

VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

NORTH CAROLINA

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

Wednesday, January 21, 2026, Noon
Paul E. Fisher Gateway Building

- | | | |
|------|---|-----------------|
| I. | Call to Order & Welcome | Stephen Kidd |
| II. | Board Meeting Minutes | Stephen Kidd |
| III. | Financial Report | |
| | A. Financial Report | James Meacham |
| | B. Lodging Market Data | Sarah Michalec |
| | C. FY2024-25 TDA and CVB Audit Reports | Eddie Carrick |
| IV. | Tourism Program of Work Report | |
| | A. Destination Marketing | |
| | 1. Digital Marketing | Brooke Arrowood |
| | 2. Sales, Packages, Promotions and Trolleys | Tara Furr |
| | 3. 250 th Anniversary | James Meacham |
| | B. Tourism Development and Infrastructure | Sarah Michalec |
| | 1. Railwalk and Farmers Market | |
| | 2. Gateway Lobby | |
| | 3. Wayfinding | |
| | 4. Trolley | |
| V. | Additional Business | |
| VI. | Adjourn | |

ROWAN COUNTY

Tourism Development Authority
North Carolina

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ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING Wednesday, November 19, 2025, 12:00 Noon BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Attending: Craig Pierce, Stephen Kidd, April Saylor, Therese Henderson, Sada Troutman, Kimberly Morgan, Krista Sullivan

Not Attending: Annette Privette-Keller, David Post, Andy Maben, Richard Reinholz

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

RCTDA Call to Order

Kidd welcomed everyone and wished the group a Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas in advance. He noted that the board will lose a board member: David Post, because he was not re-elected to City Council. A new Council member appointment is expected most likely in January. The board does not have a meeting in December, so this will carry over to the January 2026 meeting.

Approval of the Minutes

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

Second: Sada Troutman

Motion: Approved

Finance Report

Meacham reported that the organization exhibited a very healthy financial position through the end of October. Occupancy tax revenues (accrual basis) were approximately \$540,000, slightly behind FY 25–26, mainly due to October being down year-over-year. For context October 2024 was described as an anomaly with the entire month above 85% occupancy, extremely high ADRs, major peak revenues. October 2024 occupancy tax revenue noted roughly \$170,000, compared to typical peak months around \$145,000. Meacham reported that the drivers of October 2024 spike included displacement travel related to Hurricane Helene and other unusually strong travel demands.

In comparison, October 2025 had business loss due to government shutdown impacts and disrupted travel patterns (contractor travel related to the VA, some military groups, international travel delays due to airport challenges, etc.). The projection is for about ~8% below last year, but still higher than October 2023.

Meacham reported the year-to-date organizational financials as follows: Revenue (accrual basis) was just under \$690,000 with expenses of \$566,000, leaving a net positive of \$122,000. Current assets are \$691,000 (about \$41,000 higher than prior month), with receivables of \$281,000 (including September/October taxes). Cash on hand is \$400,000 at the end of October which is about \$56,000 higher than September.

The long-term liabilities include the interlocal agreement with the county for the Railwalk which started at \$750,000 (Interest-free) with RCTDA paying \$12,500 per month. On an operating note, Meacham reported the Trolley line expenses higher than expected due to the unexpected towing bills and rentals while awaiting insurance reimbursement. The fiscal year first quarter finished up just under 2% at \$401,000, which was the highest first quarter (July–September) on record, and August and September 2025 up 4%, and 4.8%.

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion to accept the financials as presented.

Second: Therese Henderson

Motion: Approved

Lodging Market Update

Sarah Michalec presented the lodging market data report, reminding the board that staff are providing a little extra data on the local market each month. Sarah presented a rolling 12-month comparison, noting that the market is trending ahead of 2024 for running 12-month occupancy at 69.7%, as well as year to date occupancy at 71%, ADR at \$113.45, RevPAR at \$80.50 and revenue above 19 million.

Michalec reported statewide (Visit NC) numbers as of Sept 30, 2025. Occupancy growth is down .5%, ADR growth is up 1.9% and revenue growth is up 2.5%. Which shows a similar trend to the local market, which is up slightly. Looking down at the submarkets, Michalec showed the group a graph that reflects the data and stated that the Salisbury/Concord submarket is outperforming the neighboring submarkets on occupancy and is in the middle on ADR change. Which is good news for Rowan County.

