

# VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

NORTH CAROLINA

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

Wednesday, April 15, 2026, Noon  
Paul E. Fisher Gateway Building

- |      |   |                     |
|------|---|---------------------|
| I.   | Call to Order & Welcome                   | James Meacham       |
| II.  | Board Meeting Minutes                     | James Meacham       |
| III. | Financial Report                          | James Meacham       |
|      | A. 2026-2027 Budget Development Process   |                     |
| IV.  | Tourism Program of Work Report            | Rowan Tourism Staff |
|      | A. Lodging Market Data                    |                     |
|      | B. Tourism Development & Capital Projects |                     |
|      | C. Marketing, Sales, & Communication      |                     |
| V.   | Dan Nicholas Partnership                  | James Meacham       |
| VI.  | Additional Business                       |                     |
| VII. | Adjourn                                   |                     |



Tourism Development Authority  
North Carolina

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**ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING  
Wednesday, March 25, 12:00 Noon  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

Board Members Attending: Craig Pierce, Stephen Kidd, April Saylor, Therese Henderson, Krista Sullivan, Kimberly Morgan, Andy Mabry, Susan Kluttz

Not Attending: Richard Reinholz, Annette Privette-Keller, Sada Troutman

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

**RCTDA Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Stephen Kidd and a quorum was present. Kidd welcomed members and opened the meeting.

**Approval of the Minutes**

RCTDA Board members confirmed receipt of the prior meeting minutes and confirmed minutes have been reviewed.

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion to approve the February 2026 meeting minutes.

Motion: Therese Henderson seconded the motion.

Motion: The motion was approved unanimously

**Financial Report**

Meacham presented the financial report, noting that financial documents were distributed shortly before the meeting due to timing constraints associated with tax season and coordination with the organization's accounting firm. Meacham reviewed the organization's financial position through February 28, noting that the fiscal year operates on a July through June cycle and that the organization is nearing completion of the third quarter.

Meacham reported that cash on hand decreased from approximately \$300,000 to approximately \$250,000, which is typical for this time of year due to lower occupancy tax collections during winter months. Accounts receivable totaled approximately \$217,000, representing January and February occupancy tax collections not yet received at the time the report was prepared. Fixed assets increased significantly due to continued investment in the Rail Walk capital project. Construction in progress reflects approximately \$154,000 in Rail Walk expenditures, which

appear on the balance sheet rather than the profit and loss statement until final audit adjustments are completed.

The interlocal agreement liability with Rowan County related to the Rail Walk project continues to be paid down according to schedule, with approximately \$100,000 already repaid. Total income through February was approximately \$1.315 million against expenses of approximately \$1.244 million, producing a net income of approximately \$70,741. Meacham clarified that this amount largely reflects trolley insurance proceeds currently categorized as miscellaneous income but ultimately designated for capital allocation related to the trolley asset.

Occupancy tax revenues are slightly below budget by approximately \$7,843 year-to-date; however, overall revenues and expenses remain aligned with projections. Meacham emphasized that maintaining balance between revenues and expenditures is consistent with expectations for a Public Authority. Discussion included clarification regarding treatment of fixed assets, implications of transferring assets to other entities, and potential insurance cost reductions should assets be removed from the balance sheet.

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion to approve the financial report.

Motion: Therese Henderson seconded the motion.

Motion: The motion was approved unanimously.

### **Tourism Program of Work**

Furr reported that February continued to build upon the intentional strategic direction established at the beginning of the calendar year. Despite February traditionally being a slower visitation period, efforts remained focused on strengthening long-term visitation growth, economic impact, and brand positioning. Strategic emphasis was placed on advancing capital projects, strengthening statewide advocacy relationships, expanding seasonal storytelling initiatives, cultivating group travel opportunities, and deepening strategic partnerships.

Furr noted the importance of balancing physical development projects with narrative development efforts that communicate Rowan County's unique identity to potential visitors. Emphasis continues to be placed on positioning the destination to capitalize on spring travel opportunities through proactive marketing and partnership engagement.

### **Lodging and Market Performance Update**

Michalec reported that February lodging performance remained strong compared to the prior year. Occupancy for February reached 66.9%, representing an increase of 4.4% year-over-year, with year-to-date occupancy reaching 53.5%, an increase of 5.5%. Average daily rate (ADR), revenue per available room (RevPAR), and total lodging revenue all demonstrated year-over-year growth.

