



## MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority  
Board of Directors Meeting  
May 24, 2017 (Wednesday), 1:00 p.m.  
Cullowhee, NC 28723

**Public comment- none**

### **Call to order/Roll Call**

Chairman Robert Jumper called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. Cordelia Camp Building, Room 143, WCU

Members in attendance: Ann Self (conference), Bob Williams, Mark Jones, Darlene Fox, Julie Spiro, Mary Lanning, Robert Jumper, Ron Mau, Sarah Jennings, Stephanie Edwards, Kathy Korb, Laura Bowers, Gareth Daley, Megan Orr, Vick Patel, Joel Sowers.

Members absent: Henry Hoche, Kelly Custer.

**Others in attendance:** Clifford Meads, John Kautz, Suzan Brand, and Stephanie Legacy (Rawle Murdy); Deborah Stone (President), Jessica Ennis (Account Executive and Media Relations Specialist), and Melissa Webb (Account Director in Strategic Planning) with Pineapple Public Relations; Matt Saenger, Balsam West; Joyce Pope, minutes.

### **New Board Member Introduction –**

Chairman Jumper introduced the board's newest member, Mark Jones.

### **Review and Approval of April 19, 2017 Minutes**

Minutes were presented and approved for the April 19, 2017 meeting.

Executive Director Breedlove asked that the minutes be amended from 97% sold out in Jackson County for the Solar Eclipse to 95% in the Cashiers Area among hotels and resorts.

**MOTION:** *Mary Lanning moved to approve the minutes as presented. Megan Orr seconded. Motion passed.*

### **Review and approval of year-to-date financial report**

The Financial Report was presented by Darlene Fox. Collections for April were \$40,394.81 with \$400 collected in penalties. The YTD collection total is \$733,166.04, or 85.91 % of budget. 90 units reported for April rentals with collections up 7.93%. The total increase for the fiscal year is 13.29%.

April expenses were \$119,581.28. YTD expenses totaled \$863,389.89 with encumbrances of \$2,063.74 for a combined total of \$ 865,453.63, or 87.62% of budget. The Cash balance on April 30, 2017 was \$459,492.49.

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

#### **Budget Amendment**

Darlene Fox presented a budget amendment for a net increase of \$126,500 reflecting additional expenditures, room occupancy tax collections and investment earnings.

**MOTION:** Lanning moved to accept the budget amendment. Gareth Daley seconded. Motion passed.

#### **FY 17-18 Draft Budget**

Darlene Fox presented the draft budget. She is projecting a TDA room occupancy collections increase of 5.37% and appropriations of fund balance of \$60,000. The draft budget totals \$1,144,523.

Executive Director Breedlove reviewed several new items in the draft budget:

- Conversion of the Internet / phone systems for the Chambers. The system will be converted to operate on fiber optics, and the total estimated fee for the phone line item for the year is roughly \$15,000, inclusive of conversion. Julie Spiro stated that the slow Internet adds to hours worked to access information. Matt Saenger with Balsam West presented information to the board. Balsam West is jointly owned by EBCI and Drake Enterprises. The network is a 'ring' network, meaning it is self-healing in case of line outages. The bandwidth is essentially unlimited. Balsam West is proposing voice, internet, and all communications to be combined in one package. We currently budget \$9,000 per fiscal year; after the initial outlay, costs will be almost half at about \$4500 per fiscal year. The phone system is housed in a secure data center and they handle all upgrades preventing obsolescence.
- Funding Change: funding for environmental groups will expand to include Pinnacle Park at \$500 and Friends of Panthertown at \$500 for the coming FY budget. However, the funding could be done as regular appropriations if the board should so choose.
- Breedlove stated that TDA would like to create a capital projects line item to accommodate future capital projects. A capital projects policy will also need to be created. An initial \$15,000 is being set aside for that line item. Funds will not be expended until a capital projects policy is created and funds spent in this line require Jackson County Commissioners' approval.
- About \$20,000 will be invested back into the website. The website is giving great dividends and reinvestment is critical since about 65% of users are mobile. Future projects will be geared towards improving the mobile interface.
- Advertising: every dollar spent on advertising typically brings \$15 back into the community. The local government commission recommends we allocate 8-percent as reserve. We are far above that and have about four month's operating expenses set aside on top of the regular 8-percent.
- Chamber operations contracts are structured slightly different this year. Instead of monthly invoices for receipts, office supplies, etc., we will provide them a lump sum at the beginning of the year that they will manage. This eliminates time and money and paperwork spent on processing.
- Breedlove obtained quotes for every operational line item in the budget. The budget draft contains a lot of detail to reflect the specifics of actual operations. This year's budget should be more in line and cause fewer amendments.
- A budget hearing will be held June 21 at 1:00 p.m. at NCCAT.



