

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

Wednesday, February 19, 2025, Noon

I.	Call to Order	Stephen Kidd
II.	Approval of Meeting Minutes	Stephen Kidd
III.	Financial Report	James Meacham
	A. Financial Report and Market Update	
IV.	Tourism Program of Work Report	
	A. Destination Services, Sales, and Marketing	
	1. Digital Operations	Sarah Michalec
	2. Trolley Program	Tara Furr
	3. Sales, Marketing and Communications	Tara Furr
	B. Tourism Development and Infrastructure	Sarah Michalec & James Meacham
	1. Railwalk	
	2. Wayfinding	
	3. Marriott Towneplace Suites Project Update	
VI	Additional Rusiness	

VII.

Adjourn

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING

Wednesday, January 15, 2025, 12:00 pm

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

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

Not Attending: Richard Reinholz, Annette Privette-Keller

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

RCTDA Call to Order

Stephen Kidd called RCTDA to order at 12:00pm.

Approval of the Minutes

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for approval of the November 2024 minutes.

Second: Sada Troutman

Motion: Approved

Resolution in Honor and in Memory of Mayor Karen Alexander's Legacy

The proposed resolution in honor of Mayor Alexander read as such:

Whereas, Mayor Karen Alexander represented with distinction the City of Salisbury on the Rowan County Tourism Board of Directors for ten years; and

Whereas, the City of Salisbury and Rowan County have been deeply enriched by the leadership, dedication, and vision of Mayor Karen Alexander, whose tireless efforts have left an indelible mark on our destination; and

Whereas, Mayor Karen Alexander served as the Mayor of Salisbury with unwavering commitment to the growth and well-being of the City of Salisbury and the community; and

Whereas, through her leadership, Salisbury strived to be a vibrant city, with Mayor Alexander's passion for culture, community development, the arts, tourism and historic preservation driving significant advancements that will continue to shape the city's identity, inspiring others to follow in her footsteps of dedicated service to the community; and

Whereas, in addition to her role as mayor, Karen Alexander played a pivotal role in fostering economic growth through tourism in Rowan County, working alongside local organizations to enhance tourism initiatives and establish Salisbury as an original destination for visitors and citizens; and

Whereas, Mayor Alexander's service with Rowan County Tourism was instrumental in the creation of new programs, events, and partnerships, leading to an increase in visitors and the promotion of Salisbury's rich history, diverse culture, and unique attractions; and

Whereas, Mayor Alexander's leadership and compassion touched the lives of countless individuals, fostering a sense of community and belonging that will remain part of her lasting legacy.

Now, Therefore, be it resolved, by the Rowan County Tourism Development Authority, do hereby adopt this resolution in honor of the extraordinary life and service of **Mayor Karen Alexander**, a true Rowan Original, offering our deepest appreciation for her contributions to Salisbury, Rowan County, and the greater community.

Let this resolution serve as a testament to her tireless work, vision, and unwavering commitment to the people she served. May her memory be forever cherished, and her legacy live on in the continued prosperity of our Salisbury and Rowan County, North Carolina.

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for approval of the proposed resolution as read.

Second: Therese Henderson seconded the motion.

Motion: Approved

Audit Reports Year Ending June 30, 2024

Meacham introduced Eddie Carrick, CPA and reminded the board members of the importance of the yearly audit presentation on the RCTDA (Public Authority) and the SRCVB as a 501c6 and how the organizational audits differ. Meacham reported that the RCTDA is legally required to complete the audit and filed with the LGC and the state treasurer's office.

Carrick gave the 2023-24 RCTDA audit report noting that RCTDA should be seen as the funding source and primarily functions as the collector of the revenue, holding and distributing the funds, and the investment company. Carrick reported that the RCTDA Audit received an unqualified or clean opinion. Carrick reviewed several key components of the report for the board, noting that pages covering the management analysis and offer a summary in layman's terms. Carrick encouraged the members to review those pages on their own. Carrick pointed out the various assets held by the TDA. Carrick noted that RCTDA is a governmental entity and is monitored by the State Treasurer's office and LGC each year.