Early March performance data indicates a shift in market conditions. For the first two weeks of March, occupancy averaged 69.6%, representing a 9.2% decrease compared to the same period last year. ADR increased approximately 2.5% year-over-year to \$113; however, total revenue declined approximately 7% due to reduced occupancy levels. Michalec indicated that broader macroeconomic factors, including rising fuel prices and international geopolitical uncertainty, are contributing to reduced transient travel demand.

Approximately 80% of Rowan County's lodging market demand is generated through traditional hotel accommodations, while approximately 20% is generated through short-term rental platforms such as Airbnb and VRBO. Michalec explained that transient travelers, defined as travelers not associated with organized group activity, tend to be most sensitive to fluctuations in fuel prices and broader economic uncertainty. Peer destinations across North Carolina are experiencing similar patterns. Despite these pressures, Rowan County continues to perform competitively within the Salisbury-Concord submarket.

### **Capital Projects Update**

Michalec reported that the Rail Walk project is nearing completion and represents a significant placemaking investment for the community. Light pole banners have been installed, final electrical work has been completed, and landscaping installation is substantially complete. Remaining project components include installation of archway signage scheduled for March 30 and installation of two remaining directional signs scheduled for April 2. Pavilion cleaning and final landscaping refresh activities are planned during the week of April 14 in advance of the opening of the Farmers Market season.

A Rail Walk dedication event is scheduled for April 23 at 10:30 a.m. The event will include an opportunity for attendees to tour the completed project, participate in a brief program recognizing key contributors, and engage in community fellowship. Food service will be provided by Crafty Buffalo. Board members were encouraged to attend and participate in the event program.

Michalec reported completion of the website design framework and noted that the project is now entering the sitemap planning and customization phase. The redesigned website is intended to improve navigation, strengthen storytelling capability, and optimize search visibility, including improved readability for artificial intelligence search tools. In addition, the organization's new centralized data platform has been successfully implemented. The system consolidates data sources previously maintained across multiple platforms, allowing staff to analyze performance metrics more efficiently and allocate more time to strategic initiatives. The anticipated website launch timeline remains late summer.

### **Marketing and Communications Report**

Furr reported the February communications strategy emphasized winter visitation promotion while simultaneously positioning Rowan County for early spring travel.

Arrowood reported that content development focused on broadening the destination narrative through storytelling that highlights historical assets, hidden destinations, and local experiences consistent with the "Be an original" brand identity. Campaign themes included promotion of Wine About Winter experiences, Valentine's Day travel inspiration, St. Patrick's Day events, and seasonal event promotion. Blog content highlighted historic experiences, African American heritage experiences, hidden gems, and curated day-trip itineraries. Arrowood also emphasized continued promotion of wedding venues to support long-term group travel demand.

Digital influencer programming was intentionally paused during slower travel months to allow reallocation of marketing resources to higher-impact travel periods later in the year.

## **Digital Performance Metrics**

Arrowood reported that digital engagement metrics continue to demonstrate strong growth. Total digital reach increased to approximately 1.6 million impressions, representing a threefold increase since January. Social media following increased to 59,241, with notable growth occurring on TikTok, where approximately 1,000 new followers were gained during the past month. Website engagement metrics also demonstrated growth, with page views reaching 62,614 and users reaching 33,180. E-newsletter subscriptions increased to 5,468, maintaining an open rate of approximately 33.22%. Arrowood attributed improvements in reach and engagement to strategic adjustments in content development and the Media One partnership, which has improved advertising efficiency and target audience.

## **Stay & Play Packages**

Arrowood reported that stay and play package utilization continues to support overnight visitation. To date, 40 packages have been sold, generating approximately 60 room nights. Package utilization included 25 Wine About Winter packages, 7 Visa-supported packages, and 8 Cheerwine Festival packages.

## **Group Travel and Partner Engagement**

Furr reported that group travel and partner engagement remain priority focus areas. Furr reported securing the Rowan-Salisbury School System conference event, which brings approximately 70 college students from across North Carolina. The organization continues to strengthen its partnership with the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers heading into the 2026 season.

