

VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

SALISBURY, NORTH CAROLINA

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ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

204 E Innes Street, Ste. 120, Salisbury, NC 28144
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Name: Destination Marketing Committee

Date of Meeting: April 4, 2019

Committee Chair: To Be Appointed

Date of Next Meeting: May 9, 2019

Committee Members Attending: Kelly Alexander, Darrell Blackwelder, Gretchen Witt, Annette Privette Keller, Amie Baudoin

Not Attending: Aaron Kepley, Vivian Hopkins, Krista Osterweil, Michelle Patterson

Tourism Staff: Tara Furr, Sarah Michalec, James Meacham

Tara Furr called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the Destination Marketing Committee Meeting for April 2019.

Meeting Minutes:

Furr called for a motion to approve the February 2019 minutes as presented.

Motion: Kelly Alexander made a motion to approve the minutes.
Second: Gretchen Witt
Motion: Approved

Tourism Support Applications

Boer Goat Association: This group falls under the minimum \$5,000 impact bucket. They are requesting assistance with three rooms for one night each for their judges, as well as up to \$500 in hospitality, totaling up to \$1,000 in support.

Motion: Kelly Alexander made a motion to approve their request.

Second: Gretchen Witt

Motion: Approved

Cheerwine Festival: Requesting 22 room nights for their band, as well as up to \$1,000 in hospitality support. Rowan County Tourism will also be making an in-kind donation of the use of the F&M Trolley for the day. This request would go above the \$3,000 support limit.

Motion: Kelly Alexander made a motion to approve their request.

Second: Gretchen Witt

Motion: Approved

Tilley-Harley Davidson of Salisbury Bikers and Blues Event: Requesting for up to \$1,000 to offset the judges lodging, \$1,000 lodging costs for some of their out of town folks, and \$1,000 towards hospitality.

Motion: Gretchen Witt made a motion to approve their request.

Second: Kelly Alexander

Motion: Approved

Earth Day Jam: Requesting 15-20 room nights in lodging support for their musical acts, which would roughly amount to \$2,100. Tourism staff recommendation is for the committee to approve up to \$1,000 in lodging support, rather than the entire lodging expense due to the economic impact of the event, as well as the timing of the event (Easter Weekend).

Motion: Annette Privette Keller made a motion to approve their request.

Second: Amie Baudoin

Motion: Approved

Destination Marketing Report

Furr presented the Destination Marketing Report. Trolleys are about to hit a very busy time. March was a strong month with 588 in ridership, \$2,180 in revenue, 2 rentals, 1 group and 3 advanced booking. Narrated tours start back on Saturday, April 6 and will run through October.

Visitor Services fulfilled 35 traditional inquiries in March.

Day Out with Thomas packages went on sale April 1. 7 packages and 9 room nights have been booked so far. Polar Express packages go on sale April 15.

Kelly Alexander explained that Polar Express tickets are going on sale earlier this year due to the competition in the mountains of North Carolina putting their tickets on sale 3 months earlier. It was too much of a risk to let their tickets be the only ones on sale for 6 months in North Carolina.

Meacham announced that the TDA is in the process of making an offer to a new staff member to assist with packages. The new Visitor Services Coordinator will begin the first week of May.

With regard to group sales, Furr is working with the South Eastern Little League group for their summer tournament in July. Cycle NC will be coming in September 2019. The Railroad Passenger Car Alliance has been confirmed for January 2021.

The NC Main Street Managers Conference was held in March. The conference was very successful. Final room numbers have not been reported, but it is estimated that the conference generated around 500 room nights. The conference was held in partnership with DSI and the City of Salisbury. The TDA's roles included securing the hotels and venues for events. In addition, the TDA donated the trolleys to transport guests, including a historic tour. The welcome reception was sponsored by the TDA with catering by Morgan Ridge and an offering of glass bottle Cheerwine.

In regards to Tourism Supported Investments, Furr explained that our year to date event-visitor related economic impact is at \$265,906.

There was a lot of great exposure with the NC Main Street Conference, which brought our PR numbers up to 4 media assists and 7 media placements.

The Salisbury Post Community Calendar has continued to be successful with 4,322 views in March. This is a continued partnership with the Salisbury Post.

Sarah Michalec shared the digital report with the group, stating it has held steady throughout March. There has been an increase in new users and average time on the site. Pageviews were up by just over 2,000 in March 2019 over March 2018. Updates to the listing and events pages are now being made on the website. This will help it to be more user friendly.

Right Now in Rowan County and Rowan County Road trip email campaigns have continued. The Rowan Arts & Ag email campaign started back at the end of March. These emails will go out around the first of the month from now through October.

Michalec shared that social media has remained steady. On Facebook, an emphasis has been placed on outdoor activities now that spring has arrived. The audience continues to respond well to blogs and content links. On Twitter, there was a huge growth in profile visits and mentions around the time of the NC Main Street Conference. The most popular topics in March were history and events. On Instagram, we saw a growth of 59 followers in March. This is the largest single month growth in the last 12 months. The destination blog has continued to do well. Blog views shot up in March. There were 425 more individual views in March than in February. Our audience continues to enjoy the list and life style blogs. There are lots of upcoming blogs planned to center around Rowan Arts & Ag.

Arts & Ag 2019

The first Arts & Ag event is this coming weekend. TDA staff will be at the Tractors & Trains Festival at the North Carolina Transportation Museum.

Budget Planning

Meacham explained that the TDA Board has put together a budget and finance committee. One of their specific focuses is the revenue resulting from the new hotel opening in the summer of 2019. It is being recommended to the board to not budget the revenue for the first year a new hotel property is open. This will allow the revenue to build working capital to put towards future projects. This year's occupancy tax revenues are running about 15% ahead of last year. We have been averaging a 12-15% growth over the past few years. In each committee we have been identifying our priorities for short term and long term in connection to the Master Plan program that was launched in 2013. Many aspects of the Master Plan have been completed. In May we hope to get into specifics of the budget, as our budget will be presented to the TDA board in May. The sheet provided allows you to see the current marketing programs, their master plan initiative, their cost and their return on investment. This document reflects current initiatives, their cost and return on investment. We'd like for the committee to review and make any suggestions for priorities for the 2019-2020 budget. The Destination Marketing budget will be the same for 2019-2020 as it was for 2018-2019, which was \$320,000. This does not include staff.

Meacham continued, based on the current framework, there will be roughly \$80,000 to put towards new initiatives and priorities. These priorities can be suggested by the committee and can be very specific or very broad. This information will be further distributed to the entire committee, and will be discussed further in May for the board's overall consideration.

Alexander and Annette Privette Keller requested that TDA Staff help bring the committee up to speed on trends happening in tourism in other areas. It will be helpful to know what is working for other destinations and what is not. The committee wants to make sure to stay on the cutting edge of destination trends.

Meacham requested that all committee members please submit their priorities and ideas ahead of the May meeting if they are unable to attend.

Adjourn

With no additional business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by: Sarah Michalec, RCCVB