



## MEETING MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority  
Board of Directors Meeting  
January 15, 2025 (Wednesday) @1:00 p.m.  
98 Cope Creek Rd., Suite D  
Sylva, NC 28779

### Call to Order/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Mr. Jumper.

**Members in attendance:** Executive Director Nick Breedlove; Robert Jumper, Chair; Daniel Fletcher, Megan Orr, Vice Chair; Ashlie Mitchell, Secretary; Craig Smith; Peter Evers; Julie Spiro; Mandi Cantrell; Susan Gregory; Commissioner Jenny Hooper; and Finance Officer Darlene Fox

**Members absent:** Trevor Brown

**Others in attendance:** Kara Addy, JCTDA Social Media Manager; Cheryl Osborne, Minutes Clerk; Tiffany Henry and Betsy Norwood, Jackson County Economic Development; Mark Hartzell, BGRM; Gina Stouffer, and Ashley Svarney, LHG; Jane Mauer, Smokies Life.

### Approve Agenda

**MOTION:** Ashlie Mitchell moved to approve the agenda. Craig Smith seconded. Motion carried.

### Public Comment

Jane Mauer, Smokies Life, commented that the number of recreational visitors to GSMNP in 2024 was 12,355,076 (down 14.9% from 2023). This is the lowest total number of visitors since 2018. Ms. Mauer pointed out that the winter edition of "Smokies Life" is out and contains a map showing the areas of the Park that are closed due to the flooding caused by Hurricane Helene.

### Recognize County Commissioner

Mr. Jumper introduced Ms. Jenny Lynn Hooper, the new County Commission representative to the JCTDA. Each person introduced themselves to Ms. Hooper with a brief explanation of what organization they represented.

### Review and Approval of December 4, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Minutes of meeting are available on the JCTDA website. Minutes were also attached to the agenda for this meeting. No comments were made.

**MOTION:** Megan Orr moved to approve December 4, 2024 meeting minutes. Peter Evers seconded. The motion carried.

#### **Review and Approval of December 4, 2024 Financial Report**

Ms. Fox presented the financial report as follows. Highlights for December include Occupancy Tax collections \$183,028.80 with penalties of \$6.91 and YTD collection totals of \$1,244,316 which is 49.77% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$44,133.42. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$27,914.28 and the VACASA, NC total was \$5,402.83. 80 accounts reported rentals for November rentals (increase of 2 accounts from last year). Collections were down 3.32% from the same period in 2023. The November 30, 2024 cash balance is \$167,321.86 with investments totaling \$3,450,000.00. November expenses were \$888,348.96 with FYTD expenses totaling \$1,930,975.20 with encumbrances of \$0.00 for a combined total of \$1,930,975.20, equaling 59.62% of the budget.

Mr. Breedlove commented that the expenses in December were higher than usual due to the Greenway Capital Project expenditure.

**MOTION:** Craig Smith moved to approve the December 4, 2024 financial report. Mandi Cantrell seconded. The motion carried.

#### **Grant Request – Bear Shadow Festival**

JCTDA received a grant request from Bear Shadow Festival. Mr. Breedlove presented highlights from the grant request.

The Bear Shadow Festival has been successfully held in Highlands for five years. The opportunity to move to Cashiers in Jackson County arose because the town board in Highlands did not want the public park to be used for a paid event. The Festival is a large scale three day music festival. Cashiers is an appropriate site for the event since Cashiers is the home of the Shadow of the Bear and The Village Green is an ideal location for the main event with several satellite locations throughout Cashiers the entire weekend. The Festival will bring in people from outside Jackson County and, as a bonus, it is graduation weekend at WCU. The proposed schedule is for kickoff May 8 with programming May 9-10.

The Festival promoters will use The Village Green Commons and Amphitheater, gazebo, lawn and pavilion. The promoters (owner) of the Festival will hire a company called Eleven Events, LLC as the turn-key producer. They will supply and build all the infrastructure (stage, seating, etc.) with assistance from The Village Green, marketing, media management, talent procurement, parking, transportation, trash pickup, staffing and security.

The economic impact of the Festival is estimated to be \$2-3 million in one weekend to benefit the local economy. May is the peak period for the most opportunity of unsold rooms in Jackson County. The grant request is for \$40,000 to \$50,000 for sponsorship for the Festival. The Executive Committee proposed an amount of \$35,000 for this first year in order to see how the Festival performs before any more substantial funds are invested since the promoters are requesting the funds before February 1. The Festival also donates to a portion of the ticket sales to a local charity in Highlands. Another stipulation for the grant would be that the donation would be split evenly between Cashiers and



Highlands and that any funds generated would be go back into the Bear Shadow event in Jackson County.

