

# VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

SALISBURY, NORTH CAROLINA

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## ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING – Virtual

Wednesday, January 19, 2022: 12:00 pm

### BOARD MEETING MINUTES

**Board Members Attending:** Don Bringle, John Ketner, Sada Troutman, Craig Pierce, Michelle Patterson, Krista Osterweil, Karen Alexander

**Not Attending:** Vivian Hopkins, Cyndi Greenwood, Stephen Kidd

**Guests:** Eddie Carrick, CPA & Chris Cavanaugh

**TDA Staff:** James Meacham, Sarah Michalec

#### RCTDA Call to Order

Osterweil called the RCTDA to order at 12:00pm.

#### Approval of the Minutes

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for approval of the December 2021 minutes.

Second: John Ketner

Motion: Approved

#### Organizational & Financial Update

Meacham gave an organizational update wrapping up where the organization finished as of December 31, 2021. Meacham reported revenue on an accrual basis fiscal year to date from occupancy taxes equals \$609,607 and is 31.8% ahead of initial 2021-22 budget projections.

Additional occupancy tax revenues above budget are being placed in operating reserves as adopted by the Board. November 2021 occupancy tax collections were 69.7% higher than November 2020, were 4.7% higher than November 2019 and 29.3% ahead of budget projections. November 2021 occupancy taxes were the highest monthly collection on record for the month of November eclipsing the previous November record set in 2019.

December occupancy taxes are projected to come in at \$95,000 and 38% ahead of budget projections. Meacham said fiscal year to date revenue is ahead of expenses by \$176,259 as of December 31, 2021, the net income is driven by the Board setting aside ARPA funds for reserves, and growth in occupancy tax revenues.

COVID relief ARPA grants as approved by the Board in the amount of \$152,483 were distributed in December. A combination of the grant distributions approved by the Board, holiday marketing campaigns and three payroll cycles in December resulted in a net loss for the month of \$179,233, with \$152,483 coming from the COVID relief grants.

Meacham reported total current assets of \$454,027 a decrease of \$178,495 from 11-30-21; with \$152,483 coming from the COVID grant program disbursements. Accounts receivables were \$193,413 consisting of November and December a\occ. taxes. Cash on hand as of 12-31-21 was \$260,613 a decrease of \$152,737 from 11-30-21. Total assets equaled \$3,306,538 as of December 31, 2021.

### **Finance Committee Report**

The Finance Committee met last week, John Ketner reported that the committee is pleased with the economic recovery and the performance of the organization in 2021 and heading into 2022. Staff has had a part-time temporary person filling a budgeted full time position and would like to make that role a permanent position. The primary duties of the position would consist of partner services, destination engagement, trolleys, packages and driving traffic to county destinations. Meacham said one of the primary duties with the position will be real time staff presence in assisting with digital promotion and content generation relating to community tourism partners.

Ketner reported that staff is recommending \$8-9,000 in unallocated capital funds be utilized to have Chris Cavanaugh come back to assist the board in updating priorities for destination development. Meacham noted that the TDA is near the end of the 10-year Tourism Master Plan and needs to identify what the capital priorities and funding objectives are for the next several years.

Motion: The Finance Committee made the recommendation to hire Cavanaugh to assist with determining destination development priorities.

Second: Craig Pierce

Motion: Approved

Ketner reported that staff recommends, providing the financial status remains strong, retiring the branding loan at the end of this fiscal year. In addition, staff compensation will be reviewed, and wage increases will be considered for cost-of-living adjustments and will also explore what Rowan County sets for the COLA's for FY22-23 budget.

### **Audit Reports Year Ending June 30, 2021**

Meacham reminded the members of the yearly audit presentation on the RCTDA and the SRCVB. The RCTDA is legally required to complete an audit and file with the LGC and the state treasurer's office.

Eddie Carrick, CPA reported that 2020-21 seems to be a stabilization period after the initial pandemic period of 2019-2020. Carrick noted there were several unique items that occurred this year due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation. Carrick reviewed those changes as well as some of the items that were adjusted this year. Carrick gave the 2020-21 RCTDA Audit report stating that the organization received an unqualified or clean opinion.

