

**RECORD OF MINUTES  
DARE COUNTY TOURISM BOARD  
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2026  
9:00 A.M.  
OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES  
MANTEO, NC 27954**

**ATTENDING:**

John Head, Vice Chair; Tod Clissold, Treasurer; Tess Judge, Assistant Treasurer; Tonia Cohen, Secretary; Mark Batenic, Brenda Chasen, Summer Copeland, Richard Hess, Jeff Pruitt, Rob Ross, Megan Vaughan, and Jay Wheless, Legal Counsel.

**EXCUSED ABSENCE:** Dennis Robinson, Chair; Tess Judge, and Town of Kill Devil Hills Representative.

**STAFF:**

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

**OTHERS ATTENDING:** None.

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:** Ms. Chasen moved to approve the agenda. Second by Mr. Hess. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (10-0).

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Mr. Hess moved to approve the meeting minutes from January 15, 2026 meeting. Second by Mr. Batenic. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (10-0).

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

**STEERING COMMITTEE:** Jay Wheless reviewed the Memorandum of Understanding with the Board and Dare County for the pickleball courts at the Soundside Event Site. Following the review, Mr. Hess moved to approve the Memorandum of Understanding. Second by Ms. Chasen. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (10-0).

The Chair and Staff reviewed the Steering Committee recommendations for Tourism Impact Grant extensions for the Town of Nags Head. The extensions were requested to align with bidding, construction, and permitting timelines (requests on file at the Bureau Administrative Offices):

- W. Windjammer Road Sidewalk, extension to June 30, 2026
- W. Baymeadow Drive Sidewalk, extension to June 30, 2026
- Living Shoreline, extension to June 30, 2027

Following review, Ms. Chasen moved to award the extensions as recommended. Second by Mr. Hess. There was no further discussion. The motion passed unanimously (10-0).

**BUDGET AND FINANCE REPORT:** Mr. Clissold reviewed the meals and occupancy receipts received. Receipts for fiscal year 2025-2026 were down 1.61% compared to 2024-2025.

**OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU UPDATES:** Lee Nettles reviewed:

- presentations made to local associations
- data comparing the home size to occupancy rates
- how the share of occupancy collections has changed by booking channel for short term rentals
- marketing dashboard and visitation

The Board discussed a campaign to help promote Hatteras Island in light of the storms and news coverage of the houses destroyed. Staff discussed the creation of videos highlighting the “good” things in Buxton and possible creation of a microsite for Hatteras Island.

Jeff Schwartzberg reviewed:

- work of the Long Range Tourism Management Plan Special Committee and the priorities set for 2026
- recent businesses and associations who made The Outer Banks Promise
- a partnership with Coastal Studies Institute, North Carolina Sea Grant, and Fed by Blue to host an Earth Week Film Screening of “Hope in the Water”

Lorrie Love reviewed:

- attendance at the American Bus Association Marketplace and future marketplace attendance
- Outer Banks National Soft-Shell Week May 11-16<sup>th</sup> and associated events
- 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Outer Banks Tourism Summit to be held at Jennette’s Pier November 5, 2026

Aaron Tuell reviewed:

- “Best of” designations in National Geographic, Islands, and Marlin magazines
- GoPro Creators trip to the Outer Banks in April
- Taping of two episodes for the Washington DC area television stations
- Hampton Roads Show takeover week in May

**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 announced the A250 Celebration would be held at Roanoke Island Festival Park and downtown Manteo
- Ms. Copeland noted Taste of the Beach and Softshell Week events
- Ms. Vaughan thanked the Board for granting the Town of Nags Head extensions on the Tourism Impact Grants
- Mr. Ross thanked Jay Wheless for his work on the Memorandum of Understanding with the County regarding the Pickleball Courts and reviewed the proposed referendum for a .25% sales tax increase to help fund Parks and Recreation projects, emphasizing the increase on would not apply to groceries and gas
- Ms. Cohen noted the arrival of the Spring J-1 workers and that the March was full of group tour bookings at hotels
- Mr. Hess noted the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce was wrapping up its search for an Executive Officer

**SET DATE, TIME, AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:** The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 19, 2026 at 9:00 a.m. in Curtis Creech Memorial Boardroom, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau Administrative Office, Manteo, NC. [*This meeting was moved to March 26, 2026 at 9 a.m. in Curtis Creech Memorial Boardroom, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau Administrative Office, Manteo, NC*]

The Vice Chair asked if there was any further business before the Board. Hearing none, the Vice-Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:17 a.m.

**ATTESTED:**

  
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Clerk, Dare County Tourism Board