Carrick reviewed the 2023-24 SRCVB audit report noting the CVB also received an unqualified or clean opinion. Carrick pointed out the statement of activities and briefly reviewed the breakdown of the functional expenses and noted that most expenses are marketing related. A review of the CVB Audit's highlights from the report was provided by Carrick. Carrick complimented the staff on organization and compliance to the LGC and Federal standards. Carrick reported that the RCTDA audit was accepted and reviewed by the State Treasurer's office and Local Government Commission. Carrick thanked the board for the opportunity to serve the organization and the staff for their hospitality.

Financial Report & Tourism Market Update

Meacham reported occupancy tax revenues as of 12-31-2024 for fiscal year 2024-25 on an accrual basis equaled \$792,229 and are 16% ahead of budget expectations. October 2024 occupancy taxes were 21.8% ahead of October 2023 and were the highest ever collected ever. November 2024 occupancy taxes were 18.6% ahead of November 2023. Both October and November taxes were all-time highs for their respective months. December 2024 taxes are projected to be in line with budget to slightly higher than 2023. Year-to-date revenues on an accrual basis through December were \$19,317 less than expenses. With total revenues equaling \$1,071,494 against total expenses of \$1,090,812. Meacham said the operating loss is being driven by variances in a repayment schedule from Rowan County for the wayfinding signage program's capital expenses.

Meacham reviewed the balance sheet and reported current assets equaling \$514,075, comprised of

cash on hand and occupancy tax receivables. Accounts Receivables equaled \$232,161 which includes November 2024 and December 2024 outstanding occupancy tax revenues. Cash on hand as of 12-31-24 equaled 308,913.

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for approval of the financials as presented.

Second: Sada Troutman

Motion: Approved

Tourism Program of Work

Michalec reported that despite a challenging year for destination websites on the tail end of Google's GA4 change over and Google's new zero click AI, the website remained strong. The outline booking platform continued to improve visitor experience and allow for promotion of expanded package options. The website maintained similar counts with users and pageviews as seen in 2023. Michalec noted that this meant that staff fell short of benchmarks, however, with the previously mentioned changes that Google made, she was pleased to have remained steady. Michalec said that as she learns more about the implications of Google's new tools, she will identify ways to continue to grow the website. Staff is already in conversation with Simpleview on what enhancements can be made and what can be incorporated to take the website a step further.

The online booking platform saw significant growth in 2024. Reservations were up by 6.5%, room nights up by 11.9% and revenue up by 17.4%. Michalec said that we did fall short of the reservations benchmark, but room nights booked exceeded the benchmark by 3.31%

Michalec reported that the email newsletter continues to receive positive feedback from viewers and in 2024 continued to perform well with an average open rate of 31.71%, which met the benchmarks. Subscribers did increase by 146, bringing the total to 5,069. Michalec noted that the email newsletter is something staff is constantly working to better understand and grow as people continue to receive more and more emails daily. Staff is adapting best practices to determine what will entice subscribers to open their email newsletter.

Michalec reported an amazing increase in fans and followers on social media in 2024 with 20.49% increase across all channels, which exceeded the benchmark by 14.96%. The interactions and engagements of these fans and followers led to Rowan County content being displayed more than 2.3 million times in 2024, which exceeded the benchmark by 33.89%. In December, content was heavily focused on the Polar Express and all of the fun family friendly holiday events throughout the county. The top stories on social media for 2024 were Balloon Glow and Laser Show, 2024 Christmas Video highlight, and the Polar Express.

Digital marketing continued to be a primary emphasis in 2024. The blog was expanded, follower counts grew massively, and many new package offerings were added using the online booking system.

