

VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

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ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY and CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

Wednesday, November 19, 2025, Noon
NC Transportation Museum

- I. Call to Order & Welcome Stephen Kidd

- III. Financial Report
 - A. Financial Report James Meacham
 - B. Lodging Market Data Sarah Michalec

- IV. Tourism Program of Work Report
 - A. Destination Marketing
 - 1. Digital Marketing Brooke Arrowood
 - 2. Sales, Packages, Promotions and Trolleys Tara Furr
 - 3. 10 Year Brand Anniversary: Be an original Tara Furr and James Meacham
 - B. Tourism Development and Infrastructure Sarah Michalec
 - 1. New Website
 - 2. Railwalk
 - 3. Gateway Lobby
 - 4. Wayfinding

- V. Additional Business: No December Board Meeting

- VI. Adjourn

ROWAN COUNTY

Tourism Development Authority
North Carolina

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ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING

Wednesday, October 15, 2025, 12:00 Noon

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Attending: Stephen Kidd, Craig Pierce, Sada Troutman, Andy Maben, April Sailor, Therese Henderson, Annette Privette-Keller, Kim Morgan, Krista Sullivan, Richard Reinholz

Not Attending: David Post

Tourism Staff: James Meacham, Tara Furr, Sarah Michalec, Brooke Arrowood

James Meacham, Sarah Michalec, Tara Furr, Brooke Arrowood

Call to Order

Chair Stephen Kidd called the Rowan County Tourism Development Authority (RCTDA) Board of Directors meeting to order at 12:00 Noon. Attendees were welcomed by Kelly Alexander, the head of the NC Transportation Museum. Thanks were given to the host for using the venue. Kelly Alexander shared a series of exciting updates about recent and upcoming projects and programs as well as thanking Rowan County Tourism for their support over the years.

NC Transportation Museum - Host Presentation

Kelly Alexander provided updates on growth, capital improvements, and ongoing challenges over the last several years for the NC Transportation Museum. Alexander reported that the museum had its best year ever with over 175,000 visitors last year. Alexander stated that only 9% of funding comes from the state; the rest is earned through events and operations. Alexander reported that current capital projects include restoring two previously closed buildings, including the powerhouse and old car shop, which will be opened to the public and used for unique rentals and railcar storage. In addition, the Polar Express event continues to grow from 14,000 tickets in year one to over 80,000 in 2024. Alexander said that despite soft visitation in 2025, high-end tickets are still selling well. The museum is also tracking national trends in family attendance and utilizing that information in the marketing and planning strategy.

Currently, the museum charges admission (\$10 adults, \$9 seniors, \$8 children) for revenue. This is the first increase since 2011. New infrastructure includes a \$3.5M roof project and potential future venue expansions. Alexander emphasized that volunteers are and always have been a vital part of museum operations, especially during large-scale events. She thanked the RCTDA Board for their continued support.

Approval of the Minutes

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion to approve September 2025 minutes.

Second: Sada Troutman

Motion passed.

Trolley Update

Meacham and Furr gave a brief update on the recovered trolley, stating the damaged trolley was sent to a commercial facility in Greensboro for assessment. Most damage appears to be cosmetic, and the final insurance decision is pending.

A recommendation was made by Meacham to keep the vehicle, even if the insurance totals it, due to its uniqueness and long replacement lead times of 16–18 months. Furr stated that rental disruptions from the trolley loss were minimized with only about 20 rentals lost. Alternative transportation solutions were coordinated by Furr, including rentals from a local operator.

Financial Report

James Meacham presented the financial report stating that occupancy tax revenue is approximately 3% ahead of the previous year. August 2025 was 4% higher than August 2024. The total monthly occupancy revenue year-to-date is \$480,000 against expenses of \$408,000 with the organization operating in the black at \$71,000. Meacham reported over \$650,000 in current assets, with over \$353,000 in available cash. He stated that overall, finances are on budget and show positive trends for Q1.

