

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
ALAMANCE COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
Wednesday, April 22, 2020 at 10:00 A.M.
Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present: Katie Dukeshire
Kavita Patel
Matt Patel
Jessalynn Strauss
Cary Worthy

CVB Staff: Grace VandeVisser
Claire Davis
Brian Baker

Guest: Sara Danieleley-Kernodle

Financial Officer: Susan Evans

Moment of Silence

Kavita Patel, Vice-Chair, called the meeting to order and a moment of silence was observed.

Approval of Minutes

Kavita asked if there were any additions or corrections to be made to the minutes of the February and March meetings. No updates were needed. Cary Worthy motioned for the minutes to be approved. Jessalynn Strauss seconded. Minutes were unanimously approved.

Collection Report

Susan Evans presented the Financial Reports for July 1, 2019 through March 31, 2020. Total assets are \$1,473,051. Total revenue reported totals \$414,741. Total expenditures total \$397,947. Occupancy tax collections reported through March 31, 2020 totaled \$629,707, a 6.12% increase over the same period in 2019 with the TDA's share of \$407,231. Sales tax collections reported through March 31, 2020 total \$19,497,874 which is an 4.93% decrease over the same period in 2019. Investments total \$584,340.

Visitor Bureau Updates

Katie brought to the boards attention a conversation surrounding occupancy tax penalty forgiveness. Several DMO's in the Piedmont have put together a proposal to have late fees waived for occupancy taxes until the end of the fiscal year which is June 30th. Susan shared what the penalties are for paying occupancy tax late and explained further the process for collecting the occupancy tax. Grace stated that she will obtain the resolution from Cabarrus County to show the board with further details. Matt Patel expressed interest in waving the occupancy tax altogether. Grace stated that the occupancy tax funds our marketing dollars and therefore funds the tourism mechanism and is a pass through. She stated that we would not support waiving the occupant tax. Cary Worthy explained how Alamance Arts is a non-profit agency that receives some of the occupancy tax. As a non-profit they are counting on receiving the occupancy tax money to help Alamance Arts through the challenges of being closed for COVID-19. Susan suggested that we clarify that the proposal includes occupancy tax which would be collected through June 30th and by July 15th only. Grace clarified that the months would be April, May and June. Katie asked if the taxes are not paid in full by July 15th, are all the fees retro-collected? Susan said that the question had not come up and she would find out. She further clarified that this would be on a case by case basis with each hotel needing to contact the county if they cannot pay their occupancy taxes. Katie made a motion of interest to move forward with the late payment deferral only. Kavita seconded the

motion. The motion was unanimously approved. The motion passes. Susan stated that if this proposal is submitted in time, it could be brought to the commissioners for the May meeting.

Grace updated the board on how tourism is being affected by the COVID-19 crisis and about a recovery plan that the State of North Carolina is proposing. The State has provided to Senator Gunn a plan called Bringing Back North Carolina. The plan is asking for 7 million dollars worth of grants for DMO's, specifically in North Carolina. Grace stated that this will not affect us at this time as we have funding to move forward but other DMOs will need the help and we may need this in the future. The grant program will help DMO's with marketing and funding. They do not have guidelines set up for the usage of this funding but when the State puts together those details Grace stated she would share with the board. Grace stated she would also share the detailed information about the grant that she has, which shows the competitive risk and where we stand in comparison to other states. She stated that we have been the seventh most visited state and yet we have always had one of the smallest budgets. Travel means jobs and tourism has been one of the biggest hit industries in the State from the COVID-19 crisis.

Grace shared information about our advertising campaign and strategy as we finish out the rest of this year. Grace stated that we are in a good place due to our fund balance. There are areas we can scale back on, but we also don't want to get off the radar and therefore need to continue to fund our advertising. Social media continues to be a big source of advertising. Grace stated that during this time, while people are at home thinking about future travel plans, it is a good time to get Alamance County as a destination promoted. The results of independent research show that travelers are looking forward to getting out and traveling when it's safe to do so. The top two locations, per the research, will be the beach and smaller communities with rural towns. Grace stated that we are the perfect example of small communities and rural towns. Further research indicates that people still don't want to be in large groups. Instead they want the dining, shopping and arts experience while also spending more time with their friends and families. Grace reminded the board that we were already a drive market and driving is going to be on the rise with people avoiding air travel for a while. Research also suggests people are looking to travel within a 50-mile radius and taking more staycations. Grace stated that all of this could change at any time, but we must plan based on what we see now. Hardest hit sectors have been conferences and sporting events. As far as our hotels, we are in a great location in the state because of accessibility and we can pick up other types of business or leisure markets.