Michalec reminded the group that in 2023 the SEO team had recommended a series of guide style blogs and webpages for annual events and attractions, these included detailed information about events and attractions that was more than one would typically find on a calendar or event listing. A number of blogs were created with these parameters in 2023. In 2024, staff utilized a similar approach but focused on specific experiences that visitors can find throughout Rowan County. These blogs encouraged visitors to visit, stay and make the most of every moment. The blogs encompassed multiple attractions and experiences within one destination, rather than focusing on one at a time. The guides have proven valuable as a popular resource and have also generated a good deal of web traffic. Michalec pointed out the list of blogs that had been created and the extensive range of topics the blogs had covered. She reported that the blog had an incredible year. In total, Arrowood created 90 blogs that brought users to the website and created a great deal of social media engagement. In December, blogs included Holiday Family Fun events, Holiday Lights Guide, Gift guides, and New Year's Eve fun. Blog views were almost 52,000 which is a 32% increase over 2023. There were 90 blogs

produced which was an increase of 22% over 2023 and benchmarks exceeded for these metrics by 24% and 12.5% respectively.

Michalec reported that 2024 was the second year of the influencer program and 2024 ended with 46 paid influencer placements with 8 unique influencers to promote Rowan County. The list of events and attractions covered included Holly Jolly Farm Days at Patterson Farm and the Celebration of Lights & Winterland Express in Kannapolis which occurred in December. Influencer placements resulted in more than 2 million views and nearly 114 thousand engagements. Benchmarks were not met in 2024 in either metric due to the decrease in work by Jenna who chose to cut back and focus more on her family. As a result, staff added several additional influencers and strategies to continue to grow the program.

Furr said the CVB marketing team is excited to present the 2024 Year End Marketing Report to the group today and she is going to cover some highlights on new overnight package offerings, expansion of the trolley system, enhancing the digital platforms, the influencer program, and strong partnerships.

Rowan County Tourism supported 21 partners through the tourism supported investments program exceeding the benchmark for both the number of fulfilled requests and the number of room nights booked that were associated with the requests. In November and December requests were fulfilled for the Balloon Glow and Laser Show, Micro Wrestling, NC Craft Beer Guild, and the Polar Express. Total room nights were 843 and Visitor related economic impact for the year was over \$8 million.

The trolleys continue to be in high demand, surpassing the benchmarks for the year. Rentals saw a 49% increase and revenue increased by almost 18%. The year ended with a total of 184 rentals and \$64,000 in revenue. In November and December, the trolley participated in both Christmas parades, Christmas events, the Polar Express and for the first time since Covid, Scrooges Christmas Trolley Tour. The tour held 24 shows and all were sold out. Lee Street Theatre has plans to do the Scrooges Christmas Trolley Tour again in 2025.

Furr reported that the stay and play packages continued to be a great success and enticement for overnight visitation. The online booking platform is in its 3rd year and continues to be a seamless and efficient way to book packages online. The number of packages booked in 2024 remained consistent with 2022 levels, however the number of room nights booked associated with the packages increased 5.68%, surpassing the benchmark. The most successful packages come as no surprise and include Day Out with Thomas with 122 packages and 181 room nights, and the Polar Express with 270 packages and 369 room nights. The general travel Visa Gift card package came in with 103 packages and 146 room nights for 2024. A new holiday package was added that included our friends in Kannapolis and staff hope to do more in 2025. In total for 2024, there were 564 stay & play packages with 781 room nights associated. There are currently two stay & play packages running on the website, Wine about Winter with 16 packages and 16 room nights and the General Travel Visa gift card package with 3 sold and 6 room nights associated.

Furr reported Rowan County hosted 8 groups in 2024, welcoming back the Southeastern Little League Tournament for its 6th veteran year. Other groups include Smoke-Out, the Great Steak Cookoff, Dragon Boat, NC Main Street & the State Historic Preservation group, the Balloon Glow & Laser Show and the Micro Wrestling group. 4 additional groups secured in 2024 will occur in 2025. Preservation NC, Salisbury Youth Council, Rowan School System, and an Agricultural Conference. Group sales met benchmarks for the number of groups and room nights associated with groups exceeded the benchmark by 16.4%. Room nights associated with these groups are estimated to be 1,122 with an economic impact of \$989,550.