Carrick reviewed key components of the report for the board. Carrick noted that RCTDA is a governmental entity and is monitored by the State Treasurer's office and LGC each year. A review of the Audit's highlights from the report were provided. Carrick reported that the RCTDA audit was accepted by the State Treasurer's office and Local Government Commission.

Carrick reviewed the 2020-21 SRCVB audit report noting the CVB also received an unqualified or clean opinion. Carrick noted that the CVB runs very , as designed being a subset of the TDA. Carrick pointed out

pages 5-6 that illustrated the expenses covered by SRCVB. Carrick thanked the board for the opportunity to serve the organization and the staff for the hospitality.

Meacham stated that the receipt of the ARP funds was communicated to Carrick, and he is aware of those funds for the coming 2021-22 audit.

## **Destination Marketing Report**

Meacham reported that Furr is ill and not available today. Michalec and Meacham provided the year-end report for the board. Typically, in January staff gives a calendar year-end report. The standard monthly report is available on the website for anyone who would like to look at the data later.

Meacham reviewed the tourism support investments for the year outside of the packages. The lodging market data year to date was presented by Meacham and it revealed that annual profitability is beginning to return to the lodging industry which is key. Total revenue for 2020-21 are currently trending ahead of 2019-20.

Meacham briefly reviewed the various marketing campaigns during 2020-21. The partnership with the Cannon Ballers was very successful and offered a great deal of exposure for the county. The sponsorship with the Cannon Ballers has been renewed for 2022-23.

In addition to the primary marketing campaigns, Michalec reported that digitally there were some specific focuses such as constant event updates, attractions availability, as well as promoting visiting outdoors and shopping local. Michalec reported 187,000 total users to the website which was up 65% over 2020 and 16% over 2019. Total pageviews equaled 362,000 up 67% over 2020 and 6% over 2019. Mobile continues to be the primary device visitors are using to view the website.

Michalec reported that primary visitors to the site by state locations were in NC VA SC GA and TN. Cities with highest online visitation included Charlotte, Raleigh, Concord as well as Atlanta, GA. Michalec reminded the board that the new website will be up in the spring of 2022 with online capability for booking lodging and packages.

Michalec reported 21,423 Facebook fans with 3 million impressions which is up 306% from 2020 and up 21% from 2019. Instagram has 1,973 followers with 96,000 impressions which is up 14% from 2020 and 27% from 2019. Twitter has 2,123 followers, 56 impressions. Followers are up 3.5% from 2020 and 10.5% from 2019. Overall, marketing content was displayed 313 million times up 243% over 2020 and 14% over 2019. Michalec reported 34,000 views of the blog which is up 39% from 2020 and 13% from 2019. Finally, the email newsletter had an 18% open rate, with 4,563 subscribers which is 6.7% growth in subscribers over 2020.

Ketner and other board members commended the marketing staff on putting the organization back ahead of 2019 in many of these digital areas, especially given the challenges from the COVID.

Meacham reported that in 2020-21 there were a total 246 packages with 437 room nights. Polar Express was a good indicator of how things can be demographic specific. Ticket sales for the event were very good, package sales were down due in part to the various aspects of pandemic travel. Staff is going to work on growth strategies for package programs in the coming year in context of the new dynamics of COVID.

Meacham reported that trolley revenue from 2020-21 reflected in the report was driven all by private rentals except for the two corporate sponsorships of F&M and Novant.

Meacham reported that organized group travel is slowly returning with, the Rail Passenger Car Alliance and the Little League Softball Tournament coming back in 2022-23.

**Additional Business**

Meacham reported that unfortunately there was an attack on a tenant in the Gateway building a couple of weeks ago in the female restroom by a male assailant. No one was injured and two male employees apprehended the assailant and turned him over to Salisbury PD. Meacham said that after consultation with tenants, staff and security vendors staff is looking at two security installs at the Gateway building including visible cameras/monitoring equipment as well as a new keycard building entry system. Staff is currently in the process of getting pricing quotes for these services.

The meeting adjourned at 1:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted.

Lesley Pullium

SRCVB