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

Wednesday, January 18, 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 |
| VI. | Program of Work Report | |
| | A. Destination Marketing Report | Sarah Michalec |
| | B. Tourism Development | James Meacham |
| | a. Wayfinding | |
| VII. | Additional Business | |
| VIII. | Adjourn | |



**ROWAN COUNTY TOURISM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

Wednesday, November 16, 2022, 12:00 pm

BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Attending: Sada Troutman, Craig Pierce, Krista Sullivan, John Ketner, Karen Alexander, Cyndi Greenwood, Therese Henderson, Kimberly Morgan, Richard Reinholz, Vivian Hopkins, Michelle Patterson

Not Attending:

Guests: Andy Abramson, TDA Attorney

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

RCTDA Call to Order

Sullivan called the RCTDA to order at 12:05pm.

Approval of the Minutes

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for approval of the October 2022 minutes.

Second: John Ketner

Motion: Approved

Organizational & Financial Update

Meacham reported occupancy tax revenues as of 9-30-22 for fiscal year 2022-23 on an accrual basis equaled \$496,397 and are 16.3% ahead of budget and of the same period in fiscal year 2021-22. September 2022 occupancy taxes were \$118,975 and 18% ahead of September 2021. Meacham said the final October 2022 occupancy taxes are in line for \$120,000: about 5% of the all-time high collection in October 2021. Meacham noted that August 2022 and September 2022 continued as record months surpassing the records set in 2021, and October 2022 is on pace to be another record month. Year to date revenue on an accrual basis has exceeded expenses by \$115,932.

Meacham reported total current assets equaled \$521,859 and are up \$31,482 from the month ending September 30th. Accounts receivables equaled \$258,008 an increase of \$2,500 from the month ending September 30th and consists of September and October occupancy taxes. Meacham reported cash on hand as of 10-31-22 equaled \$263,851 an increase of \$28,982 from the month ending September 30, 2022.

Meacham noted that Smith Travel reported the area up about 11.5% from the year before which was the best ever collection year. Through the first couple weeks of November, figures month to date are about 11% ahead of last year and are still seeing strong occupancy tax percentages and strong rate growth. Market to date for November is about 75% and October was 71%. Staff is continuing to put aside cash for the future capital projects in the NC Capital Management Trust account.

Safety and Wellness

Meacham gave the board some information on some of the issues that the community has been dealing with relating to visitor safety and wellness crime, and homelessness.

Crime related to commercial businesses and tourism-related businesses on the interstate. Breaking and entering issues have occurred over the years in some of the hotel properties off the interstate and are complex situations. Incidents of these burglaries go up and down from time to time at various properties. Most are crimes of opportunity. There has been an uptick recently in these crimes and this has resulted in some lost business. There have been customers who have removed corporate business in this community to other communities due to safety concerns. Tourism staff has had various conversations with the police dept over the years about what can be done are aware that there are 12-13 vacant positions currently and that is about 18-20% of the force reduced.

Meacham reported that there have been a lot of work and effort on what can be done to prevent these crimes from lighting, cameras, extra trimming of scrubs etc... The properties have done a fantastic job in encouraging visitors to take measures to secure their valuables and safety. The most effective way of preventing these crimes as indicated by the police dept is police presence. Police dept staff have share the statistics that prove this fact. However, it is not feasible to have a police presence at each property overnight. Meacham stated that the board is not being asked for any specific action today he is just making the board aware of the situation and what hotel, TDA, and police staff has done to try to prevent these crimes.

Many of these criminals are not from the local area but simply travel the interstate and take advantage of circumstances and the proximity of properties to the interstate. Greenwood said that her property has not had a crime issue is a while. Greenwood indicated that sometimes guests become concerned when there is a police presence as well. Sullivan stated that Hampton Inn is currently installing cameras that photograph license plates. Reinholz said the YMCA is also in the process of installing those cameras. Meacham said that a best practice sheet is being constructed by Salisbury Police dept to share with all the properties. Staff is staying abreast of the situation and working with the local police department and the local hotel properties.

