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

Wednesday, April 19, 2023, Noon

MEETING AGENDA

- | | | |
|------|---|------------------------|
| I. | Call to Order | Krista Sullivan, Chair |
| II. | Approval of Meeting Minutes | Krista Sullivan, Chair |
| III. | Financial Report | |
| | A. Tourism Financial Report and Market Update | James Meacham |
| | B. Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Budget | |
| IV. | Tourism Program of Work Report | |
| | A. Destination Sales & Marketing | Tara Furr |
| | 1. Trolley Program Update | Brooke Arrowood |
| | B. Tourism Development | Sarah Michalec |
| | 1. Wayfinding | |
| | 2. Tourism Development Plan: Railwalk | |
| | C. Tourism Policy | James Meacham |
| V. | Additional Business | |
| VI. | Adjourn | |



**ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

Wednesday, March 15, 2023, 12:00 pm

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Attending: Sada Troutman, Craig Pierce, Therese Henderson, Michelle Patterson (ZOOM), and Cyndi Greenwood (ZOOM). Karen Alexander, Vivian Hopkins

Not Attending: Krista Sullivan, Kimberly Morgan, Richard Reinholz, John Ketner

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

RCTDA Call to Order

Meacham called RCTDA to order at 12:02pm.

Approval of the Minutes

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for approval of the February 2023 minutes.

Second: Therese Henderson

Motion: Approved

Organizational & Financial Update

Meacham reported that the financials ending 2.28.23 were not yet available from the accountant's office today due to tax season and staff illnesses. Meacham stated that he is happy to report that the organizational financial position and cash position continue to be strong. Revenue continues to continue to exceed expectations in budget. The TDA finished the 2nd quarter 10.9% ahead and January came in at 18.2% ahead. Feb should be 9-10% ahead and the first 11 days of March indicate 75% occupancy in the market, 19% ahead on revenue, and 15% ahead on rate. All profitability rates are ahead of March last year and March 2022 was a very profitable month. Meacham said that the February and March financials should be available at the next TDA board meeting. Meacham reported that as revenue has been coming in above expectations, the capital fund is now at \$196,000.

Meacham welcomed Tara Furr back from maternity leave. Meacham directed the members to the page in the packet that illustrates a staff restructuring. The chart indicates the two key buckets for the organization, tourism marketing communications and tourism development. Sarah Michalec has been promoted to manage the tourism development side and Tara Furr will continue to manage the tourism marketing and communication expanding within that to continue focus on storytelling and brand development, and be engaged on the tourism developed projects when needed. Brooke Arrowood will move into the full digital development section. The

tourism coordinator position listed will fall underneath Furr and the tourism marketing communication side. The tourism coordinator position handles trolleys, packages, partner outreach, and assists with groups sales. Meacham praised the team and stated that he thinks the new position structure will be good for the organization and staff. Staff will stay in the current office space with a few moderations in current office placement.

Program of Work

Meacham briefly reviewed the lodging data which shows that year to date occupancy is basically the same through January. When factoring in February, occupancy is ahead and trending back into the low mid 70s for occupancy, showing the health and stability of the local market. January is typically a slower month, but going into Covid January 2020 was a very healthy 58.6%. January 2023 was up 8% in occupancy, \$24 in rate and \$14 in profitability which means the market is healthier than it was right before going into Covid in 2020. The numbers are outpacing the region as well as the statewide numbers. Meacham said that Rowan County is well positioned and is seeing strong economic growth. Local businesses are doing well, there was no drop in leisure travel and the group business has come back well and is diverse in nature. The local market was always underbuilt but had a quality supply just not a great deal of supply.

Michalec reported that the email newsletter had a 34% open rate with 4,900 active subscribers. The visitrowancountync.com website had 33,000 page views and just under 16,000 users. One year after the launch of the new site, the Simpleview representative states that the new site is very healthy and engaging with visitors. Michalec said, the booking widget affiliate program through Root Rez continues to roll out. The widget is in place on the Rowan County site, Dan Nicholas Park site, and will go onto NCTM this week. Staff is still working with DSI and a few other partners to get that program completely rolled out.

Michalec reported that all social media platform performances continued to hold strong in February. Staff focused on the year of the trail, the new exhibit at Waterworks Visuals Arts Center and the NC Transportation Museum visit. Arrowood produced some great blogs in February covering 11 historic experiences, pickleball, African American Heritage, the local February events and the Februarys Arts blog. Year to date social media engagement was 51,000 and reach is at 270,000. Michalec reported that for Tic Tok Jenna did three videos in February which generated 718,000 views and 60,000 likes. She attended Wine about Winter, Sewanee theatre in Kannapolis, and spent the weekend at Cherry Treesort. As mentioned last month, Jenna brought with her an influencer friend from Charleston, SC who also has a huge following. Michalec reported paid marketing placements year to date are at 468.

Furr reported that Arrowood is continuing to do a great job with trolleys. As of the first of March, there are 73 books for the year and 8 over the next 90 days. Looking at the stay and play packages, Day Out with Thomas packages will start on March 31st.

In group sales, Furr reported a group called Bike Walk NC reached out to her just prior to the meeting about hosting their yearly summit in Rowan County with an estimated 300-450 room nights in September 14-16, 2023. This is the 12th year they have held the summit but will be their first time in Rowan County. This is a conference on sustainability, alternate travel, and biking safety not a biking event. This group will be utilizing the trolleys for their event.