Breedlove opened the floor for questions on the draft budget. There were no questions.

**MOTION:** *Megan Orr made moved to accept the draft budget. Lanning seconded. Motion passed.*

**Committee reports: Personnel & Governance** – no report per Ann Self

## **Marketing Committee**

### **Jackson County Chamber of Commerce activity report**

Julie Spiro presented Chamber updates:

- The inaugural hook line and drinker event was a success, featuring 17 fly fishing booths, 9 craft beer vendors, 2 bands, and food vendors. Surveys from vendors indicated 60-200+ people visited fly fishing booths; sales averaged about \$40 (non-profit booth)-\$1650 (retail booth); 300+ people went through the beer vendor booths during the 4-hour period with \$175-\$750 range in sales among stations. All food vendors sold out of food.
- The “Day of Caring November 2018” planning is in process. Partnerships have been established with Jackson Neighbors in need, Jackson Projects, Habitat for Humanity, and Harrah’s. The Chamber will partner with them to go out into the community to target people who have a task that they cannot do themselves. The goal is to help people who are truly in need. This event has been held successfully in surrounding counties.
- Concerts on the Creek kicks off on Friday and lasts through Labor Day.
- The work-ready community rating is being prepared. This rating relates to preparing school children to be “certified work ready.” This is the beginning of a 2-year process.
- July 4: fireworks will take place downtown (expanded this year with bigger fireworks) with a children’s area and band.

### **Cashiers Chamber of Commerce activity report**

Stephanie Edwards presented highlights:

- Newly published visitor guide for the Cashiers area is available with 30,000 copies printed. Play On is in the guide as well as the Ale Trail. Because of their partnership with Smoky Mountain News, this is produced at zero cost. The guide is provided upon request to visitors.
- The lifestyle map is the best map of their local area in the south part of the county. Copies were given to the board.
- This weekend they will be promoting the solar eclipse with banners and distribution of additional rack cards. They have about 3,000 cards out.
- Upcoming events include the May 27 Groovin’ on the Green Concert Series kicks off (in lieu of Blues, Brews & BBQ Festival) and the May 27-28 - Rotary Arts & Crafts Spring Fair at The Village Green.
- An inaugural plateau job fair was held two weeks ago. In attendance were 29 exhibitors, including accommodations, restaurants, and other businesses. The event was very well received. It was advertised in Clayton, Walhalla, Sylva, Brevard, and more. They are still getting residual inquiries.
- In town, both gas stations have been sold to the same owner; the new ownership is receptive to providing a hospitable welcome to visitors and receiving training on visitor information.

## **Director Report Highlights**

Executive Director Breedlove provided the board with highlights of his report:

- The NCDOT updated traffic counts for Jackson County for the solar eclipse. Another meeting with NCDOT will take place to align red lights and traffic flows for the event.
- He has been working with Pineapple to get Our State magazine out to our part of the state and to feature WNC. They will visit the area June 4 – 6 and stay at High Hampton.
- The JCTDA Board page has launched. This page includes resolutions, agenda, minutes, and the budget. Everyone is also encouraged to visit the site [flyfishingtrail.com](http://flyfishingtrail.com) launched by the Jackson County Chamber.
- There are no major changes to the Chamber contracts, other than potentially eliminating the separate lease document from that contract.
- Funds from the lease were placed into the original contract.
- The scope of work was revised slightly to include flexibility to take off holidays that are typically taken throughout government.

## **Jackson County Chamber of Commerce Contract**

### **Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce Contract**

Both contracts were reviewed by the Board.

**MOTION:** *Lanning moved to accept both agreements for signing. Jennings seconded. Motion passed.*

## **Pineapple Public Relations Plan for 2017-18**

Pineapple presented a FY 2018 time and action plan. The presentation started with a review of 2017 articles: *Country Living*; *Reader's Digest*; *Men's Journal*; *Southern Living*; and *The Food Network*. We received a lot of national coverage. Additional coverage was featured in *Travel & Leisure*; *Outside*; *Epicure & Culture*; The Weather Channel; and *Local Palate*. Regional coverage in newspapers from Atlanta to Chattanooga. Also targeted were American angler and fly-fishing outlets. Circulation during the period 7/16 – 4/17 was 276,159,457, equating to \$6,568,000 in editorial value.