Michalec reported the geolocation data as of October 31 reminding the group that this data is collected from mobile devices with location services enabled so it represents a partial view of total visitors. The out-of-state markets and the out of county visitors continue to track from the same places. The ranks change slightly, but these 5 are consistently found within the top five. The primary counties listed (order changes but consistent group): Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Davidson, Forsyth, Iredell, Wake (Wake was mentioned; list maybe six). In reviewing the visitor spending, Michalec stated the data shows out-of-state visitors: 2% above state average with daily spending about \$16 below the average (consistent with destination profile vs beach/mountain rentals). The top spending categories remain food & beverage and gas.

The key takeaways Michalec points out in this information are that despite being down in the last two weeks of October, YTD occupancy finished just a touch ahead of last year at 71%.

Total revenue is up, and our submarket has led the neighboring submarket in occupancy over the last few months. The out-of-state markets remain strong for advertising, and we have a strong idea of the out-of-state and out-of-country markets. The website performance is pacing well against 2024's numbers, and our strategy is continuously being evaluated and adjusted.

Michalec directed the group to the chart in the report, and said in conclusion, the month of October drop was attributed to the hurricane business from 2024, the loss of federal groups and general economic conditions. Michalec said that in the first 15 days of November, the first 15 days are ahead of last year, and last year was a strong, and revenue is up 8% so we are pleased. The first week and a half was very strong, last week was a bit flat, however, we still outperformed the submarket. Meaning, we are doing better than Cabarrus.

The month-to-date occupancy is up a little, ADR is up 7.3% and revenue is up 8%.

Destination Marketing Report

Brooke Arrowood reported that year to date for the www.visitrowancountync.com website stats noting that the website has seen 423,030 pageviews from 198,141 users, and continuing through the 4th quarter are still on pace to reach or ahead of most of the bigger benchmarks. Staff are continuing to add linked thumbnails to the recent short-form videos on any relevant pages/blog posts and just making sure the website stays up to date with local events, businesses, and current running packages. Staff are also implementing all SEO recommendations our partners at Media One suggest.

Arrowood reported that YTD, the eNewsletter has seen a 34.08% open rate and is at a total of 5,377 subscribers. The November eNewsletter covered November events, Rowan County Holiday Parades & Tree Lightings, The Polar Express, the tour app, The Swannee Theatre, & a highlight of Spencer, N.C. Additionally, Arrowood started running our final eNewsletter sign-up campaign of the year at the beginning of November.

In social media, YTD the total following stands at 53,198 across all platforms, and a total engagement of 203,756 – both of which exceeding the 2025 benchmarks for these categories. Additionally, the YTD reach is currently at 4,377,419. The top engaged posts in October included the reel highlighting Mac Tabby Cat Café which received 51,358 views & 799 engagements on Facebook & 15,900 views & 659 engagements on TikTok and the Salisbury Ghost Walk reel on Facebook which received 93,982 views & 1,485 engagements and 13,700 views & 893 engagements on TikTok.

As a quick October update in regard to the partnership with Media One, this partnership continues to pay off exponentially. In October, the total site traffic was up by 12% year over year, ad campaigns delivered annual highs for total monthly sessions, organic sessions, Media One sessions and outbound link clicks. The Polar Express landing page earned over 9,000 visits – 5,000 of which were due to our Media One ads, and AI monthly sessions were up 59.4%. The next steps for Media One will be to continue rolling out ads to hopefully capture any last-minute Polar Express Package bookings, draw traffic to the Holiday events page and secure more Christmas in Rowan County Stay & Play Packages.

For the Media One partnership, October site traffic went up 12% year over year, ads delivered annual highs: total monthly sessions, organic sessions, Media One sessions, outbound moves. The Polar Express landing page: 9,000+ visits, 5,000 from Media One ads. "AI monthly sessions" were up 59.4%. The next step will be to continue ads for last-minute Polar packages, holiday events traffic, and holiday stay packages.

Arrowood reported 104 blog posts, 65,000+ views YTD and the top October blog posts were Fall fun on the farm, Patterson Farm guide, Halloween fun, haunted trails guide. The Influencer program included 7 influencers YTD with an impact of 900,000+ views, and 32,000+ engagements. Mentions included B-Street Timework trolley tour, celebration of lights, Autumn Jubilee, October tour, Patterson fall fun on the farm. Finally, the Tour App is officially available in both the Apple & Google Play stores now. Arrowood said she is currently working alongside Miller Davis to get some marketing materials made and is planning to continue building the app with more tours and trails as time goes on. The total digital impact at the end of October 2025 included 7,726,442 engagements across all platforms (website + social + newsletter + Media One + influencers).

Furr reported that the trolley was very busy during the month of October, even considering the circumstances of just having one trolley. October is historically a busy month. Furr stated that she has been working with the gentleman that owns the trolley in Kannapolis, and he assisted on many events that required a second trolley. Furr reported that year to date a little over \$71,000 in revenue, and 104 trolley bookings, and 22 remaining bookings for the year.

