

VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

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

Wednesday, May 20, 2026, Noon
Paul E. Fisher Gateway Building

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

ROWAN COUNTY

Tourism Development Authority
North Carolina

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**ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING
Wednesday, April 15, 12:00 Noon
BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

Board Members Attending: Craig Pierce, Andy Maben, Therese Henderson, Susan Klutz, Kimberly Morgan, Annette Privette Keller (ZOOM), Richard Reinholz

Not Attending: Stephen Kidd, Sada Troutman, April Saylor, Krista Sullivan,

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

Call to Order

Meacham called the meeting to order stating that Chairman Kidd is out of town today. Meacham welcomed the group and noted that additional members were attending remotely via Zoom.

Approval of Minutes

Board members were asked to review the minutes from the March 2026 meeting, which had been distributed via email.

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for approval of the March 2026 meeting minutes as presented.

Second: Therese Henderson

Motion: Carried and minutes approved

Financial Report

Meacham provided the update on financial performance through March as the organization approaches the fourth quarter of the fiscal year (April, May, and June).

Meacham stated that on an accrual basis through March, occupancy tax revenues totaled \$1.125 million, which is 1.35% behind budget. A portion of the variance is attributed to reduced transient travel associated with high gas prices and exempt tax rooms related to Livingstone College stays in November and December.

Meacham said that when exempt tax rooms are factored back in, collections would be slightly ahead of last year. The February tax collections were strong, coming in 4.4% above February 2025, representing the highest February on record. The March 2026 occupancy tax collections are projected to be approximately 5% below projections, largely due to reduced transient travel brought on by the sudden rise in gas prices.

Meacham reported that early April 2026 trends indicate continued softness in a similar percentage range. The Easter holiday timing differences continue to impact comparative data analysis. Year-to-date revenues through March exceeded expenses by \$147,000.

After removing \$70,000 related to the trolley, net revenues exceed expenses by approximately \$70,000. Total current assets at the end of March were slightly over \$500,000, approximately \$48,000 above February. Receivables totaled \$249,000 (February and March taxes) and fixed assets totaled \$3.94 million.

Meacham reported total cash on hand was \$256,000, an increase of approximately \$16,000 from the previous month.

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

Second: Kim Morgan

Motion: Carried

Audit Contract Approval

Meacham presented a proposal to approve the annual audit contract for fiscal year 2025–2026. Auditor Eddie Carrick, CPA of Lexington, submitted a proposal in the amount of \$5,000, consistent with prior years. Meacham noted that Carrick specializes in governmental audits and serves municipalities and public sector organizations. There was some discussion on local firms that might be considered and it was noted that no local firms currently provide governmental audit services meeting Local Government Commission requirements.

Motion: Richard Rineholz made the motion to approve the FY 2025–2026 audit contract with Eddie Carrick CPA in the amount of \$5,000.

Second: Craig Pierce

Motion: Carried

Budget Process Update

Meacham provided an overview of the FY 2026–2027 budget development timeline.

Key points included:

- Internal planning will occur between the April and May board meetings.
- A planning session will be held with marketing partners, facilitated by Chris Kavanaugh.

- The proposed Program of Work and budget will be presented at the May meeting.
- A public hearing is scheduled for the June meeting.
- The proposed budget will be made available for public inspection online and at the visitor center during the period between the May and June board meetings.
- Board members are encouraged to submit suggested revisions between May and June meetings.

Program of Work Updates

Seasonal Tourism & Marketing

Michalec reported continued focus on maintaining visitation momentum through spring seasonal campaigns and overnight packages.

Recent initiatives include:

- Promotion of Wine About Winter event, moved from February to March.
- Marketing tied to strawberry season, Cheerwine Festival, and spring experiences.
- Messaging adjusted to reflect increased travel costs due to rising fuel prices.
- Continued emphasis on overnight stays and packaged experiences.

Crafty Buffalo Kitchen & Tap House at the Rail Walk was highlighted as a successful new restaurant partner experiencing strong visitation and social media promotion engagement.

Hotel Performance Metrics

Michalec gave the hotel performance metrics update for March. Michalec reported occupancy at 72.2%, approximately 5% below prior year. ADR was flat compared to prior year this time and RevPAR down compared to prior year.

Michalec reported April 5–11 occupancy of 71.6%, down 3.3%, and the Salisbury-Concord submarket occupancy at 75%, down 2%. Revenue declined approximately 4% with Easter holiday timing differences impacting year-over-year comparisons. Hotel rates remain stable, with no significant discounts observed.

Capital Projects

Michalec reported that construction is complete at the RailWalk. All signage has been installed, and pressure washing was completed yesterday at the Pavilion and along the alley. The landscaping crew will continue to keep a close eye on things until the event

next week and then will begin a regular weekly maintenance schedule for both the Pavilion and alley.

The Farmer's Market kicks off this weekend. Staff have been in close communication with the market manager to make sure everything is in line and also trained them on how to use the new shades.

Michalec reported that all of the Railwalk directional signs have been installed. Staff is waiting for some loose brick pavers to be repaired at the base of the sign near the Trolley Barn. There are 8 signs throughout Downtown directing people to the Farmers Market, Railwalk area, businesses and the theater. There is one final portion of the signage program to complete in Spencer at their new Downtown park that will fall during the summer of 2026.

