

**JOHNSTON COUNTY TOURISM AUTHORITY
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
12 Noon, December 10, 2025**

Present: J Hoke, M Smith, WE Andrews, J Pritchett, J Lassiter, K Pickett, P Boucher

Absent: C McLamb, J Jenkins, A Whitehurst

Staff: A Mullins, A Phillips, A Brame

Guest: Berkeley Young, Madelyn Young

Zoom: Lou Hammond Group

I. Call to Order – J Hoke, Chairperson

J Hoke called the meeting to order at 12:16 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 accept the November minutes that were previously sent to the board.

K Pickett motioned to accept the November minutes as presented. WE Andrews seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Finances – November Financial Reports – A Mullins

Month-to-date revenue for November was \$173,003.35. Month-to-Date Operation Expenses were \$187,845.68. The net variance for the month was -\$14,842.33. Year-to-date revenue was \$921,130.83. Year-to-date Operation Expense was \$920,003.01. The Year-to-Date net variance was \$1,127.82. October Johnston County 3% revenue was \$127,460.17, Smithfield's 2% revenue was \$36,722.34, Selma's 2% revenue was \$8,487.08, Kenly's 2% revenue was \$2,388.50, Benson's 2% revenue was \$8,798.33, and Clayton's 2% revenue was \$5,574.49.

Mullins asked A. Phillips to review the procedures for approving grant payments to the North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources (DNCR). Phillips reported that DNCR would submit approved invoices to be paid from the Bentonville Grant funds. Johnston County Finance requested that the Tourism Department also provide an internal approval for these payments. After discussion, the board agreed that payment approvals should be completed by a designated member of the Tourism Authority.

M Smith made a motion that one of the Executive Committee members should sign invoices. J Lassiter seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Executive Committee – J Hoke, Chairperson

There were no updates from the Executive Committee.

IV. Special Projects Committee - WE Andrews

No updates were heard.

V. Marketing Committee – M Smith

No updates were heard.

VI. Sports Council – A Mullins

A Mullins and A Brame shared that after thoughtful discussion, the Johnston County Visitors Bureau, in partnership with the Johnston County Parks and Open Spaces Department, has decided to sunset the Sports Council at the end of 2025.

The decision comes after recognizing that the original reasons for forming and continuing the council — including the need for regular bi-monthly meetings — have come to a natural conclusion.

The council's collaborative work over the past decade has strengthened sports tourism, recreation programming, facility development, and community partnerships throughout the county. Including the council's work on the county's first-ever countywide parks and recreation master plan back in 2015. Mullins shared that we are grateful for the time, input, and leadership has been contributed.

VII. Staff Report - A Mullins

A Mullins asked that in order to save time that board members review the staff report and reach out to him with any questions or concerns.

VIII. New Business

J. Hoke welcomed Berkeley Young, President of Young Strategies, Inc. Young provided an overview of the DestinationNext and Strategic Planning Project for Explore Johnston County. He emphasized the need to develop a five-year strategic plan that would unify all 11 towns while highlighting the unique stories and experiences each community offers.

Young noted that his team was currently conducting on-site visits. The next steps include distributing a 90-question survey, hosting a workshop in February, and presenting a recommended strategy in March. The board engaged in a question-and-answer session with Young.

IX. Old Business

A. Brame welcomed representatives from the Lou Hammond Group via Zoom. She stated that she would continue to serve as the primary representative of the Visitors Bureau and, should the bureau engage LHG, she would provide the agency with stories and photos for promotional use. Brame noted that LHG would monitor industry trends, pitch the bureau's story, and provide access to various publications. She emphasized that a strong PR program would reduce reliance on Visit NC and that LHG would serve as an extension of the bureau—not a replacement—by offering earned media support in addition to paid media opportunities.

Following the presentation, board members expressed that the information provided was highly informative. Discussion included the cost of the proposed partnership and funding options. Brame noted that unutilized funds previously allocated for Google Ads within the current budget could be reallocated to cover costs from January through June 2026. She added that the FY 2026–27 budget would need to be reviewed to incorporate future expenses.

M. Smith made a motion to proceed with establishing a partnership with the Lou Hammond Group, with funds reallocated from the Google Ads budget line to cover initial costs. K. Pickett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

X. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 1:52 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Maria Smith, Secretary/Treasurer

**Next Meeting
Johnston County Tourism Authority
Wednesday, January 14, 2026
Visitors Bureau Administrative Offices - 12 Noon**