



MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority

Board of Directors Meeting

March 15, 2017 (Wednesday), 1:00 p.m.

North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching
Cullowhee, NC 28723

Public comment- none

Call to order/Roll Call

Meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Robert Jumper. Members in attendance:

Present: Laura Bowers, Nick Breedlove, Kelly Custer, Gareth Daley, Stephanie Edwards, Darlene Fox, Henry Hoche, Sarah Jennings, Robert Jumper, Kathy Korb, Mary Lanning, Ron Mau, Megan Orr, Ann Self (teleconference), Joel Sowers, Julie Spiro, Bob Williams

Absent: Jim Hartbarger, Vick Patel

Others in attendance:

Joyce Pope (minutes), Sharon Taylor (Mainspring); Margaret Carton (Friends of Panthertown)

New Board Member Introductions

Executive Director Breedlove welcomed the following members to the board: Laura Bowers (Great Smoky Mountain Getaways, Whittier), Megan Orr (Holiday Inn Express, Dillsboro), Kathy Korb (Laurelwood Inn, Cashiers), and Gareth Daley (Landmark Vacation Rentals, Cashiers). Each new board member introduced themselves and said that they are looking forward to being a part of the TDA. Laura Bowers noted that Smoky Mountain Getaways has about 60 rentals, 45 or so in Jackson County. Megan Orr works for Vick Patel at the Best Western and Holiday Inn Express properties. Kathy Korb is the Resident Manager of Laurelwood Inn in Cashiers. Gareth Daley, originally from South Africa, manages Landmark Vacation Rentals in Cashiers and has been in area for 17 years. All of the current board members introduced themselves to the new members as well.

Review and Approval of Minutes

Minutes were presented and approved for the February 15, 2017 meeting.

MOTION: Sarah Jennings moved to approve minutes as presented. Mary Lanning seconded. Motion passed.

Review and approval of year-to-date financial report

The Financial Report was presented by Darlene Fox.

YTD collections: February: \$ 29,187.66; \$170 in penalties; \$ 701,088.16 total YTD. That is 71.47% of budget. Collections are up 9.93% over last year, with 89 units reported for January rentals. Total increase for the fiscal year is 12.76%.

February expenses were \$ 82,520.21. YTD expenses totaled \$ 616,253.79 with encumbrances of \$ 5,882.98, for a combined total of \$ 622,137.77, or 63.42% of budget. The Cash balance on February 28, 2017 was \$ 631,980.98.

MOTION: Lanning moved to accept the financial report. Jennings seconded. Motion passed.

Budget Amendments – Director & Technology Budget

Fox presented a budget amendment to increase the budget in order to put money in salary and wages, and to remove \$22,500 from contracted services. Of the budget, there is a \$2277 fund balance appropriation with a \$2000 budget for marketing and advertising. These changes were previously discussed and tentatively approved.

MOTION: Megan Orr motioned to accept. Lanning seconded. Motion Passed.

Bob Williams joined the meeting at 1:14pm.

Committee reports: Personnel & Governance, Marketing

Chairman Jumper told the board that he is saddened to lose Clifford Meads from the TDA. We will miss his leadership and wisdom, Jumper said. Meads was also the Chairmen of the Marketing Committee. It has been the intent of the TDA to bring in someone for the marketing committee, and for the marketing committee to act as an advisory committee to Executive Director Breedlove, stated Jumper. This would mean that no Chairman is necessary, Jumper added. Henry Hoche believes that it is a good idea to eliminate the Marketing Chair position of the marketing committee. Chairman Jumper stated that at this time he will not assign a role as the Chair as this time, until he advises the board otherwise. Breedlove will act as a quasi-chair with no voting authority.

Personnel issues were tabled to be discussed under the Human Resources portion of the meeting.

