

VISIT ROWAN COUNTY

SALISBURY, NORTH CAROLINA

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ROWAN COUNTY TDA BOARD OF DIRECTORS PLANNING SESSION

Wednesday, September 12, 2018: 12:00 pm, Gateway Building

PLANNING SESSION MINUTES

Board Members Attending: Whitney Wallace, Cyndi Greenwood, Craig Pierce, Stephen Kidd, Tony Shaw, Amie Baudoin, Kelly Alexander

Not Attending: Brian Miller, Krista Osterweil, Darrell Blackwelder, Don Bringle

Guest: Chris Cavanaugh - Magellan Strategies

TDA Staff: James Meacham, Tara Furr, Sarah Michalec, Allyson Teague, Lesley Pullium

Meacham thanked everyone for attending and welcomed Cyndi Greenwood, Quality Inn, and Stephen Kidd, Ameriprise Financial, to the board. Introductions were made around the room.

Meacham reported that the NC Division of Travel and Tourism and Duke Energy have been working with DMO partners around the state to assist with hurricane updates, lodging for evacuated citizens and for the power crews. Sarah and Tara have been keeping the state up-to-date on Rowan County's room availability.

Tara Furr reported that several local events have been postponed or cancelled due to the hurricane, including the Brewbury Festival and GermanFest. The Biker, Blues and BBQ is still going forward and the Rowan Fair is planning to open as weather permits. Staff will continue to communicate with both local and state partners.

Strategic Planning Session & Review

Meacham introduced Chris Cavanaugh who will facilitate a discussion on a quick strategic assessment and guidance for RCTDA. Cavanaugh stated that much of the discussion today will go back to the Tourism Master Plan from 2013. Two key components of the TMP were to make the plan the driving force behind all decision making for the next 10 years, and to offer a focus point of tourism economic growth of doubling of economic impact from tourism in 10 years. Cavanaugh gave a PowerPoint led discussion covering:

Tourism Master Plan – set the stage for organizational plan and focus

- Organizational Structure
- Destination Marketing & Branding
- Destination and Product Development
- Partnership Structure & Connectivity

History of the Organization – Milestones

Established in 1987 with 1% tax; 1991 tax increase to 3%,
Trolleys, STCDC established, 501C6 organization, TMP, Gateway Building ownership,
Development of the Community Brand, Rewriting of the TDA Legislation restructuring to a county wide
tourism development authority

RCTDA Today – Lean organizational structure, aligned with the strategic vision,
purposeful destination marketing & branding, a unique model of destination
and product development, development of successful partnerships and connectivity,
effective and individualized partnerships, flexibility, successful adoption of the community brand, unique
and sound product development investments, good reporting and accountability

Strategic Planning - General

Objective – Double economic impact in 10 year time period

Scope – Know capabilities, assets, customers and geographic market and are vertically integrated

Competitive Advantage –Unique activities, customer value proposition, successful use of assets

Understanding the strategic sweet spot

Future – Future growth opportunities and potential from new audiences and markets

Future destination marketing plan, new product development, partnership structure changes

Cavanaugh asked the members to share their input on what they feel is next for the TDA. It was noted that much of the TDA marketing is an incentivization model such as the Day Out with Thomas and Polar Express incentive package programs in partnership with the NC Transportation Museum. This type of marketing has been very successful and has increased growth in tourism revenue.

The Board discussed how the TDA marketing team has done a good job in utilizing the digital investments to capitalize on this incentivized investment approach while also telling the destination story. It was discussed that the Arts & Ag program in 2018 also served to bridge cross-sectional sites and attractions across the county while selling the brand and telling the story. The Board was asked for input on these models moving forward, if they wanted to continue this approach, to explore new models as well as their ideas and suggestions for future.

The Board noted that an important aspect moving forward is understanding the destination's growing product and future growth coming in the southern area of the county. Staff recognizes that a new microcosm is building in the Southern end of the county creating two prominent areas (Kannapolis and Salisbury) that will support the overall growth of the county.

Craig Pierce said that we need to develop a strategic plan on how to extend our reach into the southern end of the county to capitalize on the growing visitation and activity in that area. Pierce suggested working with the City of Kannapolis on the development of tourism partnerships in order to develop programs that encourage these new visitors to venture deeper into Rowan County. The Board was agreement with Pierce's thought process and recognition of long term opportunities in Southern Rowan.

Meacham asked Alexander and Baudoin their thoughts on the current marketing support program with the tiered system of every room night booked the support goes up. Both stated that while this approach is still new it is working well, especially for the larger organizations like NCTM. Some of the smaller organizations are learning how to utilize the program better with their events. Alexander praised the Arts & Ag initiative with the cross promotion. The initiative brought a great deal of new people to some sites and attractions that they had not visited prior as well as promoting the brand county-wide with the colorful signs, billboards and flags.

Cyndi Greenwood said that last year during a time when the industry is usually slow (Oct – Dec), the impact of Day Out with Thomas and the Polar Express on the local lodging industry was huge. The marketing support and incentivization for those events has a big impact on local lodging.

Stephen Kidd noted that TDA's partnerships with the EDC and the Chamber of Commerce have been very beneficial for both organizations and he would like to see those partnerships continue.

Pierce asked about having a liaison from RCTDA to work more regionally with Cabarrus County TDA as a part of developing the relationship with Kannapolis and the southern end of Rowan County. Representatives from Kannapolis currently serve on the TDA Marketing and Tourism Capital Committees.

Shaw agreed with the comments of Pierce in regards to the growth in the southern part of the county and that it is important that the TDA makes an effort to expand our presence in that area.

Meacham noted that what he is hearing is approval of the current marketing support approach, working on the development of what the next Arts & Ag will look like as well as increasing outreach and presence in Southern I85 corridor in the China Grove to Kannapolis area.

Meacham asked the board if they are still supportive of the partnership leverage model that the TDA has used to accomplish larger capital projects such as with the City to purchase the new Trolleys and with the County to complete the Railwalk Project and Community Branding. This model has allowed the TDA to complete some large initiatives by securing funds with the help of partners and then paying those partners back over time. Consensus of the board was that this model has worked well. Cavanaugh stressed continued flexibility and staying nimble with ability of quick decision making.

In summary, Cavanaugh said to keep in mind the idea of the sweet spot, stay focused on growth, think about skating to where the puck is going to be next. With all the changes in the industry, the market and the destination where the puck is now is not where it will be in five years.

Adjourn

The Board was thanked for attending today and the meeting adjourned at 1:00pm.

Respectfully submitted by: Lesley Pullium, RCTDA