board Members were present.
- II. Persons Wishing to Be Heard (None Appearing)
- III. Approval of Minutes
 - A. Regular Meeting of October 9, 2023.

Chair Eckard moved, seconded by Mr. Seaman, that the Minutes of October 19, 2023, be approved. The motion carried unanimously.

- IV. Approval of Financial Report

- A. Event Revenue - Ms. Howard

Ms. Howard presented the Event Revenue Report for October 2023. There were 16 events in October 2023, five of those being first time events. Year-to-date event revenue is at 44% of the budget.

B. Occupancy Tax - Ms. Hildebrand

Ms. Hildebrand presented Occupancy Tax Chart for September 2023. Year-to-date occupancy tax revenue is at 25% of budget.

C. Finance Report - Ms. Hildebrand

For the fourth month of the Fiscal Year, income and expense should be at 33%. Overall, income is at 31% of what was budgeted without October occupancy tax, and expense is at 30% of what was budgeted.

Ms. George moved, seconded by Mr. Warren, that the Finance Report for October 2023 be approved. The motion carried unanimously.

V. Sales & Marketing Report - Ms. Jones

Ms. Jones said that the sales/events team has bid on bids events since September 19. Some of those are repeat events and some would be new events. The first piece of business for the expansion building has been booked, MDA Cheer for March 2025.

Fishers of Men wants to be on a 3-year rotation and should be back in 2024. King Kat Fishing also wants to come back, and staff is working on collecting hotel pick-up data from that event.

Bidding on AENC Annual Meeting for July 2026 and VisitNC will be here for their Annual Tourism Conference in 2025.

Had marketing influencer in town recently, "Queen City Chic" (influencer out of Charlotte) who has over 40,000 followers. Also hosted influencer "Adventure in Ales" who focuses on pet friendly breweries, hiking, and other activities she can do with her dog.

After passing of strategic plan, staff sent out branding RFP, proposals were due Friday, and four proposals were received.

Also have another RFP due soon for outsourcing the Destination Guide.

Lenoir-Rhyne University received a request from a state legislator to find out the economic impact of athletics (university private schools mostly, but some public), based on total attendance at these events and if teams stayed overnight, (does not include overnights for families, etc). The base for one year is \$4 million, which Ms. Jones feels is

a little low since it is only based on actual tickets scanned and an estimate of players per team. This number is only based on Lenoir-Rhyne University Athletics.

Ms. Keisler mentioned that it would be a great thing to see an overall tracking of all sporting events knowing we are trying harder to attract sports. We could include everything HMCC is doing, Mr. Seaman's events with Hickory Rec, Lenoir-Rhyne University, CVCC, App State, etc. Could use placer data to help collect these results.

Mr. Seaman asked if hotel room bookings are usually slow during Thanksgiving. Ms. Keever said yes. Mr. Seaman mentioned that there is Hmong basketball tournament and New Year's celebration in house during this Thanksgiving weekend.

VI. Old Business

A. Construction Update - Mr. Beasley and Ms. Hildebrand

Mr. Beasley mentioned that parking should be starting soon (JT Russell won the bid on project). Ms. Hildebrand is working with Alan Jackson to make sure all the technology in the building matches. Long term we need to look at adding additional parking.

Ms. Hildebrand said that Brad Lail was going to connect with Mr. Wood to try and find some money from NCDOT to provide a path to connect hotels and convention center.

Mr. Lail is working with the museum specifics for Hall of Fame.

VII. New Business

A. Agreement Renewal with Legal Counsel - Chairman Eckard

It is time to sign renewal agreement with legal counsel. Motion made by Mr. Wood, seconded by Ms. George, that the Agreement Renewal with Legal Counsel be approved. Motion carried unanimously. Signed Agreement attached.

VIII. CEO Report - Ms. Hildebrand

Should have the Audit Report for Fiscal Year 2022-2023 by December meeting.

Hopes to have a draft of items needed after renovation/expansion is complete at the December meeting.

Updated Board List in notebook - there is an appointment that needs to be made by City of Hickory. The appointee should be someone who has ownership or interest in hotels and/or works for a hotel and/or could include any lodging facility in Hickory and Conover that collects occupancy tax (AirBnB owner, etc.).

Strategic Marketing Plan is in the notebooks and can be emailed to the board again and/or can be taken out of the notebook for board members to keep with them. Over the next year the plan is to start spending more time during the meeting discussing the items in the plan as a lot of it involves the boards assistance.

Ms. Taylor mentioned that we should get word out about hospitality opportunities to the high schools. App State is known for its Hospitality program and CVCC is getting ready to hold it's third Hospitality Academy.

Ms. Keever gave an update on the Home2 Suites being built near the convention center. Once it breaks ground it will take about 18 months to build it.

Ms. Hildebrand and Ms. Jones are going to the NCTIA Conference this week. It's a great opportunity to talk to tourism partners across the state.

Staff changes include moving Kendyl Warren to Convention & Event Services position, which will report to Ms. Howard. Ms. Warren has a Hospitality Management degree from East Carolina University. The goal is to post the Visitor Services & Receptionist position this week. The plan is to move that person into the lobby after the expansion/renovation is complete. The hope is that the new employee would begin in January 2024, depending on applicants and finding the right person for that job. Once that occurs Chrystal Dieter will be moved into an Office Manager position.

IX. Adjournmernt

The next HCTDA Board Meeting will be held on December 11, 2023 at 8:30 a.m. at the Hickory Metro Convention Center.

There being no further business, Chair Eckard adjourned the meeting.

By: 
Chairman Bruce Eckard

Attest: 
Clerk to the Board