Magellan Strategy Group

The TDA engaged Magellan Strategy Group to help implement and guide executive committee through the process with its Chamber assessment. We feel it is best for Chris Cavanaugh to lead us through that process, stated Breedlove. Other vendors were investigated, and their quotes were much higher than Magellan Strategy Group. Facilitation sessions are proposed for Chris Cavanaugh, at a fee of \$600 per session (3 sessions total) to lead the TDA through the process, stated Breedlove. It is the recommendation of the Executive Board that we follow this recommendation. There was no further discussion.

MOTION for Magellan to proceed with this process. Hoche moved to accept the motion; seconded by Lanning. Motion passed.

Executive Director Job Description

A handout was presented detailing the Jackson County TDA Executive Director Staff position duties and Job Description. The job description includes the areas of planning and organization; marketing, public relations, and social media; financial; and promotion. Bob Williams asked if the job description should be clarified to specify that Breedlove would manage website content and not be a technical manager. Any technical issues with the website would be handled by the ad agency firm, advised Lanning and Breedlove. The language in the job description is “maintain” the website, and Breedlove asked if the board felt that the language should be changed to “maintain content”. Lanning and Jennings pointed out that the Director would “synchronize activities with outside agencies” as listed in the job description, which should serve to provide enough clarity. Commissioner Mau asked when the fiscal year would

start. July 1st would be the start, according to Breedlove. A draft budget would need to be in place by June 30th. The timing of approval of the budget was discussed.

MOTION: *Fox moved to eliminate the word 'draft' from the finance section of Breedlove's duties. Lanning moved and Jennings seconded to approve the budget as amended removing the word draft. Motion passed.*

MOTION: *Lanning moved to accept the job description of the Jackson County TDA Executive Director; Jennings seconded. Motion passed.*

Executive Director Authorizations

A resolution was also presented authorizing signatory authority to the Executive Director and other authorizations. This resolution was based on one by Jackson County. The Jackson County Manager executes a resolution annually, on the advice of their attorney. This resolution would allow Executive Director Breedlove to negotiate advertising; to spend funds for new advertising; and to spend funds on the TDA-issued credit card with the stipulation, that any charge over \$500 be approved by the Chairman or Executive committee, and that they fall within the budget line items. The effective date of this resolution would be April 1st.

MOTION: *Jennings moved to approve the resolution. Hoche seconded. Motion passed.*

Lease with Jackson County for Office Space

Chairman Jumper gave the board one further opportunity to review the lease with Jackson County for TDA Office Space. A copy was distributed at the meeting. The county attorney, Michele Smith, reviewed the lease at no charge, stated Breedlove. Jackson County Commissioners considered the lease yesterday and have it on their agenda for the March 20th meeting, according to Breedlove.

MOTION: *Jennings motioned to approve the lease. Lanning seconded. Motion passed.*

Mainspring Conservation Trust

Breedlove said that he attended a presentation by Sharon Taylor regarding Panthertown Valley and invited her to speak to the board today. Panthertown is prominently mentioned in our media and advertising, and the area is heavily used by tourists. Tourists seem to come from a wide area, and Breedlove noted many out of state license plates on a recent visit to the property. The simplest way to determine who is using the facility is a license plate survey of the vehicles in the parking lot. In his recent visit, Breedlove counted 40 vehicles, with only 3 to 4 North Carolina license plates.

Sharon Taylor (Mainspring Conservation Trust) and Margaret Carton (Friends of Panthertown) addressed the TDA.

Sharon Taylor spoke first about Mainspring Conservation Trust. The Trust is a regional conservation trust headquartered in Franklin, covering everything west of Balsam. They have 12 employees and a sizeable budget. They cover 6 counties as well as Northern Rabun County in Georgia. They cover projects that help protect the area and also that help to bring people into the area. They are currently working on the conservation of 5,000 acres in Macon and Swain counties. Some of the projects they work on are meant to create better public access. The last project with Jackson County was a 300-acre acquisition to connect Forest Service land with the Panthertown area. The County Commissioners strongly endorsed

this project, with the caveat that the area be opened to the public as soon as possible. Their current project is with the Friends of Panthertown on a 16-acre tract acquisition, helping to facilitate that purchase by Friends of Panthertown. This project gives them the opportunity to conserve an amazing knoll that provides not only a fabulous view of Panthertown, but also creates better public access.

