

**RECORD OF MINUTES
DARE COUNTY TOURISM BOARD
THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 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; Tonia Cohen, Secretary; Brenda Chasen, Summer Copeland, Richard Hess, Jeff Pruitt, Rob Ross, and Jay Wheless, Legal Counsel.

EXCUSED ABSENCE: Tess Judge, Assistant Treasurer; Mark Batenic, Megan Vaughan, 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: Philip Ruckle, *The Coastland Times*.

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. Head moved to approve the agenda. Second by Mr. Hess. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: Mr. Hess moved to approve the meeting minutes from February 19, 2026 meeting. Second by Ms. Chasen. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

Mr. Pruitt moved to approve the meeting minutes from February 27, 2026 Special Meeting. Second by Mr. Head. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

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

CHAIR/STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT: The Chair reported on recent attendance at the Visit NC Tourism Conference and the Town of Nags Head public hearing on permitting for the OBX Rod & Custom Festival.

CHAIR/STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT (continued):

The Chair reviewed the following July 4th Firework Grant Recommendations:

- Avon Property Owners Association \$16,500.00
- Town of Kill Devil Hills \$16,250.00
- Town of Manteo \$20,750.00
- Town of Nags Head \$16,250.00

Mr. Hess moved to approve the recommendations as presented. Second by Ms. Chasen. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

The Chair reviewed the Tourism Impact Grant Extension Request from the Town of Manteo. Mr. Clissold noted that progress was slower than anticipated but work was under way for the project. Ms. Chasen moved to approve an extension to June 30, 2027. Second by Tonia Cohen. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

BUDGET AND FINANCE REPORT: Mr. Clissold reviewed the meals and occupancy receipts received. Receipts for fiscal year 2025-2026 were down 1.48% compared to 2024-2025. The Board discussed what factors were influencing delays in bookings and dining out.

GRANTS & LOCAL PUBLIC RELATIONS REPORT: Mr. Hess reviewed the work of the Grant Committee and the following Event Grant Recommendations:

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Project</i>	<i>Recommended Amount</i>
Bluegrass Island Charitable Organization	2026 OB Bluegrass Festival	\$ 12,500.00
Buxton Civic Association	BCA Polar Plunge 2027	\$ 2,500.00
Chicamacomico Historical Association	2026 Thanksgiving Week	\$ 1,000.00
Community Care Clinic of Dare	2026 Annual Billfish Tournament	\$ 2,000.00
Cross Roads OBX	The Main Event 2026	\$ 10,000.00
Dare County Arts Council	2026 Outer Banks Veterans Week	\$ 2,500.00
	2026 Rock the Cape Gallery Tour	\$ 3,500.00
Eastern Surfing Association OBNC District	2026 Easterns Surfing Championship	\$ 15,000.00
The Elizabethan Gardens	75th Anniversary Diamond Jubilee	\$ 4,000.00
Manteo High School	Manteo Redskin Wrestling Duals Tournament	\$ 3,000.00
Nags Head Surf Fishing Club	2026 F. Boyden Youth Fishing Tournament	\$ 1,500.00
	2026 NH Surf Fishing Tournament	\$ 3,000.00
North Carolina Beach Buggy Association	2026 Red Drum Tournament	\$ 5,000.00
OBX Jeep Invasion	2026 OBX Jeep Invasion	\$ 10,000.00
OBX Room in the Inn	12 Bars of Christmas 2026	\$ 21,000.00
Outer Banks Board Riders	2026 USA Surfing Prime Series	\$ 3,000.00
Outer Banks Conservationists	2026 Island Farm Pumpkin Patch	\$ 4,000.00
Outer Banks Home Builders Association	2026 Parade of Homes	\$ 2,500.00
Outer Banks Relief Foundation	2026 Halloween Island	\$ 13,000.00
Outer Banks Seafood Festival	2026 OB Seafood Festival	\$ 30,000.00
Outer Banks SPCA	Stand-Up for Strays	\$ 1,500.00
	Another Round 25k	\$ 2,500.00
Outer Banks Sporting Events	2026 OBX Marathon	\$ 10,000.00
	2026 Outer Banks Triathlon	\$ 5,000.00

Roanoke Island Historical Association	2026 Shellabration & BBQ	\$ 2,000.00
The Rogallo Foundation	2026 Outer Banks Brewtag	\$ 12,000.00
Soggy Bones	2026 Which Craft Surf Gathering	\$ 2,500.00
Town of Duck	2026 Duck Jazz Festival	\$ 9,500.00
Vusic Heals	Grassfed Bluegrass Music Festival	\$ 14,000.00
	<i>Total Amount Requested</i>	\$ 208,000.00

Following the review, Mr. Pruitt moved to approve the Event Grant recommended amounts as presented. Second by Mr. Head. There was no discussion. The motion passed unanimously (9-0).

OUTER BANKS VISITORS BUREAU UPDATES: Lee Nettles:

- announced the ribbon cutting for the Boardwalk as April 22, 2026. The ribbon cutting will be followed by an Earth Day event called ‘Earth & Arts’ on the site.
- screened a video promoting Buxton and what visitors can expect
- provided a recap of the Visit NC Tourism Conference
- discussed how the recent state elections might impact the school calendar
- proposed a small group made up of the Bureau Director, Tourism Board members, and the Nags Head Town Manager and Commissioners to review and discuss continued partnership with the Soundside Event Site. The Board encouraged this idea and staff will reach out to Nags Head.
- reviewed the marketing dashboard and visitation

Jeff Schwartzberg reviewed:

- his participation as a panelist for a breakout session at VisitNC Tourism Conference
- the upcoming Non-Profit Mission Mixer on April 30, 2026
- 2nd Annual Outer Banks Volunteer Week October 10-17, 2026
- upcoming meetings, presentations, and conferences

Lorrie Love:

- reviewed recent tradeshow and marketplace participation
- updated on the progress of the boardwalk at the Soundside Event Site
- Outer Banks National Soft Shell Crab Week May 11-16, 2026. This year, there are over 30 participating restaurants and a new feature is a ‘crab bus crawl’ an educational component that will visit a local shedder, then stop at a couple of participating restaurants.

Aaron Tuell reviewed:

- “Best Of” rankings in *U.S. News & World Report*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Islands*, *World List Mania* and *World Atlas* magazines
- upcoming articles in various publications
- upcoming filming for WJLA-TV, Hampton Roads Show, and GoPro
- importance of public relations in establishing consumer trust in the age of AI

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 noted that Dare Day would not take place in Manteo in 2026. He noted there were several factors, including a town wide survey that ranked Dare Day as the least popular event.
- Mr. Head noted an adjustment in pricing for houses for sale
- Ms. Chasen noted the Town of Duck Bald Cypress sapling planting, noting the trees would later be planted along the waterfront to help minimize erosion
- Mr. Pruitt thanked the Board for the grant to install an exhibit at the Kitty Hawk bathhouse and encouraged Board members to view it
- Ms. Copeland noted lower ticket sales for Taste of the Beach and plans to announce/promote the event further out in 2027
- Mr. Ross noted the change in leadership with the state elections and how those might impact Dare County citing work with NCDOT on Highway 12, hardened structures ordinances, and the shrimping ban as examples
- Ms. Cohen noted she had walked the boardwalk at the Soundside Event Site and looked forward to the grand opening
- Mr. Hess noted the recent Economic Forecast breakfast hosted by the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, and that the Chamber had hired a new Executive Director

SET DATE, TIME, AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING: The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 16, 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 10:28 a.m.

ATTESTED:



Clerk, Dare County Tourism Board