

**RECORD OF MINUTES
DARE COUNTY TOURISM BOARD
THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2026
9:00 A.M.
OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES
MANTEO, NC 27954**

ATTENDING: Dennis Robinson, Chair; John Head, Vice Chair; Tod Clissold, Treasurer; Tess Judge, Assistant Treasurer; Tonia Cohen, Secretary; Brenda Chasen, Summer Copeland, Dillon Heikens [Town of Kill Devil Hills Representative], Richard Hess, Jeff Pruitt, Megan Vaughan, and Jay Wheless, Legal Counsel.

EXCUSED ABSENCE: Mark Batenic, and Rob Ross.

STAFF:

Lee Nettles, Executive Director
Diane Bognich, Director of Administration
Amy Wood, Clerk to the Board/Administrative Specialist
Anna Leigh Chapman, Public Relations Assistant
Lorrie Love, Tourism Sales and Events Manager
Austin Horner, Tourism Services Coordinator

OTHERS ATTENDING: Luke Halton, The OBX Way

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. The Board then recited the pledge of allegiance, followed by a moment of silence.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Mr. Hess moved to approve the agenda. Second by Ms. Chasen. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Ms. Chasen moved to approve the meeting minutes from March 26, 2026 meeting. Second by Ms. Judge. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

PUBLIC COMMENTS: There were no public comments made. No written comments were received.

CHAIR'S REPORT: The Chair welcomed Dillon Heikens to the Board. Mr. Heikens was appointed in early April 2026 to represent the Town of Kill Devil Hills on the Tourism Board.

BUDGET AND FINANCE REPORT: Mr. Clissold reviewed the meals and occupancy receipts received. Receipts for fiscal year 2025-2026 were down 2.00% compared to 2024-2025.

Mr. Clissold and Staff reviewed Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget Amendment #2. This amendment adjusts for additional capital projects, ancillary items associated with the boardwalk, and additional expenses due to a fire at the electrical control box. Ms. Judge asked if the insurance covered all but the deductible. Diane Bognich affirmed that. Following the review, Mr. Clissold moved to approve Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget Amendment #2. Second by Mr. Hess. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

BUDGET AND FINANCE REPORT (continued): Diane Bognich gave a presentation on proposed Fiscal Year 2026-2027 budget (presentation on file). The presentation showed how the meal and occupancy taxes were divided among the County, Municipalities, and Visitors Bureau and the Bureau's portion was then divided between the General Fund and Restricted Fund. She then reviewed what line items and their purpose were in each fund and what could be done with those funds.

Following review, Mr. Head moved to set the public hearing on the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 proposed budget for Thursday, May 21, 2026 at 9:15 in the Creech Memorial Boardroom, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau Administrative Office, Manteo. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU UPDATES: Lee Nettles:

- provided more information about the ribbon cutting for the Boardwalk as April 22, 2026.
- noted a date was set for the small group meeting with Nags Head and Bureau/Board
- gave a recap of the marketing committee meeting
- noted upcoming art shows [at Jockey's Ridge], events, and familiarization/content creation tours [GoPro]
- interview with local media regarding the boardwalk and event site
- reviewed the marketing dashboard and visitation figures. The Board discussed how length of stay and booking windows impacted the rental home and hotel industries.

On behalf of Jeff Schwartzenberger, Lee Nettles reported on:

- Tourism Cares 2026 North American Meaningful Travel Summit in Asheville, NC
- 4th Annual Nonprofit Mission Mixer on April 30, 2026 at the Outer Banks Brewing Station
- 'Tourism Talks' at Dare County High Schools in May 2026.

Lorrie Love:

- provided more details and encouraged Board members to attend the ribbon cutting for the boardwalk and Earth & Arts OBX on April 22, 2026
- noted the return of the school and senior groups motorcoaches to the area
- announced 38 restaurants would be participating in National Soft Shell Week and the debut of the Soft-Shell Express and Sheldon, the mascot for the week's events.

Anna Leigh (on behalf of Aaron Tuell) reviewed:

- "Best Of" rankings in *Coastal Living*, *Breaking AC*, *Traveler*, and *Southern Living* magazines
- filming for WJLA-TV, and preparations for filming of the Hampton Roads Show, and GoPro content capture
- new Outer Banks imagery on display at Gates A and B at Norfolk International Airport

OLD BUSINESS: There was no old business before the Board.

NEW BUSINESS: There was no new business before the Board.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS:

- Mr. Clissold reported on the upcoming Dare A250 Faire and suggested an episode focusing on the towns and villages of Dare County for the next season of *The Outer Edge*
- Mr. Head reported more inventory for long term rentals in the market
- Ms. Chasen noted the Town of Duck was working on an educational guide for the Town featuring the winged horses from the Centennial of Flight celebration
- Ms. Vaughan noted it was shaping up to a busy season in the Town of Nags Head and looked forward to all the events coming to the Soundside Event Site

- Ms. Copeland reported that the Restaurant Association was finalizing dates for Taste of the Beach and were working on bringing back the Grand Tasting event
- Mr. Heikens noted he looked forward to working with the Board. Jay Wheless spoke of working with Mr. Heikens on other board and looked forward to his work with the Tourism Board.
- Mr. Pruitt updated the Board on the progress of the exhibit at the Kitty Hawk Bathhouse
- Mr. Hess noted the retirement party for Karen Brown
- Ms. Judge reported on a recent decision by the Albemarle Rural Planning Organization (ARPO) decided to keep the Mid-Currituck Bridge as a regional priority. The bridge faces an \$800,000 shortfall. She also reported on the North Carolina Department of Transportation Board and staff meeting taking place in Dare County.

A few Board members asked the status of the pickleball courts. Lee Nettles noted that Mr. Ross had left an update and that the Engineering was completed and bids were put out on April 12 and the target date to start work was June 1.

SET DATE, TIME, AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING: The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, May 21, 2026 at 9:00 a.m. in Curtis Creech Memorial Boardroom, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau Administrative Office, Manteo, NC. The Public Hearing for the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 proposed budget will be at 9:15 a.m. that day.

The Chair asked if there was any further business before the Board. Hearing none, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:28 a.m.

ATTESTED:


Clerk, Dare County Tourism Board