Motion: Motion was made to approve the financial report as presented by Craig Pierce.

Second: Sada Troutman

Motion carried.

Marketing Report

Sarah Michalec reviewed the lodging and tourism data including a chart with commercial hotel data, not including VRBO and Airbnb which make up almost 20% of the market. Due to the timing of the meeting, Michalec said that she had not received the official September year to date numbers. However, the chart did reflect weekly data through the end of September.

Looking at the numbers in the chart, Michalec reported that July, August and September outperformed last year. As of September 30, Occupancy was 73.4% which is up 1% over last year. ADR was \$118.53, which is up 4.8% over the previous year and RevPAR was \$87.04 which is up 5.9% over last year. Michalec indicated that revenue was also up 5.9% from the previous year. She reported that looking at the first 11 days of October, lodging revenue is looking healthy, but slightly down from the record levels in 2024. Occupancy is at 80%, ADR \$123.80, RevPAR is \$99.01, and revenue is over \$863k.

Michalec noted that these stats are down compared to the same period in 2024. Occupancy is down 10.8%, ADR is up a few cents, RevPAR and Revenue are both down 10.7%. Michalec reminded the group that Hurricane Helene hit the western part of the state on September 26 of last year. Unfortunately, the western part of the state's loss was the piedmont's gain, as a very high occupancy level was created into the third week and fourth weeks of October 2024. A better comparison would be to compare this period to 2023 when the local area was fully out of covid and fully recovered and back to normal traffic.

When comparing to that 2023 data, current occupancy is up 10%, ADR is up 11% and total revenue is up 21%. Regardless, Rowan is at 80% occupancy for the first 11 days of October.

Arrowood reported that year to date, the website has seen 348,208 page views from 160,925 users at the start of the 4th quarter and is still on track to reach or exceed most of the bigger benchmarks. Staff continue to add linked thumbnails to recent short-form videos on any relevant pages/blog posts and keeping the site up to date with local events, businesses, and current running packages.

Arrowood reported that the Email Newsletter year to date has seen a 34.17% open rate and is at a total of 5,377 subscribers. The October eNewsletter covered October events, Halloween Family Fun events, Bell Tower BREWFEST, OctoberTour, Autumn Jubilee, Haunted Trails and a highlight of Granite Quarry. Arrowood said that staff plan to run another Facebook ad campaign for eNewsletter signups during the month of November and hope to see these numbers increase again before the year ends.

For social media, year to date total following is 51,654 across all platforms, and a total engagement of 156,758 – both of which exceed the 2025 benchmarks for these categories. The top engaged posts in September included the Autumn Jubilee Reel which saw over 534,000 views & 6,000 interactions on Facebook & over 47,000 views & 3,000 interactions on TikTok, the September Events Reel on Facebook which saw over 101,000 views & 800 interactions and the Fall Sips in Rowan County Reel which saw over 42,000 views & 500 interactions on Facebook. As for our social media marketing plans until the next meeting, staff will be focusing on promoting: Halloween Family Fun

events in Rowan County, Patterson's Fall Fun on the Farm, New exhibits at The Bridge Gallery at RCCC, Fall Foliage in Rowan County, The 2025 Sculpture Show, Mac Tabby Cat Café, Last Minute Halloween Fun, November Events & Events in the Arts, Spencer Deli, Waterworks, Veteran's Day Events, Lighting of the Fall Fires, Additional blogs, Continuing our partnership with M1, the current Stay & Play Packages including the VISA Package, Autumn Adventures in Rowan County, Polar Express, and Christmas in Rowan County.

Arrowood reported that the blog continues to be a top visited page on the website with 97 posts and over 53,000 views year to date. She said that this is largely due to the engagement with top performing blog posts for September which included the Guide to Autumn Jubilee and the Guide to the Rowan County Fair.

