

# ROWAN COUNTY

Tourism Development Authority  
North Carolina

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**ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING  
Wednesday, September 17, 2025, 12:00 Noon  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

**Board Members Attending:** Craig Pierce, Andy Mabry, Stephen Kidd, April Saylor, Therese Henderson, Richard Reinholz, David Post, Sada Troutman

**Not Attending:** Annette Privette-Keller, Kimberly Morgan, Krista Sullivan

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

## **RCTDA Call to Order**

Chair Stephen Kidd called the Rowan County Tourism Development Authority (RCTDA) Board of Directors meeting to order at 12:00 Noon.

## **Trolley**

James Meacham and the board discussed Tourism's trolley that was stolen from the F&M Bank parking lot across the street from the Salisbury Police Station. Meacham reported that as of today the trolley had not been located, that it was stolen around 2:00am on Wednesday, September 10<sup>th</sup>. Tara has been working diligently to reschedule and coordinate trolley rentals, given the fourth quarter of the year is the busiest season for the trolley system. Additional trolleys from area vendors are being utilized when applicable to meet rental requirements. Staff immediately filed with insurance and there is 30-day window in place to determine if the trolley is found and repairable or permanently gone.

## **Approval of the Minutes**

Motion: Craig Pierce made a motion for approval of August 18, 2025, minutes.

Second: Theresa Henderson

Motion: Motion was approved.

## **Financial Report**

Meacham reported that as of 8.31.25 for fiscal year 2025-26 on an accrual basis the occupancy tax revenue was \$262,335 and is in line with the FY25-26 budget. The July 2025 taxes came in 3% less than July 2024 taxes. This decrease in revenue was projected due to the loss of the Little League World Series. Meacham said that the August 2025 taxes are projected to come in 3% to 7% ahead of August 2024 revenues.

The early September figures are projected to be in line or slightly ahead of the budget. Meacham reported year-to-date revenues on an accrual basis through August were \$60,695 ahead of expenses. Total revenues equaled \$307,492 against expenses of \$246,796. Meacham reported total current assets of \$652,296 which were \$15,632 higher than July 2025. Current assets consisted of cash on hand and occupancy tax receivables. Meacham noted that accounts receivables were equal to \$262,335 which included July 2025 and August 2025 outstanding occupancy tax revenues. The cash on hand as of 8.31.25 equaled \$389,961, which is \$13,398 more than July 2025.

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

Second: Therese Henderson seconded the motion.

Motion: Approved.

Sarah Michalec updated the board with the latest tourism economic impact figures for Rowan County including the 2024 figures from the State of North Carolina which showed continued growth in the local tourism economy. (See included report)

Michalec reported lodging market data, that as of September 13, occupancy is 74.7% which is 6.5% ahead of the same period last year, the ADR is \$120. This is up 7.1% over last year and RevPar is \$89.70 which is 14.1% ahead of last year. Michalec reported that total revenue is also up 14.1% for the first 13 days of September.

Looking at the numbers on the chart, Michalec said that most noticeably July and August outperformed last year with June slightly down over last year. Occupancy was at 73.1%, which is up about 4.5% over the previous year. ADR was \$110.33 and RevPar \$80.63 which both were ahead of previous year. Michalec reported that total revenue was just under 2 million, which was also ahead of the previous year. (See included report)

## **Tourism Program of Work**

Brooke Arrowood reported that year to date (YTD), the website has seen 306,966 pageviews from 141,895 users, and heading into the 4th quarter, is at pace or ahead of most of tourism's benchmarks. Arrowood gave a quick update on the M1 partnership, noting that all is going smoothly, and there have been significant jumps in website traffic just since the first month. In the past month, the biggest change made to the website has been the transition of summer photos to fall photos. Staff are also continuing to add linked thumbnails to recent short-form videos on any relevant pages/blog posts and making sure the website stays up to date with local events, businesses, and current running packages.

