

**JOHNSTON COUNTY TOURISM AUTHORITY
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
12N, May 13, 2025**

Present: WE Andrews, J Hamilton, J Hoke, J Pritchett, M Smith, K Pickett,
B Cook, M McDonnell
Absent: C McLamb, J Jenkins, J Lassiter
Staff: A Brame, K Radford

I. Call to Order – B Cook, Chairman

B Cook called the meeting to order at 12:15 pm and stated that a quorum was present. B Cook asked for any possible Conflict of Interest concerning the agenda. None were heard.

B Cook asked for a motion to adopt the agenda as presented.

J Hamilton made a motion to adopt the agenda. WE Andrews seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

B Cook asked for a motion to accept the April minutes that were previously sent to the board.

M Smith motioned to accept the April minutes as presented. M McDonnell seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Finances – April Financial Reports – A Brame

Month-to-date revenue for April was \$176,093.25. Month-to-Date Operation Expenses were \$239,202.17. The net negative variance for the month was -\$63,108.92. Year-to-date revenue was \$1,584,136.25. Year-to-date Operation Expense was \$1,670,956.40. The Year-to-Date net negative variance was -\$86,820.15. March Johnston County 3% revenue was \$120,574.97, Smithfield's 2% revenue was 36,766.54, Selma's 2% revenue was \$6086.86, Kenly's 2% revenue was \$2,823.02, Benson's 2% revenue was \$10,285.09, and Clayton's revenue was \$3,331.62.

III. Executive Committee – B Cook, Chairman

The board received an update on the ongoing executive search process. Two candidates are currently under strong consideration, with interviews actively underway and resumes previously shared with the board. B Cook noted that the two candidates present significantly different profiles. He described one candidate as likely to rely more heavily on staff in the beginning but possessing strong interpersonal skills and the potential to be developed into an effective spokesperson. Regarding the second candidate, Ben described her as younger and highly data-driven. He shared that she presented herself as articulate, confident, and well-prepared throughout the interview process. J Hoke. inquired whether either candidate had ties to the area. B Cook confirmed that the first candidate has connections to Raleigh, while the second has family on the East Coast.

B Cook informed the board that three additional interviews are scheduled, and while they appear promising, most candidates interviewed thus far do not possess prior CEO experience. He referenced a comment from C Cavanaugh, who noted that the current compensation level may not be sufficient to attract experienced executives and suggested that increasing the salary could broaden the applicant pool. The board agreed to proceed with the three remaining interviews and, if no suitable candidate is identified, revisit the conversation about adjusting compensation to attract more qualified applicants. J Hamilton asked about a transition period, to which B Cook responded that it would be a 90-day grace period. B Cook concluded by encouraging the board to reflect on whether

the ideal candidate for the role should be more of a salesperson or a manager, as this distinction will be important in finalizing the selection.

IV. Special Projects Committee - WE Andrews

The Special Projects Committee received a Matching Marketing Grant application for the Clayton Harvest Festival. This event has been sponsored in the past.

WE Andrews motioned to fund the matching marketing grant for the 2025 Clayton Harvest Festival Matching Marketing Grant for \$3,000. K Pickett seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

WE Andrews reported that the recent DOGE-related developments have had an impact on some of the organization's tourism partners. As a result, he suggested the board consider establishing a separate grant program to provide support during this transitional period. He specifically referenced the Ava Gardner Museum, which is facing a \$25,000 shortfall this year related to efforts in documenting and preserving its collection. The matter was tabled for further discussion during the next Special Projects Committee meeting.

V. Marketing Committee – M Smith

The Marketing Committee did not meet this past month. The next scheduled meeting is June 25 at 9 am.

VI. Sports Council - J Jenkins

The next Sports Council meeting is scheduled for May 21 at noon.

A Brame reported that the organization has purchased a Placer.ai subscription, allowing towns to access data without needing their own accounts. Reports are currently being pushed to them, and A O'Neal, County Parks Director, expressed interest in collaborating further. A Brame noted that Placer.ai requires matching email domains, so full account sharing isn't possible. For now, reports will be generated monthly, with Brame handling distribution. If towns and/or the county's Parks and Open Spaces Dept. request services beyond the base subscription, they may be asked to share in the cost. Further discussions are ongoing, and the board will be kept informed.

VII. Staff Report - A Brame

A Brame reported that staff continue to perform well and are collaboratively managing the bureau's daily operations during the ongoing CEO search. The new Visitors Guide is expected to be delivered from the printer within the next week. A Brame and E Dean have placed ads and replaced damaged billboard vinyls. A Brame and A Phillips are also actively managing the current budget and have begun work on executing the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. K Radford recently visited the I-95 North and South North Carolina Welcome Centers with tourism partners from Hampton Inn Smithfield, Hampton Inn Benson, and the Rudy Theatre in celebration of National Travel & Tourism Week. J McGowen concluded her role at the end of April, but left the team well-positioned, with social media content scheduled through the end of August. E Prickett, the NCSU intern, has stepped in to assist with content and successfully completed the Bureau's Resident Sentiment Survey. Regarding marketing initiatives, A Brame reported that the bureau's partnership with Expedia has so far generated significant returns. To date, \$27,000 has been invested, resulting in approximately \$140,000 in hotel revenue. A total of 164 room nights have been booked across hotels in Smithfield, Selma, Clayton, and Benson. The campaign has also generated 1 million impressions and over 800 clicks to the destination's landing page, helping to cultivate future interest and travel to the area.

VIII. New Business

The board discussed alternative dates for upcoming meetings due to scheduling conflicts. M McDonnell noted he is unavailable on the second Wednesday of each month for the next few months due to standing meetings in Durham. The board agreed to schedule the next meeting for June 18 at noon. B Cook raised the possibility of selecting finalists in June, with potential presentations in June or July, depending on the outcome of the remaining interviews. K Pickett asked about the consistency of applications coming in, to which B Cook responded he was unsure. M McDonnell commented that some candidates were sourced through both personal connections and industry channels, including Destinations International. K Pickett suggested that if a strong candidate is identified within the next three interviews, the application process should be closed. B Cook confirmed that two candidates are already advancing to the next stage, and the board agreed to proceed with scheduling the next tier of interviews.

IX. Old Business

None.

X. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 1:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

James Hoke, Secretary/Treasurer

**Next Meeting
Johnston County Tourism Authority
Wednesday, June 18, 2025
Visitors Bureau Administrative Offices - 12 Noon**