Margaret Carton with Friends of Panthertown addressed the board next, stating that their user access survey last year showed that users were from the following areas: 25% from Jackson County; 27% from other North Carolina counties; 37% from Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and Tennessee; with the remaining 11% from outside this general geographical area. Obviously Panthertown does pull people from a wide area.

The U.S. Forest Service has a total budget of \$1000 for the entire Nantahala Forest. In 2003 the Forest Service began work on Panthertown Valley trails. Friends of Panthertown was formed in 2003, with a Park Service person assigned to work with Panthertown in 2007. In 2011, they became a separate 501(c)(3). Friends of Panthertown has 10 volunteer members and one part-time paid director. They fundraise to meet their budget of \$45-50,000 per year.

There are 30 miles of trails that Friends is permitted to work on. Friends also focuses on providing education on Leave no Trace, the flora and fauna, trails, and key sites in the valley. A current area of concern is the Salt Rock entrance, has a parking lot deficit. There is now property on the right of the Salt Rock gate that is now available for purchase. The land has already been in use by foot traffic for access to rock climbing, hiking and camping, even though it is privately owned. Acquisition of this property would provide a wonderful place for camping, an educational area, and benches, said Carton. Executive Director Breedlove added that this roadway is quite congested in the summer and that more parking is needed. There would be two phases to clear and grade the land, then evaluate the use of the space. Once the forest service owns the property, they would apply for an RTP grant. The total cost would be \$25-30,000 once the land is owned by the Forest Service.

Mainspring negotiated with the landowner, stated Taylor. They are paying full fair market value of \$191,000. Some survey and legal work was also required, so they are raising \$250,000 to acquire the property. They have a closing date scheduled for April 21, 2017. They have already invested extensive time and travel, and have received \$51,000 in donations. Mainspring has a donor who has agreed to match, dollar for dollar, incoming donations. An additional \$90,000 is currently needed, and the TDA is invited to invest in the project, said Taylor.

Breedlove noted that in last year's survey, a question addressed whether a line item would be favored to support this and other natural areas, such as Pinnacle Park; and 74% responded that they would favor support. According to Finance Director Fox, some budget money is available. A donation of \$2,500 is suggested, stated Breedlove. This would be a donation and not a grant. This donation would likely be doubled by the private donor.

The floor was opened for questions. Williams mentioned that better road signage would be helpful to direct people to Panthertown. Carton stated that additional educational information would be useful at the entrance about personal equipment needed and trail conditions. Edwards mentioned that Panthertown is listed on the hiking and waterfall map also. Carton pointed out that the website has a map available.

MOTION: *Hoche moved to donate \$2500 to this conservation effort; Kathy Korb seconded. Motion passed.*

Advertising Request

Breedlove stated that for \$1,800 each, we can advertise in two e-newsletters for Smoky Mountain Living using an ad banner. The marketing committee approved Breedlove to proceed with pursuing this advertising. Ann Self, Mary Lanning and Sarah Jennings are on the marketing committee.

Printing: Solar Eclipse Cards and Merchant Tips

The JCTDA is out of solar eclipse rack cards. We have funds in a media contingency fund. A consensus agreed that Breedlove should move some of this money over to pay for another printing of 10,000 solar eclipse cards.

A Merchant Tips for the Solar Eclipse handout was distributed. Discussion centered on how to distribute these tips to local merchants. The board felt that the merchants should be given merchant tips via PDF.

VisitNC Advertising Buys

The Marketing committee authorized the TDA to expend up to \$63,000 +/- 10-percent on VisitNC Advertising co-op buys. The TDA will be allocating future fiscal year funds on behalf of marketing this Sunday, March 19th, at the VisitNC state tourism conference said Breedlove.