Grace shared the results of her Visit NC PR Crisis Management workshop. 20 people registered and about half were on the call. Grace shared one aspect of the workshop which was the importance of having a 30 to 90-day plan to stay relevant and reassess where you are as a destination or attraction. Grace has been working with Visit NC to keep them informed of our Virtual Experiences so they can then push it out on their media. Visit NC is picking up stories to help promote the local DMOs and inspiring future travel. Grace stated that when she sees those kinds of stories, she passes them on to Visit NC. Grace shared that we are in the process of doing a PTDMO takeover on the My Piedmont Region social media and that's going well. Grace reminded the board that in a couple of weeks it will be National Tourism Week. Normally, Grace stated, we would visit the local Welcome Centers and do a familiarization tour but as things have changed, we will now be doing a campaign using US Travel's national campaign message about the spirit of travel. The national campaign will push the message, "We'll be ready when you are ready to travel." The message will rely heavily on imagery. Grace shared information about a contest the CVB has hosted on Instagram for photography. The contest supports local businesses by selecting a winner every week from the photos that have been entered and giving a gift card to the winner. So far, the winners have received gift cards to Smitty's, Dick and Janes and Cup 22 (when it re-opens). The final week of the Instagram campaign is now. One of the options is to offer virtual shopping training. Grace stated that several of our local businesses are hosting successful virtual Live Events and she is hoping to provide training for other businesses that would like to do the same. Grace shared that our 60-day goals are to highlight local woman because it is the Year of the Woman. Other ideas include

launching a Meet the Chef series where virtual cooking classes would be held, allowing the community to get to know a local restaurant and chef. Grace shared that the CVB will also be following up with people who ordered guidebooks from us during this time and finding out if they were looking to travel here. In 90 days, Grace stated that she hopes we will be ready for folks to start traveling here again. Our message during this time might be somewhere along the lines of #LetsGo or #WeAreReady. These are just ideas. Another element of the 90-day plan includes scheduling a familiarization tour for the fall and continuing to do geo-targeting and looking for partnership opportunities. Grace stated that we will continue to measure these campaigns through engagement on social media. She also shared that these phases will continue to be reassessed. Our Instagram takeover in March, prior to Covid 19's events, we increased our followers by 155, which is significant. We also picked up 22 followers in a single day with the My Piedmont takeover. Engagement on the website has increased with viewers between the ages of 25-34 and 55-64. Grace stated she has other statistics she will send under a separate cover. Katie mentioned that the Visit NC PR Crisis Management was very helpful and informative.

Grace discussed the new BMX 2021 bid which has been extended. We are hoping to win this bid and have dedicated \$10,000 from our funds for the bid fee, along with the Burlington Parks and Recreation department dedicating \$5,000. Grace stated that BMX has a huge economic impact when they come to our county. She shared that we made it to the top two last year and with enhancements we will be in a better position this year. Grace stated she would be reaching out to the hotels in the next few days to get information from them regarding this.

Claire Davis shared about our two new pages on our website. A Curbside/Take-Out page has been added directing those in the community to restaurants open for take-out. We have also added a Virtual Experience Page. The Virtual Experience page will direct people to online events including shopping, concerts and more. Claire stated that these have been popular on Facebook. We have had 83 visitor guides requested in the months of March-April. Claire mentioned that we are receiving requests from a wide range of states that we may not normally hear from. On Facebook we are reaching an average of 100-200 per post. Our Facebook followers are 1,937. She shared that during the month of April we had an average of 400 total likes and shares on our posts. On social media we are focusing on promoting take-out and curbside service from our local restaurants. She stated that we are also promoting local shopping and online sales, as well as Community Hero's: local businesses and organizations helping others during the COVID-19 crisis.

Grace shared information regarding our engagements and sessions for the website. Comparing the same period from last year we are down only 13 percent for page views. We would like to keep that momentum going as far as keeping folks engaged.

Adjourn

Katie adjourned the meeting at 11:03 am.
Minutes submitted by Claire Davis.