Furr reported another wonderful year in partnership with the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers. The sponsorship with the Cannon Ballers includes upper and premium home plate season tickets, concourse signage, outfield ribbon board signage, a full-page program ad, the Where's Boomer videos and added this year, the on-field activities that showcased Rowan County destinations that took place between innings. The 3rd Annual Tourism &

Hospitality Celebration Night took place in May with 600 community tourism partners who showed up to celebrate the local tourism and hospitality sector with food, drinks, giveaways, and baseball.

Furr reported on the Ale Trail by Rail partnership with NC by Train and NC Craft Brewers Guild. The Ale Trail by Rail highlighted the region's craft beer scene. It provided rail visitors with a unique opportunity to travel by train with 10 daily trips between Raleigh and Charlotte hoping off in Salisbury and other cities along the route to partake in locally crafted beef and experience the downtown area. Furr said a special thanks to Sada Troutman and her husband who graciously agreed to be models for the promotional video shoot.

Furr reported that in 2024, the team continued to push the Be an Original brand, bolster story telling through marketing and press releases, tout our partners and increase our relationships with media. Strengthening our relationships with our partners remained a top priority. The December partner outreach is always a favorite of Furr's, and she delivered almost 30 cheesecakes to our partners chatting with them about how things were going in their world, what was ahead and spending time thanking them for all they do for our industry. The year ended with 58 partner relationship visits, 24 PR engagements and 24 site/event visits that Arrowood completed.

Looking ahead for 2025, Furr states that staff will continue to leverage storytelling through local macro and micro-Influencers on social media, identify and begin work with additional influencers who match the target audience, ongoing and continuous updates to the website based on SEO findings as well as consideration and exploration of website redesign. Furr stated that new package development and promotion of all stay & play packages will continue with an emphasis on incentivizing general travel.

Tourism Development

Meacham reported that there is a lot going on with capital projects and Sarah will cover wayfinding. Meacham said that after some back and forth and reworking of the stormwater plan the project has been approved by the city and will break ground the first week of February. There are very nice signs at both entries to the RailWalk and the estimated completion time is about 3-4 months.

Michalec reported that unfortunately due to illness, weather and a series of other things, the welcome signs for the various municipalities did not get in the ground in December. There was one hiccup that had to be worked through to relocate one of the signs. Once that challenge has been met and the location finalized after the utility lines are confirmed, the team will begin installation. Installation should be 1-2 days for digging and then installation of the actual signs, which should be completed by the end of January.

Michalec reported that confirmation of a right of way issues on signs in China Grove and Cleveland are being verified and then those signs will be sent to production. Due to the availability of funds, Michalec reports that Salisbury is being added to the list of communities receiving welcome signs with a focus on Downtown Salisbury. These signs will match the look and feel of the countywide signs. Sada is currently working on verifying the proposed locations and checking for any right-of-way issues.

Meacham reported that the Marriott Townplace Suites has cleared some hurdles with the city TRC Committee and is moving forward and is on pace to go to through planning and Council to get the conditional planning permits to move forward.

Meacham gave an update on the Gateway building and noted that there was a meeting with tenants recently. Stephen Kidd gave a summary of the meeting on the concerns raised by some of the tenants. The tenants and their various board chairs came together, and everyone shared their concerns including the TDA as the building owner. Kidd stated that the tenants were told that lease rates would need to increase to meet some of the key needs. Everyone left the meeting feeling their concerns had been addressed and understanding the

next steps that would need to be taken for some of those concerns to be met effectively. Kidd said that Meacham, Michalec and Trantham do a good job of managing the facility and accommodating all of the building tenants.

The meeting adjourned at 1 pm. Respectfully submitted. Lesley Pullium SRCVB



FINANCIAL SUMMARY REPORT AS OF 1-31-2025

Report Date: February 18, 2025

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

Fiscal Year 2024-25 Statement of Activities: Highlights as of 1-31-25.

- Occupancy tax revenues as of 1-31-2025 for fiscal year 2024-25 on an accrual basis equaled \$887,391 and are 12% ahead of budget expectations.
 - o December 2024 occupancy taxes were 3.7.% ahead of December 2023
 - January 2025 taxes are projected to be 10% higher than January 2024
- Year-to-date revenues on an accrual basis through January were \$163,221 ahead of expenses. This was driven by Wayfinding invoices being reclassified as balance sheet transaction under construction in progress. Total revenues equaled \$1,243,586 against total expenses of \$1,080,365.

