



## MEETING MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority  
Board of Directors Meeting  
September 17, 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, Secretary, Mandi Cantrell, Daniel Fletcher, Darlene Fox, Jack Austin, Todd Vinyard, Trevor Brown, Dale Collins, Craig Smith, and Megan Orr

**Members absent:** Jenny Lynn Hooper, Susan Sapienza, Peter Evers

**Others in attendance:** Cheryl Osborne, Minutes Clerk; Ashley Svarney, LHG; Alexandra Noto, Madden Media; Samantha Nelson, JCTDA Social Media Manager; Tiffany Henry, Jackson County Economic Development

### Approve Agenda

**MOTION:** Craig Smith moved to approve the agenda. Dale Collins seconded. Motion carried.

### Public Comment

None

### County Commissioner Updates

Jenny Lynn Hooper was absent.

### Review and Approval of August 27, 2025 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 motioned to approve the August 27, 2025 meeting minutes. Jack Austin seconded. The motion carried.

## Review and Approval of August 31, 2025 Financial Report

Ms. Fox presented the financial report as follows. Highlights for August include Occupancy Tax collections of \$561,413.72 with penalties of \$1,044.20 and YTD collection totals of \$866,810.00 which is 24.93% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$96,486. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$109,185 and the VACASA, NC total was \$12,510. 100 accounts reported rentals for July rentals (increase of 9 accounts from last year). Collections were up 49.01% from the same period in 2024. The tax rate increased from 4% to 6%, effective July 1. The August 31, 2025 cash balance is \$663,293.97 with investments totaling \$2,900.00. August expenses were \$153,934 with FYTD expenses totaling \$337,741 with encumbrances of \$26,097 for a combined total of \$363,838 equaling 10.27% of the budget.

Mr. Breedlove noted that Airbnb total for July is the highest amount ever, due in part to the six-percent tax rate.

***MOTION:** Dale Collins moved to approve the August 31, 2025 financial report. Craig Smith seconded. The motion carried.*

## Grant Application

### From Rails to Breweries: Sylva's Story on Foot

A grant application was received from the Mountain Heritage Center at WCU for \$2,797.00 for a series of history tours of downtown Sylva after an intern researches and drafts a script for the tours in consultation with Sylva Economic Director. There will be a total of 12 guided tours beginning in the Spring of 2026 and concluding in April 2026. The tours will be free for participants.

Mr. Breedlove commented to the applicant that 12 tours is limited in scope and will be over after the 12 tours. The applicant at Breedlove's request stated that they would put together some print and digital tour information that could be accessed after the in-person tours are completed. There would also be a marketing campaign for the tours to get people interested.

Mr. Jumper stated that he had no issues with funding the application.

***MOTION:** Megan Orr motioned to approve the From Rails to Breweries: Sylva's Story on Foot grant request. Daniel Fletcher seconded. Motion carried.*

## JCTDA Director's Update

The JCTDA Director's Brief with updates on industry metrics and lodging performance was attached to the agenda. Mr. Breedlove presented the Director's Brief, highlighting the following:

- There are three open seats on the Board. An on-line application/registration has been created so that interested parties can apply. Three outstanding candidates have applied. The position of Chair is still open. Mr. Jumper will discuss the requirements for the position.
- The TDA had a booth at the Outdoor Economy Conference this week. Mr. Breedlove shared a photo of the booth and branding materials. Mr. Brown, Mr. Breedlove, Ms. Henry, and others

have been manning the booth and received much positive feedback on the promotional items and the new logo.

- A reminder that the monthly report, which included information on occupancy tax and social media statistics, is issued on the 26<sup>th</sup> of the month. The Smith Travel Research information comes out at the same time, so it is too close to the deadline for the TDA monthly report. Mr. Breedlove will send the Board Report separately.
- Room occupancy was 53% in July compared to 55% last year. Mr. Breedlove considers this a very positive trend considering the surrounding countries' statistics are much lower. The average daily room rate is up from \$169 to \$181.
- The 2025 fall season is projected to be very favorable for the tourists who come to leaf peep. The photo wall at the JC Chamber has been updated with fall and winter photos to get visitors interested in Fall and Secret Season.
- An lodging specials page has been added to the JCTDA website for hotels, resorts, etc. to add their deals to the page.

### **Social Media Report**

Ms. Nelson reported on the improved social media metrics. There is an increase in followers on Facebook and Instagram. Views on all social media continue to increase. Highlights for August are as follows:

- The top performing post about the fall color forecast on Facebook which got 559,000 likes.
- There was a giveaway on Instagram with 729 followers. The prize package included a stay at Hotel Sylva and a choice of a Forest Therapy session or a VISA gift card.
- Filmed a variety of videos which are featured on the TDA YouTube channel and are available in September.