Draft of Human Resources Policy

A draft of a Human Resources Policy was distributed. Resources from the tourism industry and the Jackson County Human Resources handbook were used to draft this policy, stated Self. Human Resources policies should be generic to any employee regardless of position, noted Breedlove. The language compliance was reviewed by the Jackson County Attorney, and some revisions will be made to the Fair Labors Standards portion of the draft. Suggestions were invited for changes or improvements to the draft. Chairman Jumper stated that the board should take the next month to review the policy. TDA members are invited to be ready to discuss this policy at the next meeting.

Chairman Jumper left the meeting at 2:01 p.m. due to another meeting.

Record Retention Policy Discussion

Breedlove discussed the need for a record retention policy. He received guidance from the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources. The TDA was advised to adhere to the County schedule, an extensive 140-page document. Self recommended that the TDA adhere to those policies. Those policies relate to open meetings, transparency of emails and texts, and more. Breedlove reminded the board about the requirement to preserve email and texts. Any departing board members are requested to archive and preserve emails; Gmail makes this particularly easy. This record retention policy will be presented more fully at the next meeting.

Commissioner Self left the meeting at 2:12pm.

Jackson County Chamber of Commerce activity report

In consideration of the meeting going over the allotted time, Julie Spiro deferred to the complete Chamber report previously emailed to Board members. The floor was opened for questions. No questions were received.

Cashiers Chamber of Commerce activity report

In consideration of the meeting going over the allotted time, Stephanie Edwards deferred to the complete Chamber report previously emailed to Board members. The floor was opened for questions. No questions were received.

Director Report Highlights

In consideration of the meeting going over the allotted time, Executive Director Breedlove deferred to the complete report previously emailed to Board members. The floor was opened for questions. No questions were received. Breedlove then presented canvas bags to the TDA as a sample of the items being furnished to media on FAM trips.

WNC Outdoor River Adventures presentation by Kelly Custer

Kelly Custer presented the most recent draft of the layout of the outdoor park on the county land, using the county boat ramp (the C.J. Harris boat ramp). A greater tourism draw is the goal, stated Custer. Climbing, zipline, and a ropes course are all under consideration. An RV park is also being considered, which would include a pool and playground. Additional camping with primitive campsites are a part of the current plan. Bridges would be needed to connect the two sides of the proposed plan. The conceptual drawings that were presented were created by Cooper Stewart.

Jennings asked what the timeline is for the park. April through June is the target timeframe for opening, stated Custer. The county will be running water and sewer by the end of the year. The main rafting facility and campground are targeted to open the first of next year. For 2017, cottages are targeted to be available by fly fishing season. Clarification of the land location was requested. Hoche asked if the property is privately owned; Custer responded that the property is privately owned but open to the public. Hoche asked how many campsites and RV spots will be available; Custer stated it is currently around 35. The walkability of reaching Dillsboro from the park was discussed since there are no sidewalks currently, and it is not safe to walk along the current road. Future plans for bridges might provide better access.

Breedlove asked about the expected tourist draw and economic impact. No tourist draw information is available. Economic impact information was available for part of the property, estimated at roughly \$60 million. Edwards asked about the tourist experience. Rafting trips will be offered to go downriver for pickup on either private or public property locations, stated Custer. The long-term plan is to try to put together a whitewater park in conjunction with some of the national whitewater agencies. A question was posed as to whether RV camping was included in occupancy; there was consensus that RVs would be included in county occupancy rates. Food trucks are planned for the site, according to Custer. Edwards asked about branding for the facility. Custer stated that branding is in the works.

May Meeting date change from May 17 to May 24


Breedlove is not available to meet on May 17 due to STS Marketing College. Chairman Jumper had proposed moving the meeting to May 24. That meeting is when the TDA will need to approve the marketing plan. April 1st is the deadline to discuss grants. An updated meeting calendar was provided, along with a map of the Cordelia Camp Lab building. An updated contact sheet for the board was also distributed.

Announcements

Breedlove reminded members that the April meeting will take place at WCU.

MOTION: *Jennings moved to adjourn. Orr seconded. Motion passed.*

Meeting adjourned at 2:28pm.



Sarah Jennings, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: April 19, 2017