The influencer program is still going strong and Arrowood reported that Furr had secured partnerships with @JensenSavannah who covered Bell Tower BREWFEST and @KidsTakeCharlotte who covered Patterson Farm's Fall Fun on the Farm with 7 influencers year to date. The year-to-date influencer impact is currently at 596,712 views, which is just shy of 100,000 more views than last month with 28,455 engagements. Finally, Arrowood noted that total year to date digital impact equaled 589,000 engagements across all platforms at the end of August which includes website interactions, social media interactions, eNewsletter activity and the influencer campaign performance.

Arrowood gave an update on the new Tour App, stating that it is officially complete and available in the Apple App Store. She is still waiting for the app to be approved by the Google Play Store, however as of right now, the app hosts an About page which guides users to our website, eNewsletter, Visitors Guide, LinkTree, our social media channels, hours and location of the Visitor Center. The app also hosts the first of hopefully many tours – the Salisbury Heritage Walking Tour. This app allows visitors to take a self-guided walking tour through Salisbury. The tour itself is the same as the physical brochure that can be picked up in the Visitor Center but gives visitors a more interactive experience.

The tour includes 143 stops that users can follow with an in-app map. Each stop is triggered by the user walking to each stop or can be followed manually by clicking "Next Stop." Arrowood noted that she uploaded many photos to accompany each stop so that even if visitors are not physically present, they can get a feel for the tour virtually in hopes that they come to town to take the tour. Arrowood was also able to include links to businesses in the historic buildings to the business' listings on the website. For those stops that do have business in them, she went ahead and included hours to hopefully encourage visitors to stop in some of the local businesses while taking the tour.

Arrowood expressed her excitement that the tour is finally complete and said she will keep the board updated as far as the launch goes on in the Google Play Store.

Tara Furr reported 24 paid marketing placements during the month of September, bringing the total year to date up to 317. Furr reported 105 trolley rentals to date, just shy of \$53,000 in revenue, and 51 rentals over the next 90 days.

Furr reported that Arrowood has had 24 site/event visits and has been to several fall events so far capturing content for social media. There have been 36 partner relationship visits year to date, with Furr making it out to one partner before the trolley was stolen. Furr noted that the weeks following that were packed with damage control and crisis communications, which are not the type of communications anyone enjoys, but it had to be done. Furr reported several tourism support requests were fulfilled during September, bringing the total to 21 fulfilled requests and 744 room nights associated with those requests. Most recent requests were fulfilled for the NCTM for DOWT lodging and the YMCA kickball tournament for lodging assistance.

In group sales, Furr stated she is continuing to work with all groups who are in the books for the remainder of the year and assisting them and lodging partners at the requests of the groups. There are 13 groups in the books and 795 room nights associated with those groups. Most recently the YMCA hosted their conference and from her understanding had great attendance, more than they were anticipating. Cycle NC made their way through Rowan County last week with almost 800 riders. Staff volunteered at Patterson Farms when the cyclists made their pit stop there. Furr is still working with the Coon Hunter group. She stated that the original organization split, and a new organization has formed called The Trapp Hill Coon Hunters and will be in the county in late January 2026, versus Feb.

Furr reported that Ripe (the online booking platform) continues to work well with 340 reservations and 450 room nights, just slightly behind this time last year. Polar tickets sales are up, but packages are down. DOWT came in about 10 packages less. The current stay & play packages are: Polar Express, Autumn Adventures, Visa Gift Card Giveaway, and Christmas in Rowan County. In 2025 year to date, stats are - 408 packages, and 571 room nights associated with the packages. The total packages are down from the same period last year due to slower and late bookings.

Furr reported that staff are still full speed into fall marketing, and promoting events, agritourism and Halloween. Everyone is continuing to really push the fall overnight stay & play packages to capitalize on this busy time of year in the county. Staff are also continuing to push the Polar Express package, which always has a big impact on the winter season.