Furr noted that she has also launched a monthly partner video series intended to improve communication with tourism stakeholders and highlight key industry initiatives. Planning continues for the annual Tourism and Hospitality Celebration event, with expectations of strong attendance based on previous participation levels. Visit North Carolina has selected Cherry Treesort for inclusion in the 2027 North Carolina Travel Guide, providing valuable statewide exposure for a Rowan County tourism partner.

## **Brand Development**

Furr noted that the “Be an Original” brand will celebrate its tenth anniversary this year. Planning efforts are underway to develop commemorative initiatives that reinforce brand recognition and community engagement. Furr reported collaboration with New Sarum Brewing Company to create a signature Be an original branded beer as part of the anniversary celebration. Efforts also include expanding partner engagement strategies and continuing to position the brand as a forward-facing representation of Rowan County’s unique tourism identity.

## **Trolley Program Update**

The organization’s single trolley continues to operate successfully as a tourism asset supporting weddings, partner events, nonprofit activities, and private rentals. Year-to-date performance includes 49 rentals generating approximately \$5,000 in revenue. Community stakeholders have expressed interest in exploring privately funded acquisition of a second trolley vehicle.

## **Tourism Development Plan Update**

Meacham presented an overview of strategic priorities aligned with the Tourism Development Master Plan adopted by the Board. Investment initiatives continue to follow a dual-track strategy focusing on both urban and rural tourism development opportunities. Urban investments have included Rail Walk development, expanded wayfinding signage, Farmers Market improvements, and public art installations. Rural investments include partnership initiatives such as Patterson Farm agritourism enhancements and outdoor recreation experiences designed to attract regional visitors.

Meacham introduced a concept for collaboration with Rowan County on future tourism-related enhancements at Dan Nicholas Park. The proposed framework would focus on strengthening the park's role as a regional tourism attraction while aligning with the "Be an original" brand identity. Opportunities may include enhancements to visitor experiences, improved connectivity between tourism assets, and expanded seasonal programming opportunities.

Board members expressed strong support for exploring a collaborative framework with Rowan County that leverages existing infrastructure investments while enhancing visitor engagement opportunities. TDA staff will continue discussions with county leadership regarding potential partnership structures and planning alignment.

### **Additional Business:**

Meacham reported that Arrowood will be attending the Southeastern Tourism Marketing College in June of 2026. The program consists of one week each year over a three-year time period to receive a unique continuing education experience that upon completion awards a Travel Marketing Professional (TMP) certification.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.  
Respectfully submitted,

Lesley Pullium  
Rowan County Tourism Development Authority



## FINANCIAL SUMMARY REPORT AS OF 3-31-2026

Report Date: April 16, 2026

**\*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 3-31-2026.**

- Occupancy tax revenues as of 3-31-26 for fiscal year 2025-26 on an accrual basis equaled \$1,125,528 and are 1.3% behind the FY25-26 budget, which was based on FY25-26 actuals.
  - If exempt occupancy tax revenues from Livingstone student housing were included from November and December; total tax revenues fiscal YTD would be slightly ahead of budget.
  - February 2026 taxes came in 4.4% higher than February 2025.
  - March 2026 occupancy taxes are projected to come in 5% below March 2025 and coincide with the sharp increase in fuel costs at the onset of the US-Iran conflict that started in late February.
  - Early April 2026 projections are trending down from April 2025 as fuel costs remain high, having a negative impact on travel, especially transient visitation.
- Year-to-date revenues on an accrual basis through March were \$147,608 ahead of expenses. Total revenues on an accrual basis equaled \$1,475,788 against expenses of \$1,328,179.

### **Balance Sheet: Summary as of 3-31-2026**

- Total Current Assets equaled \$506,280 and were \$48,653 higher than February; current assets consist of cash on hand and tax receivables.
- Accounts Receivables equaled \$249,668 and included February and March occupancy tax revenues.
- Fixed Assets totaled just under \$3.94 million.
- Cash on hand as of 3-31-26 equaled \$256,612, an increase of \$16,507 from the previous month.

ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY  
Statement of Financial Position - Accrual Basis  
As of March 31, 2026

Assets

Current Assets

Petty cash	\$	16.83	
First Bank Checking - 0436		38,742.49	
F&M Operating - 9224		3,484.78	
NC Capital Mgmt Trust		189,245.74	
First Bank Money Mkt - 4509		25,122.52	
Accounts Receivable		249,668.01	
Total Current Assets			506,280.37

Fixed Assets

Building		2,176,919.00	
Land		250,604.00	
Construction in Progress		182,964.75	
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			3,942,772.95

Other Assets

Pension Asset		48,396.00	
Total Other Assets			48,396.00
Total Assets			4,497,449.32

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 March 31, 2026

Federal and Fica Withholding	1,934.20	
State Withholding	268.00	
SUTA	49.32	
FUTA	41.41	
FSA Withholding	250.00	
Total Current Liabilities		4,203.01
<u>Long-term Liabilities</u>		
Interlocal Agreement - Rowan Co. (Railwalk)	650,000.00	
Pension Deferrals	85,085.00	
Total Long-term Liabilities		735,085.00
Total Liabilities		739,288.01
<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	147,608.31	
Total Net Assets		3,758,161.31
Total Liabilities and Net Assets		\$ 4,497,449.32

See Accountant's Letter

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

	9 Months Ended March 31, 2026 Actual	Current Year June 30, 2026 Budget	Current Year Over/(Under) Budget
<u>Income</u>			
Trolley Income	39,738.01	95,000.00	(55,261.99)
Occupancy Taxes Income	1,125,528.68	1,590,000.00	(464,471.32)
Partner Services Income	19,450.72	70,000.00	(50,549.28)
Holiday Caravan Parade Income	53,793.15	65,000.00	(11,206.85)
Miscellaneous Income	93,780.85	2,500.00	91,280.85
Investment Income	7,868.11	12,000.00	(4,131.89)
Gateway Building Income	135,628.53	168,500.00	(32,871.47)
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Total Income	1,475,788.05	2,003,000.00	(527,211.95)
<u>Operating Expenses</u>			
Salaries - regular	97,195.41	132,000.00	(34,804.59)
Worker's Comp and Liab Ins.	2,920.93	9,000.00	(6,079.07)
Miscellaneous	1,907.15	4,500.00	(2,592.85)
Professional Services	23,311.90	37,000.00	(13,688.10)
CVB Appropriation	927,147.06	1,144,000.00	(216,852.94)
Supplies & Equipment	508.94	4,500.00	(3,991.06)
Trolley	16,293.39	12,000.00	4,293.39
Tourism Development	97,011.94	400,000.00	(302,988.06)
Holiday Caravan Parade	53,197.76	65,000.00	(11,802.24)
Partner Services	8,581.50	26,500.00	(17,918.50)
Gateway Building	100,103.76	168,500.00	(68,396.24)
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Total Operating Expenses	1,328,179.74	2,003,000.00	(674,820.26)
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Operating Income (Loss)	147,608.31	0.00	147,608.31

See Accountant's Letter

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

	1 Month Ended March 31, 2026 Actual	1 Month Ended March 31, 2026 Budget	Current Period Over/(Under) Budget
<u>Income</u>			
Trolley Income	5,433.56	7,916.67	(2,483.11)
Occupancy Taxes Income	137,668.45	132,500.00	5,168.45
Partner Services Income	1,501.60	5,833.34	(4,331.74)
Holiday Caravan Parade Income	1,500.00	5,416.67	(3,916.67)
Miscellaneous Income	480.00	208.34	271.66
Investment Income	552.21	1,000.00	(447.79)
Gateway Building Income	13,185.00	14,041.67	(856.67)
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Total Income	160,320.82	166,916.69	(6,595.87)
<u>Operating Expenses</u>			
Salaries - regular	10,131.92	11,000.00	(868.08)
Worker's Comp and Liab Ins.	0.00	750.00	(750.00)
Miscellaneous	246.41	375.00	(128.59)
Professional Services	750.00	3,083.33	(2,333.33)
CVB Appropriation	59,804.25	95,333.33	(35,529.08)
Supplies & Equipment	0.00	375.00	(375.00)
Trolley	0.00	1,000.00	(1,000.00)
Tourism Development	12,532.46	33,333.33	(20,800.87)
Holiday Caravan Parade	489.00	5,416.66	(4,927.66)
Partner Services	0.00	2,208.33	(2,208.33)
Gateway Building	(499.94)	14,041.66	(14,541.60)
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Total Operating Expenses	83,454.10	166,916.64	(83,462.54)
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Operating Income (Loss)	76,866.72	0.05	76,866.67

See Accountant's Letter

