



**Swain County Tourism
Development Authority
Meeting minutes
2025-2026 Fiscal Year**

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Swain County Tourism Development Authority

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Regular Meeting 07-09-2025

Present (Voting): Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Janene Lancaster, Adrian Litzau, Erin

Smith

Absent (Voting): Robin Fronrath, Tanner Lawson

Present (EX-Officio): Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

Absent(EX-Officio): None

TDA Staff: Sarah Conley, Rita Jones, Selena Hyde

Attendees: Mike Drinkwater, Fred Crawford

The Swain County TDA meeting was called to order by Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor at 12:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was given. Prayer by Rita Jones.

Call for any changes to the agenda: None

Meeting Minutes Approval:

Erin Smith made a motion to approve the Minutes 06-11-2025 Public Hearing. Adrian Litzau seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Erin Smith made a motion to approve the Minutes 06-11-2025 Regular Meeting. Adrian Litzau seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Sarah Conley, Executive Director of TDA introduced the new Board member, that is Commissioner Tanner Lawson.

Sarah also distributed the new information for the 2025-2026 TDA Binder Materials.

Erin Smith made a motion to approve the Rules & Procedures Policy 2025, with the change of the Quorum number of board members from 5 to 4, due to the downsize of the board membership to 7 per the Swain County Commissioners during their June 2025 meeting. Adrian Zitzau seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Public Comment: Fred Crawford

- Mr Crawford asked that the TDA expand the amount of time allowed to talk to 5 minutes instead of 3 minutes.

- Mr Crawford also ask that the board reconsider video on YouTube be restored for those that can't make the 12:00 Meeting.

Executive Director Report:

Marketing & Public Relations:

- June was spent on promoting Freedom Fest and the Singing In the Smokies and preparing for both events which came in strong for visitors in our area. Over 3,000 flyers were handed out by Selena and Ricky from the Chamber of Commerce. Rack Cards and Maps were also available by the TDA.
- Sarah met with Visit NC for discussion of advertising for the fall months.
- TDA sponsored a Southern Living writer that was working on a digital story we are hoping she will put into print.
- Light show Ticket go on sale in middle of July.
- 2025 Mosca contract complete.
- Sarah had an invitation to Raleigh Legislation by Sen. Corbin and his wife Beth.
- All reports PR/ social media are attached to your email.

Financial:

- Financials were sent via email
- May Occupancy report attached.

Administration & Committees:

- Beautification
 - The contract with Gabriel's Christmas is secured for 2025.
 - The Board has chosen the bow for the picture frame.
- Sarah was asked by the Swain County Board of Commissioners to give a presentation of all the things that the TDA has done or sponsorship for 2024-2025. Sarah made a binder which each of you have in your packet. There is also an itemized list of all things the TDA has made through Monetary or Improvements from 2019 to present in your packet.

HR

- Nothing new to report.

Board Discussion:

PattiJo Taylor gave an update on the Bridge Baskets flowers. Due to the poor look and the fact that people are pulling the flowers out of their baskets, it was decided to take them down. No others will be installed this year.

The board decided on the red/gold bow to go on the picture frame that will be for pictures during the Christmas season. This year we will use the Nativity that we have.

Look into having a conversation with the Town regarding hanging baskets from their black poles that are the light poles in downtown.

Erin would like to see some of the Strategic items that were listed from 2 years ago.

Erin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion. All in favor.

Meeting Adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

Board Signatures:

Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor_____

Andy Bhakta_____

Robin Fronrath_____

Janene Lancaster_____

Tanner Lawson_____

Adrian Litzau_____

Erin Smith_____

Swain County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Regular Meeting - Wednesday, August 13, 2025

Present (Voting): Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Robin Fronrath, Tanner Lawson, Adrian Litzau, Erin Smith

Absent (Voting): Janene Lancaster

Present (Ex-Officio) Cally Elliott, Swain County Finance Officer

Absent (Ex-Officio): Lottie Barker, Swain County Manager

TDA Staff: Sarah Conley, Rita Jones

Attendees: Troy & Tammy Burns, Fred Crawford, Mike Drinkwater, Monica Brown, Pat McConnell, Bobby Fuquay

This meeting was called to order at 12:00 p.m. by Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor. The Pledge of Allegiance was given. Prayer by Tanner Lawson.

Call for any changes to the agenda: Due to Ricky Sanford, Chamber of Commerce not being present, he was removed from the agenda.