Tourism Development & Infrastructure

Michalec reported the redesigning process for the new website has begun stating that Tara, Brooke and herself had their second meeting with the Simpleview team yesterday.

This was the discovery meeting to set some parameters for where staff would like to see the website go and the specific goals we plan to accomplish throughout the redesign. Staff are feeling good about the process and are looking forward to seeing the design prototypes in a month or so.

Michalec said that a lot has been happening on the Railwalk. Light posts went in last week and they are working to install additional power outlets. Decking is wrapping up, and they will be staining the decking soon, as well as the wood at the Pavillion. There is still a bit to go, but staff are excited to see some visual progress.

For the Gateway Building, Michalec reported the lobby furniture and wall art installation is scheduled for the week of November 10. Harwood Signs will begin their work on Monday and once they finish up Walser will be coming in with the large screen. During this, Charlotte Staton will be installing the furniture, and if all goes according to plan, everything should be complete by the end of that week. Michalec indicated that twelve security cameras will be installed in the Gateway building common areas. Michalec is working with the same vendor (Insight Low Voltage) who has completed all of the county's security at Dan Nicholas, the Courthouse, Rowan Community Center and other properties. Michalec stated that she has been very impressed so far and is looking forward to getting the system in and complete.

Michalec reported that in Wayfinding, Granite Quarry's three new signs should be completed and installed before the end of the week. Installation started yesterday and should hopefully be finished today. The Downtown Salisbury Welcome signs and the eight Railwalk directional signs have been permitted through the city and are in production. Most of these signs have been staked, and utilities are being called in while staff wait for the signs to be completed.

Additional Business

Meacham reported that staff received a development grant application from the Town of Granite Quarry for assistance with expanding Granite Lake Park in the amount of \$100,000 split over five budget years starting in FY26-27. The group reviewed the plans submitted along with the application for the project. After discussion among the Board and comparisons to the funding support Tourism gave to Bell Tower Green in the past that is the request was a solid tourism development project and in line with past projects supported by Rowan Tourism.

Motion: Motion was made to approve the grant funding by Sada Troutman.

Second: Richard Reinholz

Motion carried.

Adjournment

Motion: Motion was made for adjournment by Craig Pierce.

Second: Sada Troutman

Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 1:22 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Lesley Pullium

Rowan County Tourism Development Authority



FINANCIAL SUMMARY REPORT AS OF 10-31-2025

Report Date: November 18, 2025

***The Tourism Authority utilizes modified accrual-based accounting in accordance with GASB. Year-to-date expenses typically run about 6 to 7 weeks ahead of year-to-date revenues. ***

Fiscal Year 2025-26 Statement of Activities: Highlights as of 10-31-2025.

- Occupancy tax revenues as of 10-31-2025 for fiscal year 2025-26 on an accrual basis equaled \$539,614 and are 4% behind the FY25-26 budget due to a decrease in October tax receivables compared to the previous fiscal year.
 - September 2025 taxes came in 4.8% higher than September 2024.
 - The first quarter of the fiscal year was up 1.9% compared to the previous year.
 - October taxes are projected to come in 8% below October 2024 due to no business from Hurricane Helene displacements and loss business from the government shutdown.
 - Early November figures are ahead of November 2024.
- Year-to-date revenues on an accrual basis through October were \$122,616 ahead of expenses. Total revenues on an accrual basis equaled \$688,956 against expenses of \$566,339.

Balance Sheet: Summary as of 10-31-2025

- Total Current Assets equaled \$691,213 and were \$40,778 greater than September 2025. Current assets consisted of cash on hand and occupancy tax receivables.
- Accounts Receivables equaled \$281,053 which included September and October outstanding occupancy tax revenues.
- Cash on hand as of 10-31-25 was \$410,160 and is \$56,810 higher than cash on hand as of 9-30-2025.