Arrowood reported that YTD, the eNewsletter, has seen a 34.32% open rate and has a total of 5,363 subscribers, which is over one hundred more subscribers than last month. This increase in eNewsletter subscribers shows that the sign-up campaigns that have been running on Facebook, and the last Cannon Ballers Giveaway have been very successful in getting this number up.

Arrowood reported that for social media as a whole, YTD there are 48,954 followers across all platforms which is almost 2,000 ahead of the benchmark, and a total engagement of 115,038. The top engaged post in August was Bands on Bank Street Reel on Facebook which saw over 200 likes and over 60 likes on Instagram.

Regarding the Cannon Ballers Labor Day Weekend Giveaway, 12 tickets were given away to 2 different winners. The weekend giveaway was accompanied by a short-form video that saw 294 engagements & 9,038 views across all platforms. And all in all, this year's Cannon Ballers Giveaway Campaign has been the best year so far. As for our social media marketing plans until our next meeting, we will be focusing on promoting the following sites and events:

- OctoberTour
- Fall Foliage
- Local Fall Sips at Rowan County Coffee Shops
- Lazy 5 Ranch's Fall Festival
- Patterson Farm
- October Events & Events in the Arts
- Hippie Fest
- Haunted Trails
- A highlight of Granite Quarry
- Halloween Events
- Additional blogs
- Continuing our partnership with M1
- Our Stay & Play Packages including our VISA Package, Autumn Adventures in Rowan County, Polar, Day Out with Thomas, Bell Tower BREWFEST, SouthernScape Music Festival & OctoberTour

Arrowood continued noting that the blog continues to be a top visited page on our website with 84 posts and 47,476 views YTD. This is largely due to the engagement with our top blog posts of August which included a Guide to Tiger World and In & Around Woodleaf.

Arrowood reported that the influencer program is still going strong and Furr secured a partnership with @houseofhensen in the month of August who covered Day Out with Thomas and a total of 7 influencers total YTD. The YTD influencer impact is currently at 499,995 views with 22,235 engagements. There is usually an uptick in these numbers in the fall as events pick up. The upcoming partnerships with influencers include Jensen Savannah: Promotional video for Bell Tower BrewFest in September, KidsTakeCharlotte: Autumn Jubilee in October and Patterson Farms in September, Jessica Hensen: Lazy 5 Ranch Fall Festival in October,

TheAshleyNez- Time Warp Trolley Tour in October, Jenna & Her Gents: SouthernScape Music Festival in October & Magnolia Megan: Scrooges Christmas Trolley Tour in December.

The total digital impact YTD left off at 493,556 engagements across all platforms at the end of August which includes website interactions, social media interactions, eNewsletter activity and our influencer campaign performance.

Arrowood gave a brief update on the tour application, stating that she is continuing to upload stops from our Salisbury Heritage Walking Tour onto the platform. Staff have officially completed the process of creating and getting the developer accounts approved through both Google and Apple, which was a process that took some time. Staff hope to have this first tour completed by the end of October.

Tara Furr gave an update on the trolley scheduling and stated that she is prioritizing the pre-paid wedding rentals and working with our partners on the rentals that were in kind. Currently, there are 126 rentals YTD, just shy of \$43,000 in revenue YTD, and 77 rentals over the next 90 days.

Furr reports there were 34 paid marketing placements during the month of August, bringing the YTD total to 550.

Moving on to partner engagement, Furr reported that Arrowood has had 15 site/event visits YTD. 35 partner relationship visits have been completed YTD. Furr said that she has been around and checked in with the partners and distributed Cannon Ballers tickets. This month, Furr will be checking in with partners and distributing New Sarum coupons that promote their fall beers.

Tourism support investments YTD include four new tourism support requests that were fulfilled in August bringing the total to 20 with 615 room nights associated with those fulfilled requests. Most recently, lodging assistance for the micro wrestling event at Cherry Treesort was approved along with Brewers for Bell Tower Brew Fest, YMCA Conference and the YMCA kickball tournament.