Erin Smith made a motion to accept the Minutes of 07/09/2025. Adrian Litzau seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Event Recap:

Troy & Tammy Burns from Singing in the Smokies were present to inform the board of the event. A total of 5,000 people attended the event over the 3-night singing. The Burns's did a wonderful job of promoting ExploreBrysonCity.com in all their literature and advertisements. Tammy was very thankful to the TDA board and staff for all the information that our website gave out to those coming into Bryson City. It is a partnership that Tammy hopes will continually grow over the coming years. Tammy also asked if we could have a few more fans at the event park, possibly a 40x40 tent, and do something with the sandy floor.

Public Comment: Pat McConnell asked the board to consider a PR company of his choice to help Swain County recover from Helene. Mr. McConnell projection is that it will take 5 years for Swain County to recover lost revenue.

Mike Drinkwater on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce spoke about the 4th of July. Mr. Drinkwater felt that it was a true success and thanked the TDA for all their help and hard work to help put this event on for Swain County. Mike also said he looks forward to working more closely with the TDA.

Executive Director Report presented by Sarah Conley

Marketing and Public Relations:

- Marketing projects:
 - 2026 Visitor Guide Planning underway with meeting scheduled.
 - PR marketing shift into Fall and Winter in full swing
 - Fall and Winter web pages updated
 - Smoky Mountain Light Spectacular tickets are now on sale. GSMR has been sent a link to post on their website. Sarah has a meeting with Melissa Barker next month to arrange for printing of the locale tickets.
 - The Bryson City Webcam has been damaged by one of the storms, therefore we will be purchasing a new one for installation.
 - All brochure contracts are filled in for the coming year.
 - Duke Energy Poles updated. And update on the parking study.

Financial:

- We finished out the year of being up 2% from budget.

Administration & Committees:

- Beautification
 - Will be setting up a meeting regarding the 2026 Landscape and Flower program
- Finance—Nothing to report
- Marketing—Nothing to report

HR

- Secured all policies for employee healthcare for coming year
- Workers Comp audit completed for 2024 Tax season
- TDA Board filled out audit papers for auditors for 2024

Huskey's Painting gave an estimate of painting the Connex boxes that store the Christmas Show at the event park in the amount of \$10,835.00. This includes pressure washing, rust proofing then painting of the boxes. Robin Fronrath asked if we could obtain a second bid just to see if it is in line with another company.

Board Discussion:

Erin Smith made a motion that the September 10 meeting begin at 10:00am to go over some Strategic Planning rather than waiting until February, since a lot of the list from this past February has been done. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Andy Bhakta made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Erin Smith seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at: 1:03 p.m.

Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor_____

Andy Bhakta _____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Tanner Lawson_____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith_____

Wednesday, September 10, 2025, Strategic Meeting

Present (Voting): Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Robin Fronrath, Janene Lancaster, Tanner Lawson, Erin Smith

Absent (Voting): Adrien Litzau

Present (Ex-Officio): None

Absent (Ex-Officio): Lottie Barker, Swain County Manager, Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

TDA Staff: Sarah Conley, Rita Jones

Attendees: Mike Drinkwater, Monica Brown, Fred Crawford

This meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m. by Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor. The Pledge of Allegiance was given. Prayer by Tanner Lawson.

Call for any changes to the agenda: Sarah Conley made mention that at 11:45 a.m., there will be a lunch break.

No vote needed all in favor.

Erin Smith made a motion to accept Minutes of 08-13-2025. Robin Fronrath seconded the motion. All in favor.

Motion carried.

Public Comment: None

Executive Director Report presented by Sarah Conley

Marketing and Public Relations:

- Marketing projects:
 - Sarah met with Smoky Mountain Times regarding 2026 Guidebook-this year have a pull-out map and a Holiday section.
 - Switching to Fall campaigns on all platforms pushing Holiday travel plans
 - Finalized itineraries for 3 influencers coming in October, also resharing influencers last year's fall visits.
- Visit NC launched Fall Feature, Holiday Look Ahead and Insider's Guide to Bryson City. .
- Working on Volunteer details with Melissa Barker for the Light Show.
- Fall Decorations are in progress for the lawn at the Visitor Center and County Admin Building.
 - Finalized Fall/Winter/Early Spring Influencers
- Key Data report upcoming for the July 5 weekend.