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

The Director's Report was attached to the agenda for this meeting. Mr. Vinyard gave the highlights as follows:

- The 2025 season of Concerts on the Creek wrapped up on September 5, and we're grateful to the Town of Sylva and Jackson County Parks and Recreation for their continued partnership in making this beloved community event possible. We're already looking forward to next year's lineup and the energy it brings to downtown Sylva.
- Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Days will expand into a weeklong celebration, including Pickin' in the Park on Friday, September 26 at 6 p.m. in Bridge Park, featuring The Well Drinkers. This extended format promises to draw even more visitors and showcase the cultural richness of our region.
  - Sept. 19 – Grand Reopening Celebration at Speedy's Pizza and Pub in Sylva
  - Sept. 25 – Friends Night Out in downtown Sylva, with extended store hours and a Chamber receipt raffle featuring prizes valued over \$500
  - Sept. 26 – Jackson County Chamber Night at Smoky Mountain High School's football game vs. Tuscola. Chamber members will host tables during the game to connect with the community and spotlight local businesses while cheering on the Mustangs.

- Nov. 13 – Our Chamber Connects after hours event to promote member collaboration will be held at new member Balsam Mountain Inn. Members will be bringing items to donate to the Jackson County Department on Aging Christmas Drive to help seniors in need in our community. Smoky Mountain High School athletes will be wrapping the gifts.

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

Ms. Sapienza was unexpectedly absent due to an emergency and did not submit a report.

### **Partner Updates – LHG/Madden**

The Lou Hammond Group report was given by Ashley Svarney. Highlights are below:

#### **Media/Influencer Visits:**

- Terry Ward, freelance (CNN, AFAR, National Geographic) – agency sent Secret Season mailer address request and journalist showed interest in visiting for Secret Season
- Daria Smith, editor at Late Checkout and freelance (Forbes, Garden & Gun, Southern Living) – agency sent Blue Mind Theory pitch and journalist inquired in a spring visit
- Gwen Pratesi, freelance (US News, Reader’s Digest) --agency followed up with Secret Season mailer address request and discussed visit for Spring 2026
- Erica Zazo, freelance (Backpacker, Forbes, Outside) – agency followed up about 2026 visit

#### **Media Relations/Requests**

- Steve Doocy, Fox & Friends – LHG pitched Sylva for Main Street USA segment
- Stacey Leasca, Hotels Above Par – LHG pitched Hotel Cashiers for a story about boutique hotels where food is the star
- Cynthia Barnes, freelance (National Geographic, Food & Wine) – LHG pitched Cashiers for a story about affordable luxury destinations in comparison to other destinations like Aspen or Jackson Hole
- Sheeka Sanahori, The Local Palate – LHG coordinated phone interview with Chef Santiago for upcoming story about Meatballs
- Renee Onque, CNBC – LHG pitched forest bathing, coordinated an interview with Dr. Ellison and secured two stories
- Jennifer Kornegay, Southern Living – LHG provided images for story about Lake Glenville and Cashiers
- Kelsey Glennon, Southern Living – LHG pitched Sylva for a small-town guide

- CNN Travel – LHG pitched Sylva for Best Towns in 2026 list
- Patricia Doherty, Travel + Leisure – LHG pitched Jackson County for Best Places to Visit in January column, highlighting Secret Season
- Matt Ortile, Conde Nast Traveler – LHG pitched Jackson County for Best Places to Visit in January column, highlighting Secret Season
- Mark Ellwood, AFAR – LHG pitched Jackson County for Where to Go in January column, highlighting Secret Season
- Good Morning America – LHG pitched Jackson County's superlatives for 50 States in 50 Weeks segment

### **Madden Media**

The update for August was presented by Alexandra Noto. In August, the team spent time launching placements such as:

- Our State - Sponsored Content
- Foodie's Guide Visit NC Co-Op
- Our State Co-Op Article with WNC Destinations
- Sponsored Content in Charlotte, NC - Visit NC Co-Op for Leaf Festival + Colorfest
- Developed one-off creative projects such as: New signage in the Asheville Regional Airport
- Step + Repeat signage for the Outdoor Economy Conference

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

Mr. Jumper discussed the criteria for the position of Board Chair since his tenure as Chair expires in December 2025 and a new Chair is needed. Nominations need to be recommended to the County Commissioners by October 1. Mr. Jumper expressed his joy and pleasure in serving the community as Chair. He went on to explain that the job was not difficult and the partners and Mr. Breedlove made the job easy.

Jack Austin updated the board on the progress toward opening TJ Baileys, a three story retail business in Cashiers. He stated that the Shadow of the Bear Festival (held the weekend after Memorial Day) is looking for a suitable location.

Megan Orr announced that a Social Connect for Visit Smokies will be held at Oconaluftee Village on Thursday, September 18.

Craig Smith announced that Ilda has opened a wine and pasta bar beside Sante wine shop.

Mr. Jumper stated that Governor Stein was in Cherokee yesterday.

**Adjourn**

***MOTION:** Craig Smith motioned to adjourn. Trevor Brown seconded. Motion carried.*

The meeting was adjourned at 1:40 PM.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on October 15, 2025 in person at JCTDA headquarters unless otherwise posted.



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Craig Smith, Secretary  
Jackson County TDA Board  
Approved: November 19, 2025