In relation to group sales, Furr reported that she is continuing to work with all of the groups who are in the books for the remainder of the year and assisting them and the lodging partners on the various requests of the groups. There are 14 total groups and 845 room nights associated with those groups. Most recently, Furr said she has been working with the YMCA for the upcoming conference and their charity kick ball tournament, the micro wrestling group, and the Coon hunters for 2026. Furr reports 600 Reservations and 785 Room nights through the online booking platform (RIPE).

The Stay & Play packages which are not all through Ripe include the following: Day Out with Thomas, Polar Express, Bell Tower BrewFest, October Tour, Southern Scape Music Festival, Autumn Adventures, Visa Gift Card Giveaway, and Christmas in Rowan County.

In 2025 YTD, there has been 324 packages, and 451 room nights associated with the packages. The total packages are down from the same period last year due to slower and late

booking of Thomas and Polar. Looking ahead, Furr said staff is going full speed into fall marketing and promoting events and agritourism and continuing to really push the fall overnight stay & play packages to capitalize on this busy time of year in the county.

### **Tourism Development and Infrastructure**

Sarah Michalec reported that staff has signed the contract this week for the new website and are excited to get started. Staff are waiting for an exact timeline from Simpleview, but the 10-month redesign will begin sometime this fall with hopes of completing it next summer. As was authorized in budget.

Moving on the RailWalk, Michalec Railwalk reported that staff are starting to see some visual progress at the Railwalk! The decking for the stage has been completed, and work is taking place to replace posts and railings along the existing decking. Michalec had approved the stain for those decks and the pavilion this morning. The brick mason is supposed to be working on the columns for the arches this week as well. Michalec said she is still hopeful that this project will be completed on or before October 31. The additional carpentry work that was needed at the pavilion to facilitate the shades needed for the Farmer's Market has been completed. Staff are working to get everything stained and have the installer make final measurements before proceeding with the order.

Michalec reported that she is waiting on the last few chairs to arrive before the Gateway lobby furniture is installed. She is also waiting to hear an update on timing for the wall art installation. Michalec said that the Gateway lobby renovation including furniture and art installation should be completed within the next few months. Moving on to the Wayfinding report, Michalec reported that Granite Quarry's 3 new signs should be completed and installed within the next month, weather permitting. The final Landis sign location has been decided on and Rite Lite is working on those final details to get that installed.

Michalec said she is still working on having the eight Railwalk directional signs in downtown Salisbury permitted through the city. The four Downtown Gateway signs mentioned in the past have been given the green light by the City of Salisbury. Sada Troutman has been helping us with all of this, and I really appreciate that help. Michalec said she hopes all of these will be complete and installed by the end of the year, but it will most likely push into next year depending on approval times and current production schedule.

Meacham reported to the board that staff are anticipating a multi-year tourism capital funding request to support new projects at Granite Park. This request is similar in nature to the 5-year funding partnership Tourism entered into with the City of Salisbury for Bell Tower Green.