- Preparation for Strategic Planning Session **Financial:**
- July occupancy \$331,083.64. Down from 2024 by 1%

Administration & Committees:

- Beautification—Nothing to report. Planning for fall meeting.
- Finance—Nothing to report
- Marketing—Nothing to report
- Additional Paint Quote from Painting America, \$10,000.00 more than Huskey's quote.
- New MOSCA lights have arrived at event park. Installation begins Oct. 6
- Board agreed to have Assured Groundswork to redo the flowers in boxes on the street with mums for the fall season. No vote taken.

HR

- Nothing to report

Janene Lancaster made a motion to accept the bid from Huskey's Paint & Design of \$10,835.00 to paint the Connex boxes that are at the event park. Robin Fronrath seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Board Discussion:

Erin Smith talked about why she felt a Strategic Planning meeting was needed at this time of the year. Due to all of the accomplishments that the board has made, the need to start planning for next year as far as events, beautification upgrades, more planning with the Chamber of Commerce.

Sarah presented to the board the Strategic Planning booklet that she prepared for this meeting. The booklet showed all that the board has accomplished. The booklet gave a breakdown of how visitor ship is down across Western North Carolina and the state.

Items Noted During the Strategic Planning:

- 4 Corners Lawncare / Beautification efforts. Focus on more beautification instead of following up with the plan that included structural changes and additions. Starting with the visitor lawn, the corner beside BCO and then consider options for the 2 additional corners.
- Educational programs available for our business community to educate on Rates/RevPar lodging practices etc. at least 2 per year or happen quarterly.
- Flower hanging baskets that extend for the black lights poles for town.
- Bridge baskets changed to entrance and exit area only. Researching fabrication options to install to hang flower displays.
- Wayfinding Sign updates
- Parking identification – discussing with the town possible paid metered options.
- Focus on campaigning for Christmas Town accolades – Southern Living etc.

- Shoulder season initiatives like town events
- Consulting an Economic Developer to discuss event options, vagrant issues and Greenway possibilities
- Lake Access upgrade – Finger Lakes access and Almont Boat Dock – possible Beach Lake option.

Andy Bhakta moved to take a lunch break. Janene Lancaster seconded the motion. All in favor.

Motion carried. 11:29 a.m.

Janene Lancaster made a motion at 12:10p.m. to go back into regular meeting. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

The board talked about the possibility of having hanging baskets on the bridges. This might deter people from pulling the flowers out of the pots. There needs to be discussions with the Department of Transportation. The Town has asked if the TDA may be of help in getting the Crosswalks colored instead of just the white lines that the DOT provides. The Board would like to see the costs of this project before committing. The board was all in agreement that they would like to see more working together in Chamber, County and Town for different projects in the coming year.

Janene Lancaster made a motion to adjourn the Strategic Planning Meeting. Tanner Lawson seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried

Meeting adjourned at: 2:25 p.m.

Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor_____

Andy Bhakta _____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Tanner Lawson_____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith_____

Swain County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

10-08-2025 Regular Meeting

Present (Voting): Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Robin Fronrath, Janene Lancaster, Tanner

Lawson, Adrian Litzau

Absent (Voting): Erin Smith

Present (Ex-Officio) Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

Absent (Ex-Officio): None

TDA Staff: Sarah Conley, Rita Jones

Attendees: Rob Hawke, Swain County Agriculture Director, Shannon Royce, Coop Extension Director

The meeting was called to order by Chairwoman Taylor at 12:02p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was given. Prayer was then given by Tanner Lawson.

Changes to the agenda. None

Minutes for approval as follow:

Robin Fronrath made a motion to approve the minutes for 09-10-2025. Janene Lancaster seconded the motion. All in favor. Minutes approved. Motion carried.

Public Comment: Rob Hawke, Swain Co Agriculture gave presentation about the numbers for the Ag Fair 2025. Approximately 2,488 in attendance this year. Gate receipts \$6,000.00. Battle of the Bands and Moe Pitney huge success. 45 crafters in attendance. Mr Hawke was very appreciative of TDA for the money given to help with the success of the Fair 2025.

Shannon Royce of the Extension office spoke about the walking feasibility study that was done downtown. Several problems that need to be fixed are within the city limits, therefore, need to be addressed by the Town.

At this time Robin Fronrath brought up the subject of the mobile home at the east end of town about to fall into the river and the icehouse across the street that is in major disrepair. Can the county do anything regarding this matter. Tanner Lawson spoke up that the owner has had multiple letters from the county to no avail.