Furr reported 29 paid marketing placements during the month of October, bringing our YTD total to 346 and that Arrowood has had 28 site/event visits YTD. Brooke has been to several fall events so far capturing content for social media. There have been 38 partner relationship visits YTD. Furr noted that she will be working with a local partner out of Kannapolis who will be helping her with tasty treats for the tourism community partners at Christmas. Also, Patterson Farms has agreed to graciously offer limited offer discount code for Furr's partner visits in November. The goal with this being the promotion of Holly Jolly Days and Winter on the Farm events.

Furr reported that several tourism support requests were fulfilled during October, bringing the total to 21 fulfilled requests and 971 room nights associated with those requests fulfilled. Most recent requests were fulfilled for the NCTM for DOWT lodging, YMCA kickball tournament, and then packages for Bell Tower Brewfest and October Tour. The visitor-related economic impact related to this type of support is over \$6 million.

Furr stated that she is continuing to work with all of our groups who are on the books for the remainder of the year and assisting them and the lodging partners on the requests of the groups. There were 13 groups on the books and 795 room nights associated with those groups. Furr said she has been in good communication with the Trapp Hill Coon Hunters. Their event planning appears to be developing nicely for their big event that will be held in January 2026. Also, The LandTrust will be hosting an event in August and are at the point where Furr can start developing room blocks shortly for that event. Preservation NC will also host an Executive Retreat in February 2026.

Furr reported 416 Reservations & 543 Room nights on the online package booking platform. This is a little behind compared to last year, but these numbers will increase with Polar Express in December.

Furr noted that for Stay & Play packages which are all packages, not just packages through ripe. Current packages include Polar Express, Autumn Adventures, Visa Gift Card Giveaway, Christmas in Rowan County and Wine About Winter. In 2025 YTD, there were 497 packages, and 685 room nights associated with the packages.

Looking ahead, Furr noted that staff are wrapping up fall marketing and full speed ahead on holiday marketing while continuing to really push the fall overnight stay & play packages. Furr will continue to work with the upcoming groups to make sure their needs are met to ensure they have a smooth group visit. Also, one last thing that Furr wanted to note was that the team recently attended the North Carolina Travel Industry Association Tourism Leadership Conference. She was happy to report that the team won the Gold Marketing Achievement award for Technology and Innovation for our online lodging booking platform, Ripe. Meacham was also a speaker and led a great session on bureau leadership.

Being Original Brand Celebration

Furr reported that staff are currently planning a 10-year celebration of the brand, it will include different promotions, events, marketing and sales, a signature event, different ways to recognize people in the community. This will be more during November of 2026 heading into 2027 timeframe, so funding will come from the 2026-27 fiscal year. It will be fully integrated across the community and staff plan to do something additional at the May 2027 Cannon Ballers hospitality event. There is a great deal to plan, but the team is looking forward to celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the brand with the County.

250th Anniversary Event Planning

Furr reported that North Carolina is planning a great deal of statewide activity around the 250th anniversary of the country. These events will be peaking April–July next year; July 4 as major milestone. North Carolina Counties are encouraged to form a leadership group and there are about \$10,000 available per county from the state for these special events. For Rowan County, Nick Savas (County Parks & Rec Director) was noted as the leader on this task and a group meeting will occur after this board meeting. Furr reported the potential event timing of Flag Day week (June 14) at Sloan Park (or some neutral municipal ground). The Commissioners may match funding for these events. Furr voiced appreciation for Commissioner Pierce’s leadership encouraging flexibility to “make it count.” The County has purchased “100 flags” and details are still unfolding that could be incorporated into the various events.

Website Redesign + AI Search Note

Sarah Michalec reported that the website redesign is still underway and in phase one which is the design and site map research. Michalec said that she hopes to see the design concepts in the next few weeks. Currently, it is on track for a June 1 launch date.

Michalec stated that staff are continuously learning about AI and how it will play into this website moving forward. AI sessions have increased exponentially, but these visits are still a relatively small percentage of total website traffic. This is similar to how things started out with short-term rentals, and staff will continue to see how this can be incorporated as it grows.

Michalec reported that a great deal is happening at the RailWalk. The pavilion has been stained and the shades for the farmers have been ordered. Those will be installed as soon as they arrive. The installer is on standby. Crews have started working on the sidewalks. The concrete has been poured, and the brick pavers are beginning today or tomorrow. The metal railings are supposed to start sometime this week, and they will be pouring and stamping the walkway that runs through the alley on Friday. Michalec has been working out some final details for the crosswalk that runs across Depot Street. She said she is hopeful that construction will be finished by Christmas. Then work will start toward signs, landscaping and any final details. Michalec said she certainly feels like the project is in the home stretch.