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Statement of Financial Position - Accrual Basis
As of October 31, 2025

Assets

Current Assets

Petty cash	\$	16.83	
First Bank Checking - 0436		17,916.40	
F&M Operating - 9224		33,942.78	
NC Capital Mgmt Trust		328,199.77	
First Bank Money Mkt - 4509		30,084.21	
Accounts Receivable		281,053.09	
Total Current Assets		281,053.09	691,213.08

Fixed Assets

Building		2,176,919.00	
Land		250,604.00	
Construction in Progress		611,247.63	
Railwalk Pavilion		506,594.36	
Railwalk		750,000.00	
Computers		21,736.52	
Furniture & fixtures		68,310.00	
Office equipment		23,278.13	
Trolley cars		319,880.00	
Accumulated depreciation		(803,083.81)	
Total Fixed Assets		3,925,485.83	3,925,485.83

Other Assets

Pension Asset		45,079.00	
Total Other Assets		45,079.00	45,079.00
Total Assets		4,661,777.91	4,661,777.91

Liabilities & Net Assets

Current Liabilities

Retirement Withholding		2,490.12	
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See Accountant's Letter

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Statement of Financial Position - Accrual Basis
As of October 31, 2025

Federal and Fica Withholding	2,924.16	
State Withholding	432.00	
Total Current Liabilities		<u>5,846.28</u>
<u>Long-term Liabilities</u>		
Interlocal Agreement - Rowan Co. (Railwalk)	700,000.00	
Pension Deferrals	76,977.00	
Total Long-term Liabilities		<u>776,977.00</u>
Total Liabilities		<u>782,823.28</u>
<u>Net Assets</u>		
Investment in fixed assets	2,615,032.00	
Restricted Fund Balance	274,236.00	
Retained Earnings	867,070.00	
Change in Net Assets	122,616.63	
Total Net Assets		<u>3,878,954.63</u>
Total Liabilities and Net Assets		<u>\$ 4,661,777.91</u>

See Accountant's Letter

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Statement of Activities Actual vs. Budget - Accrual Basis

	4 Months Ended October 31, 2025 Actual	Current Year June 30, 2026 Budget	Current Year Over/(Under) Budget
<u>Income</u>			
Trolley Income	26,004.20	95,000.00	(68,995.80)
Occupancy Taxes Income	539,614.86	1,590,000.00	(1,050,385.14)
Partner Services Income	8,985.41	70,000.00	(61,014.59)
Holiday Caravan Parade Income	32,057.07	65,000.00	(32,942.93)
Miscellaneous Income	21,845.25	2,500.00	19,345.25
Investment Income	4,288.31	12,000.00	(7,711.69)
Gateway Building Income	56,161.08	168,500.00	(112,338.92)
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Total Income	688,956.18	2,003,000.00	(1,314,043.82)
<u>Operating Expenses</u>			
Salaries - regular	45,440.15	132,000.00	(86,559.85)
Worker's Comp and Liab Ins.	1,167.43	9,000.00	(7,832.57)
Miscellaneous	53.95	4,500.00	(4,446.05)
Professional Services	10,003.90	37,000.00	(26,996.10)
CVB Appropriation	414,451.70	1,144,000.00	(729,548.30)
Supplies & Equipment	304.97	4,500.00	(4,195.03)
Trolley	11,814.56	12,000.00	(185.44)
Tourism Development	37,777.95	400,000.00	(362,222.05)
Holiday Caravan Parade	2,503.68	65,000.00	(62,496.32)
Partner Services	3,474.66	26,500.00	(23,025.34)
Gateway Building	39,346.60	168,500.00	(129,153.40)
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Total Operating Expenses	566,339.55	2,003,000.00	(1,436,660.45)
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Operating Income (Loss)	122,616.63	0.00	122,616.63

See Accountant's Letter

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Statement of Activities Actual vs. Budget - Accrual Basis