### **Adjournment**

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

Respectfully submitted,

**Lesley Pullium**

Rowan County Tourism Development Authority

# Rowan County Tourism

## 2024 Economic Impact Report

**\$234.92M**

**Total Tourism Revenue  
2024**

**1,525**

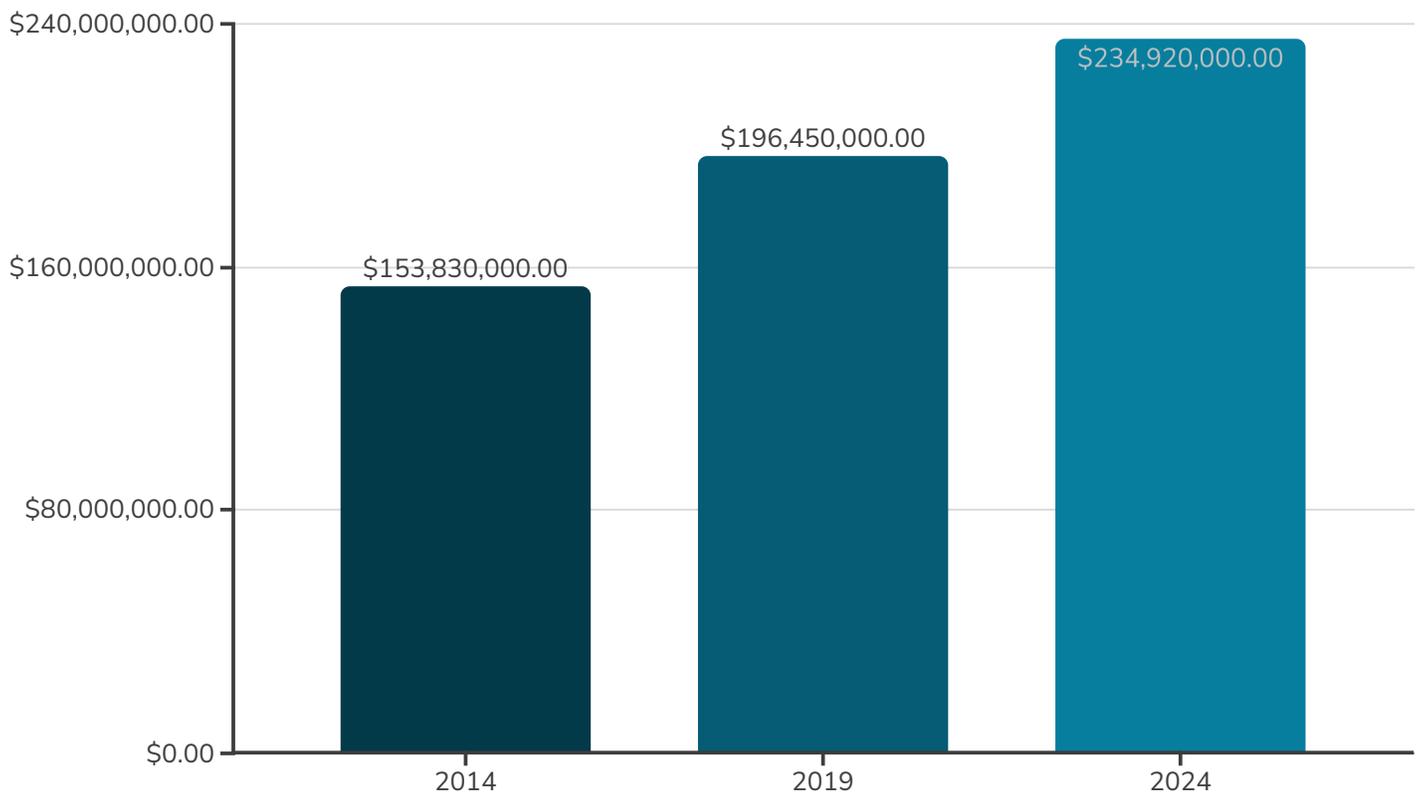
**Tourism Jobs Supported  
2024**

**\$8.25M**

**Total Local Tax Revenue  
2024**

Data sourced from VisitNC, and NC Department of Commerce

### Tourism Revenue Growth



**2014-2019**

+27.7% growth \$153.83M > \$196.45M

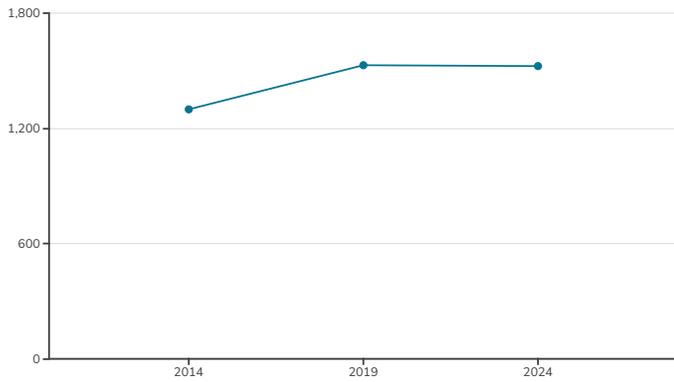
**2019-2024**

+19.6% growth \$196.45M > \$234.92M