Michalec gave a quick Gateway Building update noting that 12 security cameras have been installed that are monitoring and recording video only for all common spaces of the building. Staff did work with the same vendor who does all of the cameras for the County property. Most of the lobby installation has been completed. Michalec stated that she is waiting for the map and lettering to be installed on the left wall, and the lettering above the TV to be installed. The map is scheduled to be installed tomorrow, and she is also working on getting some floral arrangements for the tables. Everyone seems pleased with how the project has turned out.

On the Wayfinding Project, Michalec reported that the four Downtown Salisbury Welcome signs are scheduled to be completed on December 8th. The eight Railwalk directional signs are in production, as well as the signs for the RailWalk project. Michalec said that she does not have a completion date for those yet, but it will likely be the first of 2026. Everything outside of the City of Salisbury has been fabricated, and crews are working on these final parts.

Closing Remarks and Adjournment

Chair Stephen Kidd thanked staff and board members for their support and participation in 2025 to make the organization a success.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Lesley Pullium
Rowan County Tourism Development Authority

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

Assets

Current Assets

Petty cash	\$	16.83	
First Bank Checking - 0436		35,533.10	
F&M Operating - 9224		10,854.83	
NC Capital Mgmt Trust		250,460.71	
First Bank Money Mkt - 4509		27,616.16	
Accounts Receivable		209,948.82	
Total Current Assets		534,430.45	534,430.45

Fixed Assets

Building		2,176,919.00	
Land		250,604.00	
Construction in Progress		39,988.36	
Railwalk Pavilion		1,093,158.36	
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		(944,077.81)	
Total Fixed Assets		3,799,796.56	3,799,796.56

Other Assets

Pension Asset		48,396.00	
Total Other Assets		48,396.00	48,396.00
Total Assets		4,382,623.01	4,382,623.01

Liabilities & Net Assets

Current Liabilities

Retirement Withholding		1,660.08	
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See Accountant's Letter

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

Federal and Fica Withholding	1,930.74	
State Withholding	284.00	
FSA Withholding	100.00	
NC 457	326.31	
Total Current Liabilities		4,301.13
<u>Long-term Liabilities</u>		
Interlocal Agreement - Rowan Co. (Railwalk)	675,000.00	
Pension Deferrals	85,085.00	
Total Long-term Liabilities		760,085.00
Total Liabilities		764,386.13
<u>Net Assets</u>		
Investment in fixed assets	2,615,032.00	
Restricted Fund Balance	274,236.00	
Retained Earnings	721,285.00	
Change in Net Assets	7,683.88	
Total Net Assets		3,618,236.88
Total Liabilities and Net Assets		\$ 4,382,623.01

See Accountant's Letter

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

	6 Months Ended December 31, 2025 Actual	Current Year June 30, 2026 Budget	Current Year Over/(Under) Budget
<u>Income</u>			
Trolley Income	32,402.65	95,000.00	(62,597.35)
Occupancy Taxes Income	766,975.38	1,590,000.00	(823,024.62)
Partner Services Income	11,985.56	70,000.00	(58,014.44)
Holiday Caravan Parade Income	52,293.15	65,000.00	(12,706.85)
Miscellaneous Income	22,471.59	2,500.00	19,971.59
Investment Income	6,172.72	12,000.00	(5,827.28)
Gateway Building Income	81,691.51	168,500.00	(86,808.49)
	<u>973,992.56</u>	<u>2,003,000.00</u>	<u>(1,029,007.44)</u>
<u>Operating Expenses</u>			
Salaries - regular	66,758.49	132,000.00	(65,241.51)
Worker's Comp and Liab Ins.	1,796.18	9,000.00	(7,203.82)
Miscellaneous	1,660.74	4,500.00	(2,839.26)
Professional Services	22,639.90	37,000.00	(14,360.10)
CVB Appropriation	664,706.31	1,144,000.00	(479,293.69)
Supplies & Equipment	304.97	4,500.00	(4,195.03)
Trolley	14,568.34	12,000.00	2,568.34
Tourism Development	58,247.39	400,000.00	(341,752.61)
Holiday Caravan Parade	45,827.71	65,000.00	(19,172.29)
Partner Services	5,732.85	26,500.00	(20,767.15)
Gateway Building	84,065.80	168,500.00	(84,434.20)
	<u>966,308.68</u>	<u>2,003,000.00</u>	<u>(1,036,691.32)</u>
Operating Income (Loss)	<u>7,683.88</u>	<u>0.00</u>	<u>7,683.88</u>

See Accountant's Letter