Executive Report presented by Sarah Conley

Marketing & Public Relations:

- Visitor totals for Aquarium and Museum are up.
- Fall campaigns are underway.
- VisitNC will be filming a major commercial for 2026 in a few weeks.
- Lightshow Marketing underway with banners, billboards, and social media.
- Sarah is working on Heart of the Holiday's Tree Lighting campaign which will be on Nov 29.
- Trick or Treat candy is given out the week of Oct 10.
- Sarah gave an update on the Government shutdowns that may be affecting us locally. At this time, Deep Creek, Road to Nowhere, Oconaluftee, Kuwohi are all open due to Friends of the Smokies contributing monies to keep these places open during the busy fall season.
- Travel Page Advisory is now on our website to inform travelers what is open or not.

Public Relations:

- September reports attached.
- We have landed an exclusive feature with Good & Grit Magazine on Fly Fishing, working with Fontana Fly Fishing Guides.

Financial:

- Reports sent email
- August occupancy reports attached

HR:

- Nothing to report

Administrative & Committees:

- Beautification Committee—nothing to report
- Fall décor is out everywhere, Mums have been added to flowerpots downtown
- Christmas Décor will begin Oct 20
- Mosca is currently setting up at the Event Park
- Connex boxes have been painted and looking great

Board Discussion:

Andy Bhakta made a motion to buy (4) more of the large fans for the Event Park at a cost of \$10,438.92, due to Duke Energy giving rebates on these fans that are needed for the 4th of July Singing. Janene Lancaster seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Janene Lancaster made a motion to not have the November 2025 board meeting due to length of the meeting that was held in September. Andy Bhakta seconded this motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Sarah presented to the board a Sample Agreement that could be used for the Volunteer Hours that the Swain County Cross Country and Track Team might use. Much discussion regarding the use of the Track Team.

Robin Fronrath made a motion that no contract be made with the Track Team this year due to the lateness of them asking for the hours that are needed, and the fact that they could have hours at the Ag Fair and didn't choose to participate at that event. Adrian Litzau seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Tanner Lawson said that Bobby Jenkins has looked at the gazebo located at the bridge at the east end of town. The County maintenance will work on the structure, new tables and trash cans.

Adrian Litzau made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Robin Fronrath seconded the motion. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 1:21p.m.

Board Member Signatures:

Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor _____

Andy Bhakta _____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Tanner Lawson _____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith _____

November 12th's Meeting was canceled.

Swain County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

Present (Voting): Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Robin Fronrath, Janene Lancaster, Adrian Litzau, Tanner Lawson, Erin Smith

Present (EX-Officio) Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

Absent (Ex-Officio): Lottie Barker, Swain County Manager

TDA Staff: Sarah Conley, Rita Jones

Attendees: None

This meeting was called to order at 12:02p.m. by Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor. The Pledge of Allegiance was given. Prayer by Rita Jones

Call for any changes to the agenda: None

Erin Smith made a motion to accept Minutes of 10-08-2025. Janene Lancaster seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Public Comment: None

Executive Director Report presented by Sarah Conley

Marketing and Public Relations:

- Marketing projects:
 - November/December were dedicated to Light Show push and onboarding of part time employees.
 - Patti Nickels, a travel writer influencer came at the end of October. Ms. Pattis' article had over 100 hits from California, New York, Ohio, and Chicago etc.
 - All campaigns focused on Christmas downtown, polar express, Heart of the Holidays, Darnell Farms Christmas and Light Show.
 - Visitor totals are up tremendously this year.

Tree Lighting/ Light Show

- Troy and Tammy Burns Family did a 1-hour program that was well received. Avery Taylor provided the stage for the front lawn at visitor center.
- New Tree topper and Snow machines.
- New this year was the lighted frame, which was so popular, we purchased an ornament that people could stand in for pictures.
- Huge increase in visitor totals.
- The Light Show has rave reviews.
- GSMR is promoting the Light Show in their song book on board train.

Financial:

- Financial reports sent via email
- Occupancy tax huge for October
- 2024 Audit is complete

Administration & Committees:

- Beautification—January meeting planned to discuss flower boxes for 2026
- Finance—Nothing to report
- Marketing—Nothing to report

HR

- Nothing to report

Board Discussion:

The board asked Sarah to put up the extra banners that we have on entrance into Bryson City to see if that may give a boost to Light Show visitation. The banners will be put at Sleep Inn and Relax Inn. Sarah also put banner at the County Courthouse across from the train parking lot.

The January meeting will not be held due to longer meeting on February 18, 10:00am to 1:00 p.m.