Meacham reported that in relation to the homeless situation, Holiday Inn Express and the Marriott have reached out about the homeless situation. Corporate Holiday Inn Express has been in touch with the local property regarding guest complaints. There is a great deal of complexities in this situation as the major homeless encampment is located on NCDOT property on the interstate. A trespass agreement with the hotel properties would make it easier for the local police to remove trespassers. Many of these homeless people living on the interstate are not from this community but are transient from other areas. Meacham said the police and the mayor have been doing a great job working with these hotel properties on this situation including encouraging people not to support panhandlers on or near the properties.

Mayor Alexander stated that a sweep was done this past week to remove some of these folks, doing a large clean up and placing a dumpster in the area to discourage folks from returning to the East Innes Street area. The mayor stated that the city is working with the county officials on the situation as well and are trying to be as humanitarian as possible. The Rowan Helping Ministries are assisting with the homeless families but cannot accommodate people who refuse to meet the no drugs and alcohol criteria that is in place.

Agritourism and Zoning

Meacham introduced Andy Abramson, RCTDA attorney and briefly reviewed the history of agritourism and specifically in North Carolina and Rowan County. Meacham stated that there was legislation passed at different times in the NC General Assembly defined agritourism as a separate entity and what the rules and regulations that they must follow. In many counties there is agricultural zoning. This zoning defines what can be done on the farm property. Over the years agritourism has really diversified what agritourism activities are taking place on the farm. Recently, many sites have started looking at expanding into food, beverage, beer, wine, and alcohol. Farms are looking at how to manage those activities when kids are interacting with farm activities while mom and dad have a beer etc. What are the proper ways of presenting these options on the farm within the zoning rules and regulations. Basically, agricultural zoning does not allow those activities, so the zoning legislation must be amended. Meacham said that staff is not asking today proposing any specific amendment or process from the board today but rather to garner an endorsement to begin a conversation involving TDA staff, county staff, county attorney, looking at other communities that do this to consider some type of text amendment. Abramson has had some conversations with the County attorney about how this could be addressed.

Abramson briefly summarized the issue as Meacham stated specifically relating to alcohol sales taking place on a traditional farm/agritourism sites. Alcohol sales are only permitted in two specific districts in Rowan County and agricultural sites do not allow for alcohol sales. The question is how alcohol sales can be done on the sites. Regarding agritourism sites there are three ways to go about having it become a permitted activity 1) property owner sue county stating alcohol sales would be a tourism activity. If the owner can show proof that people are drawn to the property for that specific activity as a part of agritourism. An ABC permit would still be required 2) request part of the property be rezoned to CVI for industrial 3) request a zoning text amendment that would apply to all agritourism.

Meacham stated that staff would like to seek the endorsement of the board to begin a facilitation process to work this challenge out in the best interest of the farms and county residents.

Motion: Craig Pierce made the motion for staff to begin a facilitation process to work through this challenge relating to agritourism.

Second: Vivian Hopkins

Motion: Approved

Destination Marketing Report

Michalec reported that the email Newsletter open rate went up from 38% to 53% in October with a great deal of interest in Halloween events. The website had 32,000 page views in October with 16,000 users and that indicates that repeat traffic is building which is one of the ultimate the goals. It shows that visitors are using the site as an ongoing resource. This also allow staff to study the pages visitors are returning for, enhance those pages and use those pages as models for other site pages. Staff is very excited to see this activity on the new website. Michalec said that the online package platform, Root Rez continues to work well with \$13,000 in revenue in October. Staff is continuing to look at ways to drive traffic directly to this package platform using the different campaigns placements on affiliate sites.

Regarding social media, Michalec reported 1,400 new Facebook followers in October which is one of the biggest months this year. There were 1,800 blog visits in October. Site and marketing content is changing from original to Autumn to Holiday shopping, gift guides and giveaways. One new thing that staff is looking at is utilizing online influencers that have significant followers (significant being 750,000 plus) to help leverage the marketing message. Michalec said that staff is ready to take the next step of hiring an influencer and she is having some conversations with potential influencers that could take our following to the next level. Michalec

said the goal is to get this program set up and established in the next six months and then look at ways to catapult our social media marketing to the next level.