Balance Sheet: Summary as of 1-31-2025

- Total Current Assets equaled \$548,535 and were \$34,460 higher than December 2024. Current assets consisted of cash on hand and occupancy tax receivables
- Accounts Receivables equaled \$208,662 which included December 2024 and January 2025 outstanding occupancy tax revenues.
- Cash on hand as of 1-31-25 equaled \$339,872, which is \$30,959 higher than December 2024.

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Statement of Financial Position - Accrual Basis As of January 31, 2025

Assets

Current Assets		
Petty cash	\$ 16.83	
First Bank Checking - 0436	42,629.39	
F&M Operating - 9224	4,324.39	
NC Capital Mgmt Trust	262,207.13	
First Bank Money Mkt - 4509	30,695.34	
Accounts Receivable Total Current Assets	208,662.01	548,535.09
Fixed Assets		
Building	2,176,919.00	
Land	250,604.00	
Construction in Progress	225,898.03	
Railwalk Pavilion	506,594.36	
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		2,790,136.23
Other Assets		
Pension Asset	45,079.00	
Total Other Assets		45,079.00
Total Assets		3,383,750.32
	Liabilities & Net Assets	
Current Liabilities		
Retirement Withholding	1,458.18	
Federal and Fica Withholding	1,484.10	

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY Statement of Financial Position - Accrual Basis

As of January 31, 2025

State Withholding	241.00	
SUTA	8.84	
FUTA	40.78	
Total Current Liabilities		3,232.90
Long-term Liabilities	-	
Pension Deferrals	76,977.00	
Total Long-term Liabilities	_	<u>76,977.00</u>
Total Liabilities	-	80,209.90
Net Assets		
Investment in fixed assets	2,615,032.00	
Restricted Fund Balance	274,236.00	
Retained Earnings	251,051.26	
Change in Net Assets	163,221.16	
Total Net Assets	-	3,303,540.42
Total Liabilities and		
Net Assets		\$ 3,383,750,32

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

	1 Month Ended January 31, 2025 Actual	1 Month Ended January 31, 2025 Budget	Current Period Over/(Under) Budget
Income		Ü	
Trolley Income	3,913.66	6,666.67	(2,753.01)
Occupancy Taxes Income	95,162.01	116,666.67	(21,504.66)
Partner Services Income	2,308.57	5,541.67	(3,233.10)
Holiday Caravan Parade Income	0.00	4,708.34	(4,708.34)
Miscellaneous Income	0.00	83.34	(83.34)
Interest Income	880.43	1,000.00	(119.57)
Gateway Building Income	9,838.00	11,875.00	(2,037.00)
Tourism ARPA Funding	59,989.42	41,666.67	18,322.75
Total Income	172,092.09	188,208.36	(16,116.27)
Operating Expenses			
Salaries - regular	8,751.45	10,333.33	(1,581.88)
Worker's Comp and Liab Ins.	496.00	708.33	(212.33)
Miscellaneous	0.00	375.00	(375.00)
Professional Services	3,072.95	3,000.00	72.95
CVB Appropriation	100,786.64	91,291.66	9,494.98
Supplies & Equipment	0.00	375.00	(375.00)
Trolley	1,270.61	958.33	312.28
Tourism Development	(161,518.94)	62,500.00	(224,018.94)
Holiday Caravan Parade	672.39	4,708.33	(4,035.94)
Partner Services	1,624.43	2,083.33	(458.90)
Gateway Building	34,397.44	11,875.00	22,522.44
Total Operating Expenses	(10,447.03)	188,208.31	(198,655.34)
Operating Income (Loss)	182,539.12	0.05	182,539.07

