



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA

MEETING MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
October 16, 2024 (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. Fletcher.

- **Members in attendance:** Executive Director Nick Breedlove; Daniel Fletcher, Chair; Ashlie Mitchell, Secretary; Megan Orr, Vice Chair; Board Members, Craig Smith, Mandy Cantrell, Trevor Brown, Robert Jumper, Mark Jones, Julie Spiro and Mandi Cantrell
 - **Members absent:** Darlene Fox and Susan Gregory
- Others in attendance:** Kara Addy, JCTDA Social Media Manager; John Kautz, Madison Kosater and Aneska Walrath, BGRM; Gina Stouffer, Lou Hammond Group

Approve Amended Agenda

Donations to regional recovery efforts was added to the budget.

MOTION: Robert Jumper moved to approve the agenda. Craig Smith seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment

None

Recognize Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and County Commissioner

Daniel Fletcher, Chair – Commented on the floods and recovery of the last two weeks.

Megan Orr, Vice Chair – Had no comments.

Ashlie Mitchell, Secretary – Had no comments.

Mark Jones, County Commissioner – No comments.

Review and Approval of August 15, 2024 Meeting Minutes

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

MOTION: Trevor Brown moved to approve August 15, 2024 meeting minutes. Ashlie Mitchell seconded. The motion carried.

Review and Approval of September 30, 2024 Financial Report

Ms. Fox was absent. Mr. Breedlove presented the financial report as follows. Highlights for September include Occupancy Tax collections \$305,905.67 with penalties of \$24.15 and YTD collection totals of \$682,694.82 which is 27.31% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$64,880.55. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$58,162.95 and the VACASA, NC total was \$9,003.21. 97 accounts reported rentals for August rentals (increase of 4 accounts from last year). Collections were up 5.82% from the same period in 2023. The September 30, 2024 cash balance is \$566,671.30 with investments totaling \$3,450,000.00. September expenses were \$254,381.98 with FYTD expenses totaling \$626,738.03 with encumbrances of \$2,607.58 for a combined total of \$629,345.61, equaling 19.78% of the budget.

There was an error in the financial report. The encumbrances for the month were shown as \$2,67.58. It was amended to \$2,607.58.

MOTION: Craig Smith moved to change the amount of \$2,67.58 to \$2,607.58 in the financial report for September. Trevor Brown seconded. Motion carried.

MOTION: Robert Jumper moved to approve the September financial report as amended. Trevor Brown seconded. The motion carried.

Updates from Individual Board Members, Partners and Staff Re: Helene

Mr. Breedlove explained that the Crisis Communication Plan, adopted in 2019, was activated due to the flooding caused by Hurricane Helene. The TDA staff has been working methodically following the plan since Saturday, October 3, putting together documents to give pertinent information to stakeholders. There is no organization in Jackson County that puts all information in one place, so the TDA took on the responsibility for stakeholders.

The social media message crafted had to explain that Jackson County was not as seriously affected by the flooding and that Jackson County was open and not in danger, so that visitors could make a thoughtful decision about coming here safely. October is crucial to businesses to be profitable.

Ms. Addy presented examples of social media responses to messages received inquiring about what is the status of Jackson County. Crisis updates evolved into reassurances that Jackson County is fine and that visitors will have a good time. Different messages were rolled out showing how JC was helping our neighbors affected by the floods, using postings of the airplanes being filled with supplies being unloaded at our airport. There was widespread misinformation about relief efforts in NC, necessitating information to combat these falsehoods.

These efforts aimed at reassuring potential visitors were very successful and cost effective. There were over 3.8 million views and engagements increased 145%. Most comments on social media were very positive and encouraging.

On October 15, the messaging stated that every business and all the trails were open. PR campaigns by LHG will welcome visitors back in time for Fall. Influencers will be visiting in October and November to show things are back to normal.

The Occupancy Tax increase was approved by the county commissioners and will take effect July 1, 2025. Also approved were the board structure changes so the TDA can recruit individuals to fill vacancies. Mr. Breedlove thanked Commissioner Jones for his efforts getting the changes approved.

John Kautz (BGRM) commented that the brand refresh that should be ready mid-November. Gina Stouffer (LHG) updated the board on PR activities in addition to the influencer visits.

Amended Agenda Overview

There are \$56,411.00 from advertising revenue from Visitor Guide ad sales since the TDA began receiving a portion of those funds in 2019. They are unallocated. JCTDA staff created a plan about how to use these funds to help the WNC region impacted by the floods. The communities that needed the funds the most were selected and the funds to be distributed to non-profit organizations. Henderson County, Lake Lure and Chimney Rock, Swannanoa and Haywood are the specific counties to receive funding. The Jackson County Chamber of Commerce will receive funds to benefit businesses in Dillsboro that were flooded. Other organizations to receive funding benefit business and individuals, such as Legal Aid of NC, Mountain Projects, Manna Food Bank, Samaritans Purse, Mountain Biworks, Transylvania Tomorrow, United Way of Asheville and Buncomb, WAMY Community Response, and Wilmington Response.

***MOTION:** Robert Jumper moved to approve the budget amendment and donations as listed. Craig Smith seconded. Motion carried.*

Updates from all Board Members

Ashlie Mitchell commented that the Cashiers Valley Leaf Festival was successful. There were 86 food vendors, some of whom came from cancelled events due to flooding.

Mandi Cantrell expressed her thanks to Mr. Breedlove and the board for their support. She stated that her properties saw some cancellations; however, those cancelling expressed an interest in returning in the Spring.

Julie Spiro expressed her thanks to the TDA team for their leadership during the crisis.

Daniel Fletcher said that Hotel Cashiers was off-line for water and power for eight days, so their set back was higher than other lodgings in Cashiers. While they were closed, the staff volunteered in Swannanoa, which suffered significant damage.

Commissioner Jones commented that 911, cell service and internet was completely down in JC. A lesson learned is that communication systems need to be reviewed, and alternatives should be implemented.

Robert Jumper expressed his feeling that the Crisis Management Plan was an important document to follow, and he is happy that the document exists. Mr. Jumper lost his home and car in the flood in Waynesville and had to stay in a hotel for 10 days. He longs for a sense of normalcy. The EBCI Chief made the decision to go ahead and hold the Cherokee Fair to get the people back to some aspect of normalcy. The tribe volunteered in the clean up efforts in the hard-hit areas. Mr. Jumper is proud of the tribe and their contributions.

Trevor Brown reported that JC Parks and Recreation were concerned about the parks and wilderness areas being closed. East Laport and Webster river accesses are still closed. Mr. Brown thanked the TDA staff for providing timely and accurate information.

Craig Smith found that the lack of communications impacted people emotionally more than expected. He related a story about a wedding held at Bear Lake during the power outage. Weddings must go on.

Mr. Breedlove announced that the Executive Committee will meet after this meeting to discuss rebranding.

Adjourn

Since the meeting is continuing with the Executive Committee and there is no need of a quorum, no motion is needed.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held November 13, 2024 in person at JCTDA headquarters unless otherwise posted.



Ashlie Mitchell, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board
Approved: November 13, 2024