Michalec reported paid marketing placements for October of 60. There are 64 trolley bookings year to date and 18 trolley bookings in the next 90 days. Staff is continuing to look at comparisons and building new ideas for what is next for the trolleys and hope to share that with you all soon.

Michalec reported that the Wine About Winter packages went on sale today. The Polar Express package bookings are at 318 with 452 room nights. Tickets are sold out for Polar Express, but the gift card option is still available for people who have their tickets and want to participate in the package.

Michalec briefly reviewed the updated group sales and tourism support charts and noted that holiday marketing will start right after Thanksgiving with the gift original campaign and giveaway. Arrowood has been working hard with the local small businesses to give away as many gift cards as possible in contests for the gift original campaign.

The seventh and final photo shoot is on December 2nd at Polar Express. Michalec reported that staff is thrilled with the huge library of photos completed by David Bailey over the past year.

Tourism Development

Meacham reminded members that he had asked them to review the proposed Capital plan last month and consider approval of this for the framework for the Tourism Capital plan going forward. Meacham asked the group to approve the plan as a framework and adopt this as the guiding principles for the Tourism Capital plan. There are no dollar amounts and no commitment to specific projects or specific funding amounts, but this is just the framework to education decisions and adopt that moving forward.

Meacham said that this plan is focusing on building off strengths, character, furthering strategic investments, expanding brand, and especially driving over night stays and supporting visitors. Meacham briefly reviewed the highlights of the plan and the key points of driving organic destination growth and incremental visitation, creating buzz and excitement and how to push to the next level.

This plan uses a principle from the Tourism Master Plan 2013 which framed it as centerpieces taking multiple assets from the destination and centralize them into a couple of key areas building off of those creating critical mass for economic and tourism development. These are referred to and considered as hubs. Offering new experiences that focus on differentiating us build on our assets, multimedia sharing viral moment is huge to expand and grow the base but also develop the community brand further and push that out. There are two proposed areas of focus, one urban and one rural with a dual track approach of developing out the two main hubs. If adopted staff would begin driving the capital, the planning, the specifics, the acquisitions, and partnership models and developing site plans for each hub.

The first focus is urban and includes the further development and growth of the RailWalk area building on the strong investment and infrastructure that has been made in the area and expanding out this RailWalk corridor. Key things to consider are how to create this as an urban launching point for the rural tourism adventures but at the same time expand and grow the arts, dining, indoor and outdoor entertainment space etc... Meacham mentioned expanding the tourism footprint in the RailWalk area by possibly acquiring new property and developing tourism activities.

The second focus is the agritourism adventure experience creating that rural hub central activity expanding availability of agritourism outdoor tourism experiences while building off existing assets and looking at public/private partnerships. Basically, using the same concept as before of taking existing assets and building them up. This would entail bringing in those dynamic recreational experiences, multimedia opportunities, and

look at multigenerational activities as well. Again, centralizing experiences and assets incorporating private operators with public support and building strong partnership relationships. These experiences can be packaged and sold creating unique overnight experiences Meacham said. Investing in tourism product that garners two more annual Polar Express type experiences with comparable overnight stays.

Meacham reminded the members that funds are being set aside monthly for these future projects as they are identified. Meacham suggested using the next couple of months to meet with possible partners and work at identifying possible projects so that at the start of the next fiscal year staff could be ready to begin defining actual projects.

Motion: Richard Reinholz made the motion to adopt this plan as the framework for a dual track approach for the RailWalk and an unidentified agritourism adventure project.

Second: Craig Pierce

Motion: Approved

John Ketner and Michelle Patterson abstained.

Once projects are identified staff will do the due diligence of pricing out of the project expenses. Meacham reported that Michalec is stepping up and assisting with project management roles and taking the leadership on projects.

The meeting adjourned at 12:50 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%		
Quarter Total	260,542.06	290,962.29	11.7%	201,900.92	-30.6%	313,637.44	55.3%		
January	72,190.74	80,100.88	11.0%	56,291.87	-29.7%	96,918.80	72.2%		
February	74,900.88	87,894.99	17.3%	62,049.03	-29.4%	94,530.61	52.3%		
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%	\$ 481,975.89	

