JOHNSTON COUNTY TOURISM AUTHORITY
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
12 Noon, September 9, 2026

Present: **J Lassiter, J Hoke, WE Andrews, P Boucher, A Whitehurst, K Pickett, N Youngblood**
Absent: **J Cobb, M Smith, J Pritchett, C McLamb**
Guest: **Jordan Astoske, Heather Wurr**
Staff: **A Mullins, A Phillips, A Davis**

I. Call to Order –J Hoke, Chairperson
J. Hoke called the meeting to order at 12:19 p.m. and stated that a quorum was present. J. Hoke asked for any potential conflicts of interest concerning the agenda. K Pickett request to abstain from discussion and vote for the Ava Gardner matching marketing grant.

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

K Pickett motioned to accept the August minutes as presented. P Boucher seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

II. Finances – August Financial Reports – A Mullins
Month-to-date revenue for August was $240,221.92. Month-to-Date Operation Expenses were $246,706.31. The net variance for the month was -$6,484.39. Year-to-date revenue was $414,173.80. Year-to-date Operation Expense was $420,621.25. The Year-to-Date net variance was -$6,447.45. June Johnston County 3% revenue was $146,722.89, Smithfield's 2% revenue was not reported, Selma's 2% revenue was $8,962.90, Kenly's 2% revenue was $3,523.94, Benson's 2% revenue not reported, and Clayton's revenue was $5,282.26

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III. Executive Committee – J Lassiter, Vice-Chairperson
No meeting was held.

IV. Special Projects Committee - WE Andrews
The Special Projects Committee received three Matching Marketing Grant applications:

- Ava Gardner Festival – **$1,000**
- Christmas on Main/Kenly – **$1,000**
- Rockin on Raiford Concert Series – **$1,000**

WE Andrews motioned to approve all three matching grants as presented by the Special Projects Committee. N Youngblood seconded. The motion passed unanimously with K Pickett abstaining.

V. Marketing Committee
No meeting was held.

VI. Staff Report - A Mullins
A. Mullins reported that the public relations agency shared that Johnston County was currently being featured in Forbes Magazine Online as the top listing under "Most Unique Events." Benson Mule Days was featured as the top listing and was also used as the primary photo. Broadslab and Bentonville were also mentioned in the article.

A. Mullins shared that K. Radford continues to work on increasing sales leads. She is currently working with Chris Johnson, Economic Development Director, to secure leads related to defense and military events.

The Bureau is also utilizing AI to review the website and identify ways to streamline the site and make trip planning easier for visitors.

A. Davis shared that the first episode of "Driving JoCo" was very successful on social media, particularly on Facebook. The Facebook teaser generated significant engagement and interactions.

VII. New Business
Heather Wurr with Johnston Community College gave a presentation regarding an opportunity to bring a Thomas Dambo troll to Howell Woods Environmental Learning Center.

North Carolina currently features a permanent or long-term family of seven giant trolls constructed from reclaimed materials as part of a story called "The Grandmother Tree." The trolls tower among the trees and have created an experience where art, adventure, and imagination can be enjoyed by visitors.

Bringing a permanent troll to Howell Woods would provide an opportunity to highlight Johnston County's history and culture while attracting visitors who are seeking out the trolls. The installation could help increase visitation to both Johnston County and Howell Woods Environmental Learning Center.

Jordan Astoske, Director of Howell Woods, shared his thoughts on how the project could benefit the learning center. He also invited the JCVB Board to visit and explore the Howell Woods facility.

VIII. Old Business
K. Pickett shared updated information regarding the TOBS baseball stadium. Discussion was held regarding project funding and the anticipated completion date. .

IX. Adjourn
The meeting adjourned at 1:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
James Hoke, Chairperson

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