Michalec reported that the design system for the new website has been completed. The team is building out prototypes of the website while working on site map transition and some of the customized features. Michalec said staff is still looking at a late summer launch.

Arrowood reported that the three new trails have been added to the trails app and those include:

- Dan Nicholas Park
- Gold Hill Rail Trail
- Lake Corriher Wilderness Park

Marketing Metrics

Michalec reported that March content highlighted spring tourism through seasonal experiences, outdoor activities, and early promotion of festivals and events, helping drive both immediate visitation and advance planning for peak travel seasons.

It is the time of year we begin to receive tourism support applications. A few of those were approved this month and a few others are in process. Staff have also had one for Cheerwine Festival for their Stage Crew that Furr is currently working on.

Michalec noted that Arrowood's content was focused on signature events and she will review those next.

Arrowood reminded the board that staff had made the decision to pause influencer partnerships until after Easter. Those have picked back up. Kids Take Charlotte will be covering Baby Days at Patterson Farm, and Magnolia Megan and The Ashley Nez will be covering Cheerwine Festival

Arrowood reviewed the digital marketing stats reporting a social media reach of 2.5 million, with total followers of 60,687 and engagement of 84,211. The E-newsletter subscribers total is 5,48, with an open rate of 32.43%.

Total packages sold stand at 56 with total room nights associated of 90

Breakdown on the packages is as follows:

- Visa Package: 9 packages / 17 room nights
- Wine About Winter: 25 packages / 37 room nights
- Cheerwine Festival: 15 packages / 22 room nights
- Spring Package: 2 packages / 4 room nights
- Day Out with Thomas: 5 packages / 10 room nights

Media Coverage

Recent media engagement includes:

- Winston-Salem Journal coverage promoting day trips to Rowan County
- Salisbury Post coverage promoting America 250 events
- Southern Living feature in development promoting Cheerwine Festival and Salisbury visitor guide

Group Business Development Updates

- Hosting North Carolina Travel Industry Association meeting
- Ongoing recruitment of 2027 Coonhunters event
- Potential Millbridge Speedway related group business
- Land Trust conference scheduled for Rowan County event center
- Potential hosting opportunity for NC Arts Council board meeting

Hospitality Industry Engagement

Hospitality Night scheduled for May 7 at Cannon Ballers Stadium.

Board members were reminded of availability of six hospitality suite seats for use throughout the season.

Community Updates

Staff noted some upcoming community updates for the group including opening dates for local farmer's markets in Salisbury, China Grove, Landis and Kannapolis.

Meacham noted that the China Grove market reopening was led by Jeff Hall and local agricultural partners. They are now located at the China Grove Ball Field.

Koco Java has opened a second location on West Innes Street. They are in the old M&S dry cleaners building just across the street from the Ketner Center and old Food Lion #1. The second location seems to be busy and doing well.

Caldwell Road bridge closure impacting access to Patterson Farm during peak strawberry season due to NCDOT construction scheduling. Hopefully this will not impact Patterson's spring season too much. Patterson Farm employs over 150 part-time staff during peak season and is considered a major agritourism driver.

April 2nd was opening day for the Kannapolis Cannon Ballers. As a reminder the TDA does have club level tickets available for board members.

New Sarum's 10th AnniBEERsary event is happening on April 25th. Furr has also been working with Maben to finalize the collaboration for the TDA's 10-year brand celebration.

Trolley Program Discussion

Meacham reported that Trolley operations are going well with the one trolley. He noted that discussion continues regarding long-term sustainability of the trolley program.

Key considerations:

- One trolley may represent a sustainable long-term operational model.
- Continued sponsorship support expected from F&M Bank partners.
- Online booking optimization remains a priority.

Looking ahead, Michalec noted that staff will continue working to enhance the various events and marketing programs in the coming months. Including the Railwalk Celebration event next Thursday, April 23rd and Tourism Hospitality night on May 7th at the Cannon Ballers.

Staff will continue the spring seasonal storytelling and package promotion while adapting to current travel trends. Michalec reported that Furr has recently spoken with quite a few writers for upcoming features, Winston Salem Journal about Day Trips to Rowan County, Salisbury Post about America 250 Events and Celebrations and our promotion of those events. In addition, Michalec reported that she and Furr both spoke with Southern Living Magazine about a write associated for a feature about the Cheerwine Festival. Along with information about the festival, Furr included a mini guide to Salisbury to let folks know the many options for them to see and do while they are here. Furr will be staying in touch with this writer and sending her more pitches for upcoming summer events.

Dan Nicholas Park Partnership Exploration

Meacham presented initial findings from a site visit conducted with county leadership.

Discussion topics included:

- Operational improvements
- Ticketing Modernization
- Maintenance enhancements
- Potential implementation of flat-rate entry fee model like Bull Hole Park
- Potential exemption of Rowan County residents from admission fees
- Opportunities to improve visitor experience and increase revenue sustainability

Dan Nicholas Park cabins, campground, playground, paddle boats, carousel, and animal exhibits remain active visitor attractions but need infrastructure modernization. Meacham noted that consultants may assist with operational modeling and pricing strategy analysis.

Adjournment

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion

Seconded: Richard Rineholz

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Lesley Pullium
Rowan County Tourism Development Authority