Pineapple's goal is to generate excitement for the county through earned media coverage and publicity through news articles, social influencers, and more. They have worked with the TDA since 2014. They work to tap new technologies and new media sources to reach more people for Jackson County. For every \$1 spent on PR, we have received about \$1,000 in publicity. Over the last year, two of the top ten referrals to the website were news articles.

Pineapple presented travel trends most relevant to our county and our visitors. Local & artisan goods, health & wellness travel, local travel, low impact vacations, voluntourism, immersive/experiential travel; experiencing the local culture/community; and gender-focused travel. Focus areas include outdoor recreation, history, culinary, arts and culture, local events, local community awareness and storytelling to target generational audiences. Press releases and pitch topics were presented. 12 pitch areas were presented. Regional and National media outlets were presented as well as target audiences such as travel outlets, food/drink/beer outlets/outdoor/health and fitness outlets, niche southern outlets, southeast regional outlets (NC, GA, SC, TN, AL, TX); family/parenting outlets; group/meetings outlets.



- Website itineraries: they will create a series of nine itineraries for the Jackson County website. Sample themes include outdoor adventure, foodie, fisherman, rainy day, motoring enthusiast, family friendly, mid-week traveler.
- Blog schedule: started last year and has been very successful. They will do a blog post a month for Jackson County, supplemented by local voices. Sample posts were presented such as “What’s New in Jackson County for 2018.”
- Media Introductions: media visits, Media familiarization trips, Media Missions from VisitNC. They hosted a FAM Fall 2016 with 4 media attendees; there is one upcoming FAM trip June 2017; 3 secured attendees; targeting 1 additional attendee. They have had 6 individual media visits this fiscal year. They will do FAMs this fiscal year (Fall 2017 and Summer 2018) with 3-4 media total per trip. They propose to host media for curated experiences such as fly fishing, brewery tours, and on-assignment stories. Their media missions are Charlotte this summer and Atlanta this fall.
- Jessica Ennis presented the Influencer Program and Goals: set specific goals to accomplish with this influencer program, and define the strategies for accomplishing these goals. Ennis also presented information on working with paid influencers along with several examples. Working with influencers is a new and exciting way to reach travelers.

Breedlove stated we will work with Pineapple this year with an increase in the budget because we have combined several budget areas into one for Pineapple.

**MOTION:** Megan Orr made a motion to enter into the 2017-18 contract with Pineapple. Jennings seconded. Motion passed.

#### **Rawle Murdy Advertising Plan for 2017-18**

Rawle Murdy will take over the social media contract (previously held by INNights). They will also add new duties and expand the scope of the contract.

John Kautz with Rawle Murdy presented a Jackson County Marketing Plan for FY 2017 - 2018. Rawle Murdy worked with the TDA marketing committee to create the Plan. Over the past year, they have leveraged the TDA brand “Play On” to market the county and to be an economic driver for the area. Rawle Murdy seeks to complement the work that Pineapple does for the TDA. Initial results of the website show that traffic has increased by 587% since 11/16 – 3/17; unique page views increased by 424% (year over year); occupancy tax collections since launch are up 16%; and goal completions (Visitor Guide Requests) are up 84%.

Stephanie Legacy presented information on paid media recommendations. The goal is to drive room occupancy for all lodging and generate quality leads. Strategies are to continue to position Jackson County as the mountain’s premier place to stay and play. They plan to use additional budget monies to test native content travel partners in the fall and continue with better performing platforms in the spring. They plan also to continue to primarily utilize digital platforms to promote Jackson County as this allows them flexibility to adjust and optimize campaigns based on performance. Primary target audience is women 35+ who are family oriented. Secondary audience is men 25-44, active, interested in outdoor activities. Also target adults 55+ who travel and are interested in cuisine and culture and have a high household income.

Executive Director Breedlove stated that currently, social media is done by INNights. There is a fee increase and increase in media buys which is needed to maintain current momentum. The total addition to the Rawle Murdy contract is \$54,200 for social media.

Chairman Jumper asked if there were any questions for Rawle Murdy. There were no questions. Breedlove stated that the contract is in process and the board would authorize Chairman Jumper to sign off on it as soon as the contract is complete.

***MOTION:*** Orr made a motion to authorize Jumper to enter into a 2017-18 advertising contract with Rawle Murdy as presented by Rawle Murdy and Breedlove. Lanning seconded. Motion passed.

**New Business - none**

**Announcements**

The next meeting will be Wednesday, June 21<sup>st</sup> at NCCAT, 276 NCCAT Drive, Cullowhee, NC 28723. As a reminder, there is no meeting in July.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:34 pm.



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Sarah Jennings, Secretary  
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: June 21, 2017