	1 Month Ended October 31, 2025 Actual	1 Month Ended October 31, 2025 Budget	Current Period Over/(Under) Budget
<u>Income</u>			
Trolley Income	11,718.22	7,916.67	3,801.55
Occupancy Taxes Income	146,053.09	132,500.00	13,553.09
Partner Services Income	2,223.59	5,833.34	(3,609.75)
Holiday Caravan Parade Income	10,817.07	5,416.67	5,400.40
Miscellaneous Income	21,845.25	208.34	21,636.91
Investment Income	1,086.86	1,000.00	86.86
Gateway Building Income	15,084.00	14,041.67	1,042.33
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Total Income	208,828.08	166,916.69	41,911.39
<u>Operating Expenses</u>			
Salaries - regular	15,154.79	11,000.00	4,154.79
Worker's Comp and Liab Ins.	0.00	750.00	(750.00)
Miscellaneous	5.00	375.00	(370.00)
Professional Services	1,391.00	3,083.33	(1,692.33)
CVB Appropriation	107,597.40	95,333.33	12,264.07
Supplies & Equipment	0.00	375.00	(375.00)
Trolley	6,564.14	1,000.00	5,564.14
Tourism Development	13,919.14	33,333.33	(19,414.19)
Holiday Caravan Parade	1,023.50	5,416.66	(4,393.16)
Partner Services	1,021.92	2,208.33	(1,186.41)
Gateway Building	10,819.84	14,041.66	(3,221.82)
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Total Operating Expenses	157,496.73	166,916.64	(9,419.91)
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Operating Income (Loss)	51,331.35	0.05	51,331.30

See Accountant's Letter

Rowan County Occupancy Tax Receipts Collected (GROSS)									
MONTH	FY21-22	FY22-23	%CHNG	FY23-24	%CHNG	FY24-25	%CHNG	FY25-26	%CHNG
July	105,514.79	120,021.34	12.1%	108,732.65	-9.4%	133,587.33	22.9%	129,631.92	-3.0%
August	99,851.17	115,189.06	13.3%	110,177.63	-4.4%	126,464.65	14.8%	131,541.59	4.0%
September	100,792.04	119,443.37	15.6%	114,690.69	-4.1%	133,536.09	14.1%	139,933.51	4.8%
Quarter Total	306,158.00	354,653.77	13.7%	333,600.97	-6.3%	393,588.07	15.2%	401,107.02	1.9%
October	115,324.55	128,088.16	10.0%	141,296.02	10.3%	172,137.56	21.8%		
November	102,438.16	116,523.19	12.1%	109,684.96	-5.9%	130,039.92	18.6%		
December	95,874.73	103,834.94	7.7%	95,959.89	-8.2%	99,625.62	3.7%		
Quarter Total	313,637.44	348,446.29	10.0%	346,940.87	-0.4%	401,803.10	13.7%		
January	96,918.80	115,064.17	15.8%	88,997.47	-22.7%	103,025.92	15.8%		
February	94,530.61	108,890.30	13.2%	106,875.73	-1.9%	106,109.21	-0.7%		
March	114,826.05	125,056.96	8.2%	123,858.60	-1.0%	147,523.28	16.0%		
Quarter Total	306,275.46	349,011.43	12.2%	319,731.80	-9.2%	356,658.41	10.4%		
April	119,032.67	125,347.11	5.0%	137,682.85	9.8%	139,033.06	1.0%		
May	126,307.46	125,953.79	-0.3%	144,974.27	15.1%	147,952.56	2.1%		
June	115,684.25	109,364.77	-5.8%	132,031.99	17.2%	137,619.17	4.1%		
Quarter Total	361,024.38	360,665.67	-0.1%	414,689.11	13.0%	424,604.79	2.3%		
Adjmts Penalties									
Penalties									
Year Total	\$ 1,287,095.28	\$ 1,412,777.16	8.9%	\$ 1,414,962.75	0.2%	\$ 1,576,654.37	10.3%	\$ 401,107.02	