Tanner Lawson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Janene Lancaster seconded the motion. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at: 1:25 p.m.

Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor _____

Andy Bhakta _____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Tanner Lawson _____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith _____

Financial Report for October : <https://brys.onl/OctoberFinancial>

PR & Social Report for October: https://brys.onl/OctoberPR_SocialReport

Financial Report for November <https://brys.onl/NovemberFinancial>

PR & Social Report for November: https://brys.onl/NovemberPR_SocialReport

January 14th's Meeting was canceled

Swain County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 11, 2026

Present (Voting): Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Robin Fronrath, Janene Lancaster, Tanner Lawson, Erin Smith

Absent (Voting) Adrian Litzau

Present (EX-Officio) Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

Absent (Ex-Officio): Lottie Barker, Swain County Manager

TDA Staff: Sarah Conley, Rita Jones

Attendees: Dena Ensley and Staff, Yellow Rose Realty, Mark Van Osdal, Shannon Semit, Carolina Bound, Monica Brown, Frymont Inn, Jay Kirkland, Commissioner Chair Swain County

This meeting was called to order at 12:00p.m. by Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor. The Pledge of Allegiance was given. Prayer by Tanner Lawson

Call for any changes to the agenda: None

Tanner Lawson made a motion to accept Minutes of 12-10-2025. Robin Fronrath seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Public Comment: None

Andy Bahkta made a motion to go into Executive Session; GS 143-318.11(a)(6). Janene Lancaster seconded the motion. Rita Jones and Sarah Conley were asked not to attend. All in favor. Motion carried. Began at 12:05 p.m.

Janene Lancaster made motion to go back into the Regular TDA meeting. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion. All in favor. Meeting began at 1:08 p.m.

Erin Smith made a motion to put into place an Oversight Committee for Human Resource for the TDA employees. This was seconded by Andy Bhakta. All in favor. Motion carried. Volunteers for this committee are: PattiJo Taylor, Erin Smith and Janene Lancaster.

Executive Director Report presented by Sarah Conley

Marketing and Public Relations:

- Final edits on the 2026 Visitor Guide. Additional 20,000 have been added to go to print for this year.
- A new Media Page has been added to the Website that will feature media information and PR information.
- Marketing focus is on Spring Break and Summer travel.
- There was a content collab at Longview Resort and Spa for girls/getaway or Mother and Daughter getaway with Spa packages available.
- Selena has been attending Chamber meetings and Swain County 250 NC meetings.
- The Chamber of Commerce will be asking for funding sponsorship for the upcoming year within the next month.
- Sarah has a meeting with GSMR to go over the specifics of the Great Smoky Appalachia Music Train which will be taking place in June. This will be multiple music artists on the train with passengers walking through different cars on the train to get to listen to the different artists.
- Sarah is working on permanent signs for the Visitor center to remove old signage.
- Rita will be working with the Heritage Museum Board and Swain County High School to get the old Nabors sign fixed for permanent hanging in the museum.
- Selena has given updated looks for rack cards Road to Nowhere and Waterfall Hikes.
- Dec PR & Social Report: <https://brys.onl/4tsmPhF>
Jan PR & Social Report: <https://brys.onl/45X63xj>

Financial:

- Financial reports sent via email
- November occupancy is up 13% from prior year We are currently 14% over budgeted amount.
- Dec Financial Report: <https://brys.onl/4rJt9jq>
- Jan Financial Report: <https://brys.onl/3O8qUre>

Administration & Committees:

- The Finance and Marketing committees will be meeting in April following the Strategic meeting in March.

Janene Lancaster made a motion to move the April meeting to April 15, 2026, due to Spring Break is the week that our regular meeting would take place and several members will be out of town. Andy seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

HR

- Front desk staff hours have been cut for winter hours at visitor center.
- Reviews of employee handbook and Fair Labor Standards.
- Workers comp audit completed, also hours for sick leave and vacation turned into auditors.

Board Discussion:

PattiJo gave an update on the flowers for spring and summer. The colors will be the colors red, white and purple that is a blue color for America 250. Town of Bryson City gave permission for the TDA to install the hanging flowerpots on the black poles. Therefore, the flowerpots will be on Everett St and Mitchell Street. Craig Smith gave a rendering of the front entrance of the visitor center and museum. Pooh would like to see drawing from different angles before voting on this.

