

**JOHNSTON COUNTY TOURISM AUTHORITY  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
Noon, April 10, 2024**

**Present:** B Cook, M Smith, WE Bud Andrews, K Pickett,  
J Hoke, J Jenkins, J Hamilton, C McLamb  
**Absent:** M McDonnell, J Pritchett, J Lassiter  
**Staff:** D Bailey-Taylor, A Phillips

**I. Call to Order – J Hoke, Sec/Tres**

J Hoke called the meeting to order at 12:25 pm and stated that a quorum was present. J Hoke asked for any possible Conflict of Interest concerning the agenda. None were heard.

J Hoke asked for a motion to adopt the agenda as presented.

*K Pickett made a motion to adopt the agenda. M Smith seconded. Motion passed unanimously.*

J Hoke asked for a motion to accept the March minutes that were previously sent to the board.

*M Smith motioned to accept the March minutes as presented with corrections. K Pickett seconded. Motion passed unanimously.*

**II. Finances – March Financial Report – D Bailey-Taylor**

Month-to-date revenue for March was \$88,190.46. Month-to-Date Operation Expenses was \$121,786.11. The net negative variance for the month was -\$33,595.65. Year-to-date revenue was \$1,409,764.52. Year-to-date operation Expense was \$1,168,055.58. The Year-to-Date net positive variance was \$241,708.94. The February County 3% revenue was \$92,085.99, Smithfield's 2% revenue was \$28,899.12, Selma's 2% revenue was \$5,919.05, Kenly's 2% revenue was \$2,218.92, Benson's 2% revenue was \$5,427.81.

**III. Special Projects Committee - WE Bud Andrews**

The Special Projects Committee met April 2nd to review the Capital Grant applications for the FY 2025 budget. D Bailey-Taylor presented a summary of the grants to the committee outlining the requests, and the following grants met the Bureau guidelines for funding the levels indicated.

Johnston County Heritage Center – Conservation grant - \$10,000  
Johnston County Heritage Center – Historical markers - \$7,500  
Town of Pine Level – Bleachers for Sam Godwin Park - \$5,000  
Town of Archer Lodge – Dog stations for park and town - \$5,000  
Clayton Chamber of Commerce – Interior/exterior paint and mortar repair - \$15,000  
Town of Benson Parks and Rec – Wireless scoreboards for PK Vyas Park- \$12,500  
Ava Gardner Museum – Conservation grant - \$10,000  
Ava Gardner Museum – Fire suppression system/Theater exhibit casework - \$50,000  
Bentonville Battlefield State Historic Site – Flowers Farm driving tour stop - \$50,000  
Town of Kenly Parks and Rec. – Trail repair and replacing aging infrastructure - \$24,810  
The Clayton Center – Replace carpet in conference rooms - \$24,000  
Clayton Rugby Football Club – Install lighting for Wilson's Mills town park - \$5,000

The proposed 2024-25 Budget for Capital Grants is \$218,810. The bureau also received a grant application from the Town of Princeton. The request was for funding for a wayfinding sign at the entrance to the town. Wayfinding is not supported by grant guidelines, therefore the committee did not recommend approval of this grant.

***J Jenkins made a motion that the committee recommends to the full board to approve the grant requests listed for a total of \$218,810. M Smith seconded. Motion approved.***

The Board considered applications for two additional Matching Marketing grants.

***K Pickett motioned to fund the matching marketing grant for State Annual Singing Convention for \$500 as presented. J Jenkins seconded. Motion passed unanimously.***

***K Pickett motioned to fund the matching marketing grant for Clayton Harvest Festival for \$3,000 as presented. J Jenkins seconded. Motion passed unanimously.***

#### **IV. Marketing Committee – M Smith**

The Marketing Committee met on March 27<sup>th</sup>. It was noted that D Bailey-Taylor shared a PowerPoint presentation on new strategic marketing strategies for FY 25. With the use of new first party data the bureau will focus on driving more overnight rooms to our hotel partners. D Bailey-Taylor explained that the time of “revenge travel” following COVID has ended and the travel industry has moved into a slow time during this mild recession. The county’s ADR remains strong however occupancy is down a few points.

B Cook suggested the bureau plan to host reception for hotels, restaurants and attractions, sharing with them what the bureau does and how it can benefit our partners. The FY25 direct paid advertising line-item that was recommended was \$300,000.

***J Hamilton motioned to accept the marketing budget of \$300,000 for FY 2024-25 as presented to the board. J Jenkins seconded. Motion passed unanimously.***

#### **V. Sports Council - D Bailey-Taylor**

D Bailey-Taylor noted that the Sports Council met on March 20<sup>th</sup>. J Jenkins stated that he attended the meeting and that discussion about the MTS and trails between Smithfield and Benson was very informative.

#### **VI. Staff Report - D Bailey-Taylor**

D Bailey-Taylor reported the Bureau is moving forward with Bandwango beginning some onboarding for the new Beer, Wine, Shine Trail pass, which will better connect visitors to the opportunities along the trail, via a QR code, and GPS check-in system. This should be up and running in the next 45-60 days. Once the trail locations are onboarded, the bureau will expand to restaurants that serve local craft beverages. The program will allow 4 ticketed events that are related to the Trail which can be featured in the next 12 months.

Critical Mention's online and print audience was 7 million, with a value of \$36,000. Current promotions include the Smithfield Ham & Yam Festival and all things strawberries with the JoCo Grows Agriculture campaigns, via the grants awarded to the Bureau. D Bailey-Taylor reported that the community support partnership with WRAL will continue this fall with Benson Mule Days and Selma Railroad Days.

D Bailey-Taylor pointed out in the staff report how social media carousels continue to produce great impressions and engagement - with the Ava Gardner Museum having 344,920 impressions and the Benson Detours with 108,229 impressions. Most click throughs were for the Get to Know Selma carousel with 1,430 clicks, and the Ava Gardner Museum with 2,718 clicks. Coming in third on clicks was the County-wide Clean up with 1,179.

K Radford is conducting follow-up to recent trade shows sending out emails and brochures to leads. D Bailey-Taylor noted the bureau sent a survey out to hotel operators to help better understand how they use the opportunities offered by the Bureau and more about their overnight visitor. So far just 3 hotels have shared that they would like to see more restaurants, nightlife, group tour marketing, and a meeting facility to host groups, etc. The bureau also plans to engage members of the Sports Council with similar questions on how they might bid on more tournaments and use the resources of the Bureau.

The Hospitality Association will be collecting items for Harbor Shelter on April 23rd. If anyone would like to participate please drop off items here to the Visitor Center.

A Brame is currently in Charleston, SC with media visits which include *The Local Palate* and *Garden & Gun* magazines, two publications that have been targeted to feature editorial coverage on our destinations.

D Bailey-Taylor will be meeting with the Elevate Benson group on Tuesday, April 16th, to go over ways they can connect with the Bureau – checking the VisitBenson.org website for revisions to content, new photos, and posting up events. B Cook noted that responsibility lies with business owners as well to pitch stories to the Bureau team so they will get opportunities to be featured on the website.

#### **VII. New Business**

The board was presented with the proposed budget for FY 2024-25. After a brief review of the budget it was presented for a motion to approve.

*K Pickett motioned to accept the FY 2024-25 Budget as presented to the board. J Hoke seconded. Motion passed unanimously.*

#### **VIII. Old Business**

None

#### **IX. Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 1:23 pm.

*Respectfully submitted,  
James Hoke, Secretary/Treasurer*

**Next Meeting  
Johnston County Tourism Authority  
Wednesday, May 8, 2024  
Visitors Bureau Administrative Offices - 12 Noon**