Mr. Fletcher pointed out that May is an active month for weddings and that Hotel Cashiers is sold out for May of this year. He further stated that having an event such as this would be better to have in Secret Season. Mr. Breedlove pointed out that there are many properties in Jackson County with vacancies. Ms. Cantrell pointed out that there are vacancies in the Cashiers/Sapphire area and that there will be enough vacancies in May. Mr. Smith stated that in the future, a better date can be negotiated.

Ms. Mitchell abstained from voting on the grant request due to The Village Green planning involvement with the promoter of the event.

**MOTION:** *Daniel Fletcher motioned that the grant request be approved contingent upon (1) the amount granted is \$35,000 on February 1, 2025 (2) tickets for the JCTDA board and staff plus one be given so that they may experience the impact of the festival firsthand. (3) the charitable donation be split evenly between Highlands and Cashiers and (4) any funds available from this year's event be allocated for future Bear Shadows in Jackson County and not events in Highlands. Craig Smith seconded. The motion carried with one abstention.*

#### **New Business**

Mr. Breedlove said that he was asked to discuss the Board slate and the process for vacancies on the Board. The County Commission declined to appoint Ms. Peters. We do not know why she was declined; however, Mr. King, county manager, stated that the commissioners would rather have a slate of candidates for consideration for each vacancy. Mr. Breedlove explained that for most boards a large number of candidates will work; however, for the JCTDA board, that process will not work well since candidates must be from the hotel or attraction industry, be willing to serve, be qualified and undergo a background check before presentation to the commission. Mr. Breedlove reached out to five candidates and received responses from two, who now have to undergo a background check. The two candidates are Dale Collins, a former Board member, and Cathy Busick from the Appalachian Women's Museum.

Mr. Breedlove and Mr. Jumper agreed that a consensus from the Board would be adequate to forward these names to the County Commission. In the future, there should be a process to forward recommendations from the JCTDA Board Chair to the County Commission Board Chair for a direct line to commissioners.

Mr. Breedlove noted that we have lacked a formal procedure for letting the full JCTDA Board approve the vetting of candidates. The Executive Committee should review and suggest candidates to go forward.

Mr. Jumper called for a consensus on vetting from Board Chair to Board Chair after Executive Committee review and suggestion. There were no objections. It will be a policy for the JCTDA from today.

#### **JCTDA Director's Brief/Social Media Report**

The JCTDA Director's Brief was attached to the agenda. Mr. Breedlove presented the Director's Brief, highlighting the following:

- TDA staff has been very busy updating listings for new website and Visit NC scheduled to go live July 1.
- The Visitor's Guide will begin production soon with a refreshed format.
- The staff is looking for a new advertising agency since the TDA is transitioning away from BGRM after nine years. Requests for Proposals were issued in November and are ready for review by the Executive Committee. March/April is the timeframe to bring the new agency on board.
- Lodging trends are very good, with 50% occupancy, considering the recent flooding and devastation. The average daily rate is \$105, compared to \$95 last year.
- Ms. Addy presented the social media report, which was attached to the agenda for this meeting. The JCTDA reserved its name on Bluesky. TikTok seems to be losing the Supreme Court decision and may be shut down. Ms. Addy is exploring steps to take if TikTok is banned. Facebook content has been performing well, but content is being trimmed down which is a concern for Social Media Managers.

#### **Jackson County Chamber Director's Report**

Ms. Spiro presented the report. Highlights are as follow:

- There were 491 guests served last month and direct inquiries to the Chamber totaled 780. Ms. Spiro is hoping to see more guests in the future.
- The 2025 Concerts on the Creek season is set up.
- Friends Night Out is scheduled for March 27<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Cashiers Area Chamber Director's Report**

The CACOC report was attached to the agenda.

#### **Partner Updates – BGRM/LHG**

Mark Hartzell gave the BGRM report stating that they are working on Secret Season and plans for the new brand messaging.

Ashley Svarney and Gina Stouffer, of Lou Hammond Group, reported on recent PR efforts promoting our destination nationwide with media coverage. There have been seven national articles promoting our destination in Forbes, Road Atlas, Charlotte Observer, and Good Grit Magazine.

#### **Updates from Individual Board Members/Announcements**

Mr. Jumper reminded the Board about the February 19 training and the importance of everyone attending.

Mr. Smith thanked the Friends of Panthertown who will sponsor a hike to Flat Creek Falls, the second tallest waterfall in the area and can only be accessed through Bear Lake Reserve and is relatively unknown to the general public. This hike will be a fund raiser for the Friends of Panthertown.

Ms. Mitchell told about events in Cashiers in 2025.

#### **Adjourn**

**MOTION:** *Ashlie Mitchell motioned to adjourn. Daniel Fletcher seconded. Motion carried.*

The meeting was adjourned at 2:09 PM.

#### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on February 19, 2025 in person at JCTDA headquarters unless otherwise posted.



Jackson County TDA Board  
Approved: February 19, 2025