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

	7 Months Ended January 31, 2025 Actual	Current Year June 30, 2025 Budget	Current Year Over/(Under) Budget
Income			
Trolley Income	31,978.47	80,000.00	(48,021.53)
Occupancy Taxes Income	887,391.73	1,400,000.00	(512,608.27)
Partner Services Income	19,695.51	66,500.00	(46,804.49)
Holiday Caravan Parade Income	63,689.69	56,500.00	7,189.69
Miscellaneous Income	1,571.00	1,000.00	571.00
Interest Income	6,932.25	12,000.00	(5,067.75)
Gateway Building Income	91,085.42	142,500.00	(51,414.58)
Tourism ARPA Funding	141,242.84	500,000.00	(358,757.16)
Total Income	1,243,586.91	2,258,500.00	(1,014,913.09)
Operating Expenses			
Salaries - regular	70,337.43	124,000.00	(53,662.57)
Worker's Comp and Liab Ins.	5,376.00	8,500.00	(3,124.00)
Miscellaneous	2,599.71	4,500.00	(1,900.29)
Professional Services	31,032.80	36,000.00	(4,967.20)
CVB Appropriation	704,702.57	1,095,500.00	(390,797.43)
Supplies & Equipment	552.46	4,500.00	(3,947.54)
Trolley	9,350.85	11,500.00	(2,149.15)
Tourism Development	75,130.70	750,000.00	(674,869.30)
Holiday Caravan Parade	67,689.18	56,500.00	11,189.18
Partner Services	10,807.11	25,000.00	(14,192.89)
Gateway Building	102,786.94	142,500.00	(39,713.06)
Total Operating Expenses	1,080,365.75	2,258,500.00	(1,178,134.25)
Operating Income (Loss)	163,221.16	0.00	163,221.16

Rowan County Occ	upancy Tax Rec	eipts Collected (GROSS)						
MONTH	FY20-21	FY21-22	%CHNG	FY22-23	%CHNG	FY23-24	%CHNG	FY24-25	%CHNG
July	61,737.08	105,514.79	70.9%	120,021.34	12.1%	108,732.65	-9.4%	133,587.33	22.9%
August	66,399.96	99,851.17	50.4%	115,189.06	13.3%	110,177.63	-4.4%	126,464.65	14.8%
September	78,562.08	100,792.04	28.3%	119,443.37	15.6%	114,690.69	-4.1%	133,536.09	14.1%
Quarter Total	206,699.12	306,158.00	48.1%	354,653.77	13.7%	333,600.97	-6.3%	393,588.07	15.2%
October	76,794.51	115,324.55	50.2%	128,088.16	10.0%	141,296.02	10.3%	172,137.56	21.8%
November	60,357.00	102,438.16	69.7%	116,523.19	12.1%	109,684.96	-5.9%	130,039.92	18.6%
December	64,749.41	95,874.73	48.1%	103,834.94	7.7%	95,959.89	-8.2%	99,625.62	3.7%
Quarter Total	201,900.92	313,637.44	55.3%	348,446.29	10.0%	346,940.87	-0.4%	401,803.10	13.7%
January	56,291.87	96,918.80	72.2%	115,064.17	15.8%	88,997.47	-22.7%		
February	62,049.03	94,530.61	52.3%	108,890.30	13.2%	106,875.73	-1.9%		
March	84,372.26	114,826.05	36.1%	125,056.96	8.2%	123,858.60	-1.0%		
Quarter Total	202,713.16	306,275.46	51.1%	349,011.43	12.2%	319,731.80	-9.2%		
April	90,628.43	119,032.67	31.3%	125,347.11	5.0%	137,682.85	9.8%		
May	97,167.69	126,307.46	30.0%	125,953.79	-0.3%	144,974.27	15.1%		
June	102,792.30	115,684.25	12.5%	109,364.77	-5.8%	132,031.99	17.2%		
Quarter Total	290,588.42	361,024.38	24.2%	360,665.67	-0.1%	414,689.11	13.0%		
Adjmts Penalities									
Penalities									
Year Total	\$ 901,901.62	\$1,287,095.28	42.7%	\$ 1,412,777.16	8.9%	\$ 1,414,962.75	0.2%		