Furr reported that the Little League Tournament will be here again in July. Furr reported there is potential for even more room nights than the 605 from last year. the past. The qualifying for the senior division is changing and could offer more team participants. In addition, two weeks prior, Rowan County is hosting the state junior and senior state tournament as well.

Furr reports that the Aspire National Dance competition coming up in May and they are right at a sellout.

Furr referred the members to the running tourism support chart and upcoming locations that Arrowood will be visiting in the marketing report.

Michalec reported that Datafy cell phone data from December – February reported 586,000 unique and active mobile devices in the destination with location services turned on. Michalec briefly reviewed the visitor totals from top states, cities, and out-of-state cities. Michalec noted that total trips coming for attractions was 54,000 and total coming for dining was 134,000.

Furr reported that staff is working on spring, summer and fall marketing campaigns and how to position Rowan County and how to tell our story. Community engagement is a big part of that, Meacham and Furr were in Kannapolis last week for a press event with Jiggy with the Piggy and the Cannon Ballers. Furr reminded everyone about the hospitality day with the Cannon Ballers on May 4th. The event is being expanded this year with more invites of our tourism partners and will give away baseballs to all attendees with the team and TDA logos. Special giveaways will be taking place again this year as well.

Tourism Development

Michalec reported that most of the municipalities are excited and embracing the countywide wayfinding. Staff and Bizzell are working on customizing each municipality's signage with specific colors and styling. Meacham noted that it is a lot of communication with the towns. East Spencer received some additional funds from the state to assist with their signage. Michalec will be following up with the lead planner at the county to develop the final package to send to NCDOT once each municipality's plan is finalized.

Meacham reminded the board members that prior to the most recent capital plan, there was a big effort that centered around the RW with the development of Lee Street theatre, the brewery, and the farmer's market. The TDA was hoping to launch the pavilion and the Railwalk itself in 2019. The farmer's market was completed two months after Covid hit. So, going back, since the TDA board has adopted the capital plan that focuses on two key hubs RailWalk and Agritourism Adventure staff is ready to really get momentum going again. Meacham reported that the architectural services in place and construction management services are in place. Michalec and Sada are working closely on this project and Sarah is going to give the board a quick update on where the project stands. Phase I was the Farmer's Market, this is Phase II and Phase III will consist of event space, Cheerwine etc... Meacham said that staff is working on the RailWalk itself as well as potential new property acquisitions in that area that could be added to further expand the tourism footprint and create the tourism hub experience.

Michalec reviewed the existing plans from 2013, noting that one minor tweak to those will be to avoid poured concrete and using a paver system to assist with drainage. Michalec and Troutman have received the architecture proposal back for \$39,000 that includes the small changes staff would like to be made to the plan, bids, construction management, design services, permits, inspections and storm water. The proposal is with Bill Burgin who was the original architect. New drawings are being developed with the minor changes and are hoping to work out those agreements with property owners and break ground by the end of the year. Meacham noted that the approval from the HPC may have lapsed, and staff may need to go back and receive new approval.

The meeting adjourned at 12:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted.

Lesley Pullium

SRCVB

Rowan County Occupancy Tax Receipts Collected (GROSS)

MONTH	FY18-19	FY19-20	%CHNG	FY20-21	%CHNG	FY21-22	%CHNG	FY22-23	%CHNG
July	82,827.79	85,062.04	2.7%	61,737.08	-27.4%	105,514.79	70.9%	119,693.09	13.4%
August	84,227.53	87,388.13	3.8%	66,399.96	-24.0%	99,851.17	50.4%	114,943.40	15.1%
September	88,060.74	89,694.58	1.9%	78,562.08	-12.4%	100,792.04	28.3%	119,384.91	18.4%
Quarter Total	255,116.06	262,144.75	2.8%	206,699.12	-21.2%	306,158.00	48.1%	354,021.40	15.6%
October	101,229.40	113,427.41	12.0%	76,794.51	-32.3%	115,324.55	50.2%	127,954.49	11.0%
November	84,418.19	97,848.24	15.9%	60,357.00	-38.3%	102,438.16	69.7%	116,182.15	13.4%
December	74,894.47	79,686.64	6.4%	64,749.41	-18.7%	95,874.73	48.1%	103,799.59	8.3%
Quarter Total	260,542.06	290,962.29	11.7%	201,900.92	-30.6%	313,637.44	55.3%	347,936.23	10.9%
January	72,190.74	80,100.88	11.0%	56,291.87	-29.7%	96,918.80	72.2%	115,064.17	18.7%
February	74,900.88	87,894.99	17.3%	62,049.03	-29.4%	94,530.61	52.3%	108,890.30	15.2%
March	93,890.99	62,149.01	-33.8%	84,372.26	35.8%	114,826.05	36.1%		
Quarter Total	240,982.61	230,144.88	-4.5%	202,713.16	-11.9%	306,275.46	51.1%		
April	97,300.73	39,870.97	-59.0%	90,628.43	127.3%	118,973.87	31.3%		
May	92,104.89	50,585.59	-45.1%	97,167.69	92.1%	126,185.96	29.9%		
June	92,254.88	56,142.85	-39.1%	102,792.30	83.1%	115,488.15	12.4%		
Quarter Total	281,660.50	146,599.41	-48.0%	290,588.42	98.2%	360,647.98	24.1%		
Adjmts Penalties									
Penalties									
Year Total	\$ 1,038,301.23	\$ 929,851.33	-10.4%	\$ 901,901.62	-3.0%	\$ 1,286,718.88	42.7%	\$ 1,053,866.54	

