

**RECORD OF MINUTES
DARE COUNTY TOURISM BOARD
THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026
9:00 A.M.
OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES
MANTEO, NC 27954**

ATTENDING:

Mark Batenic, Tod Clissold, Tonia Cohen, Summer Copeland, John Head, Richard Hess, Tess Judge, Jeff Pruitt, Dennis Robinson, Rob Ross, Megan Vaughan, and Jay Wheless, Legal Counsel.

EXCUSED ABSENCE: Brenda Chasen, 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.

The Clerk swore in the following Dare County Tourism Board Appointees:

Summer Copeland, Outer Banks Restaurant Association
John Head, Outer Banks Association of REALTORS®
Tess Judge, At Large
Jeff Pruitt, Town of Kitty Hawk
Rob Ross, Dare County Commissioners
Megan Vaughan, Town of Nags Head

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Jay Wheless, Legal Counsel, presented the following motion from the Nominating Committee as to the slate of candidates for the 2026 Steering Committee:

- Secretary: Tonia Cohen. Legal Counsel called for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, Mr. Head moved to close nominations. Legal Counsel called for the vote. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).
- Assistant Treasurer: Tess Judge. Legal Counsel called for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, Ms. Vaughan moved to close nominations. Legal Counsel called for the vote. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (continued):

- Treasurer: Tod Clissold. Legal Counsel called for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, Mr. Batenic moved to close nominations. Legal Counsel called for the vote. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).
- Vice Chair: John Head. Legal Counsel called for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, Mr. Batenic moved to close nominations. Legal Counsel called for the vote. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).
- Chair: Dennis Robinson. Legal Counsel called for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, Ms. Vaughan moved to close nominations. Legal Counsel called for the vote. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Ms. Judge moved to approve the meeting minutes from December 18, 2025 meeting. Second by Mr. Hess. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

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

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. Mr. Ross asked about a discrepancy in the numbers for the August meals collection in Manteo. Diane Bognich noted this was due to a timing discrepancy in the collections.

OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU UPDATES: Lee Nettles:

- Noted the second season of “The Outer Edge” video series and played an episode for the Board.
- Updated progress on the stoplight at the entrance to the Soundside Event site. The Dare County Commissioners gave their consent to the expenditure and there is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Town and Tourism Board. Once installed, the North Carolina Department of Transportation will own and maintain the signal. Mr. Ross noted his surprise at the cost of the light, noting he was not opposed and thought it a good safety measure. The Board touched on other safety measures that can be used in conjunction with the stoplight.
- Gave progress reports on the MOU with the County for the proposed pickleball courts, and the living shoreline project at the Soundside Event Site
- Announced the upcoming Visit NC Tourism Conference in Asheville, March 16-18, 2026
- Reviewed the marketing dashboard and visitation. The Board discussed how AI was impacting Google searches, and trends in booking windows and lengths of stays and size factors in choosing a vacation home for travelers.

Jeff Schwartzberg reviewed:

- The first Long Range Tourism Management Plan Special Committee Meeting in 2026
- “Promise for the Park” Beach Cleanup Day February 21 at Ramp 1 of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore
- VolunteerOBX Portal progress

Lorrie Love reviewed:

- American Bus Association Marketplace attendance and upcoming trade shows
- ‘Restaurant Winter Hours’ link on outerbanks.org and encouraged partners to update their hours for the visitors
- National Soft Shell Week May 11-16, 2026. More information to be released.
- Calendar of events at the Soundside Event Site

Aaron Tuell reviewed:

- Recognition on Beach.com “10 Prettiest White Sand Beaches in the US” for Cape Hatteras National Seashore
- Articles in Meetings Today, Select Traveler, and Our State
- Upcoming media mission in New York City

OLD BUSINESS: Staff noted the fire on the southern electrical panel at the Soundside Event site and the responses to the RFP for repairing the irrigation lines and replacing the controller, and for reconstruction of the platform and electrical work associated with the electrical panels. The Board discussed the work associated with the repairing/replacing irrigation, if there was additional unknown damage, and comfort level of each company with the current irrigation system. Following discussion, Mr. Batenic moved to select Caribbean Landscaping for the repair to, and replacing the controller of, the irrigation system. Second by Mr. Hess. There was no further discussion. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

Mr. Hess moved to select Electrical & Lighting Solutions for reconstruction of the electrical platform and electrical work. Second by Mr. Head. There was no further discussion. The motion passed unanimously (11-0).

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

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS:

- Mr. Clissold noted a strong December for the Town of Manteo and growth of 12 Bars of Christmas
- Mr. Head noted ongoing discussions of workforce housing and the long term rental market availability
- Ms. Vaughan thanked the Board for the warm welcome and looked forward to working with everyone
- Ms. Judge noted her longevity in the tourism industry and how rapidly it was changing. She announced an upcoming North Carolina Department of Transportation Board meeting in Dare County.
- Ms. Copeland introduced herself and noted Taste of the Beach March 13-16, 2025
- Mr. Ross thanked Staff for their work in getting him acquainted with the workings of the Board
- Mr. Pruitt noted, as a crabber, he appreciated the soft shell week promotion
- Ms. Cohen noted her involvement with the Board in different roles
- Mr. Hess noted the search for an Executive Director for the Chamber of Commerce was wrapping up
- Mr. Batenic noted a committee forming to make the US 158 corridor in Southern Shores more welcoming
- Mr. Wheless noted his length of service with the Tourism Board and how hard the Board worked
- The Chair welcomed the new members, his service on the Board, and with Midgett Realty

SET DATE, TIME, AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

- The Board set their meeting schedule for the third Thursday of each month at 9 a.m. in Curtis Creech Memorial Boardroom, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau Administrative Office, Manteo, NC
- The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 9:00 a.m. in Curtis Creech Memorial Boardroom, Outer Banks Visitors Bureau Administrative Office, Manteo, NC

The Chair asked if there was any further business before the Board. Hearing none, the Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:37 a.m.

ATTESTED:

Amy S. Wood
Clerk, Dare County Tourism Board