\*2020 Revenue: -28.8% due to COVID-19 Pandemic

# Employment & Tax Revenue Impact

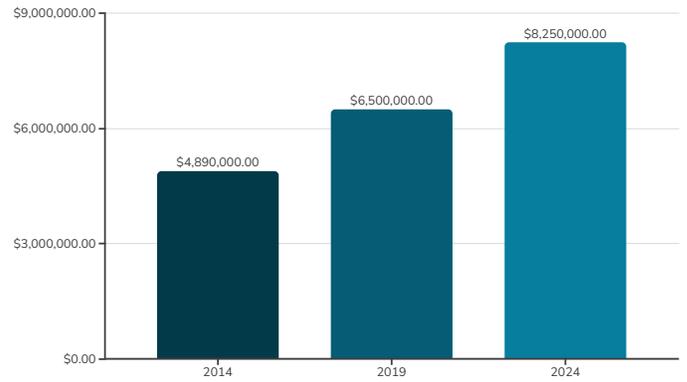
## Tourism Jobs



+17.7% growth 2014-2019

-0.3% decline 2019-2024

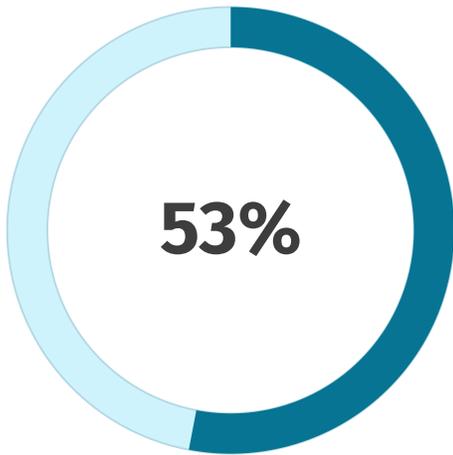
## Local Tax Revenue



+32.9% growth 2014-2019

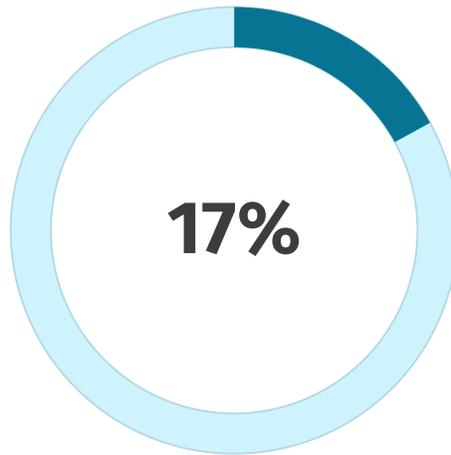
+26.9% growth 2019-2024

\*-15% decline 2020 due to COVID-19 Pandemic



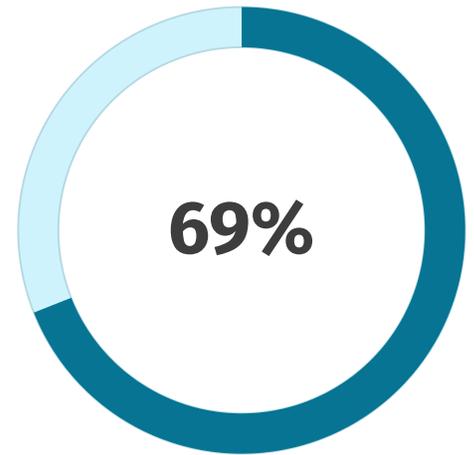
### Total Revenue Growth

2014-2024 decade increase



### Job Growth

Net increase over 10 years



### Tax Revenue Growth

Local tax generation increase