Sarah opened discussion on the TDA purchasing the property at 67 Lakeview Drive, which is the airport property above Bryson City. This property is up for sale, and it would be a great asset to Swain County. Chairman, Jay Kirkland said he has talked to the commission board, and they don't seem to be interested in the purchase of this property. But Mr. Kirkland agreed that it would be an asset to Swain County.

Janene Lancaster made a motion to have attorney Jonathan Mattox to check into the purchase of this property on behalf of the TDA. Robin Fronrath seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Janene Lancaster brought up discussion of the Christmas Light Show. There was much disappointment in the low attendance. The board agreed that there is a need for a "professional marketing company" to handle marketing of the Light Show. No vote taken on this matter.

PattiJo brought up about putting kiosks around town. The board said that they would like signage rather than kiosks that need power and must have updates ever so often. Sarah reached out to the GSMR regarding the painting of the caboose before tourism picks back up for summer. Sarah has also put out RFP regarding the Bryson City entrance sign, waiting to hear from any companies on this.

Robin Fronrath made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion. All in favor.

Meeting adjourned at: 1:58 p.m.

Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor_____

Andy Bhakta _____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Tanner Lawson_____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith_____

Swain County Tourism Development Authority

Strategic TDA Meeting - 03-11-2026

Present (Voting): Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Robin Fronrath, Janene Lancaster,
Adrian Litzau, Tanner Lawson, Erin Smith

Absent (Voting): Janene Lancaster

Present (Ex-Officio) Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

Absent (Ex-Officio): None

TDA Staff: Rita Jones, Selena Hyde

Attendees: Sabrina Rockoff, TDA Attorney, Katie Cope, Chamber of Commerce, Mark
Fortner,

Stonebrook Hotel and Fortner Excavating

The Swain County TDA Strategic Meeting was called to order at 10:06 a.m. by Chairwoman, PattiJo
Taylor. The

Pledge of Allegiance was given. Prayer by Tanner Lawson

Call for changes to agenda: None

Meeting Minutes Approval:

Regular Minutes from 02-11-2026

Executive Closed Session 02-11-2026

Special Meeting 03-03-2026

Executive Closed Session 03-03-2026

Andy Bhakta made a motion to approve all the minutes at one time. Robin Fronrath seconded the
motion.

All in favor. Motion carried.

Public Comment: Mark Fortner

Mark Fortner asked the TDA Board to give him a letter to the Town of Bryson City asking them to give
him a

Variance from the new Fire Ordinance that the Town has implemented. The ordinance was put into
place after

Mark had begun construction of the new building on Main Street.

The board agreed to give Mr. Fortner this letter in hope that it may help to provide the variance that is needed.

This project would be a great asset to downtown Bryson City.

The board went into discussion on the Bryson City sign on Veterans Blvd. Mockups were looked at and discussed.

Erin Smith made a motion to approve the Bryson City sign on Veteran Blvd. Also, to talk to Pat Monteith

regarding permission to install another matching sign on her property near the BBQ Wagon. Andy Bhakta

seconded the motion. All the board in favor 100%. Motion carried.

Erin Smith then made a motion to do the same design on the caboose that sits on Everett Street once the

Caboose has been painted which the board has already been approved. Tanner Lawson seconded the motion.

All the board in favor 100%. Motion carried.

Banners for the Duke Energy poles for America 250 and that may be used each year for 4th of July were looked

at by board.

Tanner Lawson made a motion to use the Bless the USA design from Mosca. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion.

Approved 100% by the board. Board approved for 12 banners, Rita will count the poles to make sure the

number is correct then follow up with ordering the banners.

Chairwoman, PattiJo then went into discussion of the visitor center proposal for this year. Due to the time

of year the preparation of the lawn needs to start taking place.

Adrian Litzau made a motion to purchase the fabric cloth and rock that will be in front of the visitor center; also

Get the lawn fertilized and seeded which is needed now. This work is to be done by Craig Smith. Robin Fronrath

Seconded the motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Chairwoman, Pattijo brought up the Chamber of Commerce request for Freedom Fest 2026.

Erin Smith made a motion to give to the Chamber; dollar amount up to \$14,000.00 for the bands only that the

Chamber is planning to have on site for the 4th. Tanner Lawson seconded the motion. All in favor.
Motion

Carried. All invoices will be sent to Rita for payment.

Erin Smith made a motion to go into Executive Closed Session G S 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel and GS 143-218.11

(a)(3) Attorney/Client Privilege with Sabrina Rockoff; with McGuire Wood & Bissette Law Firm. All in favor.

Rita Jones and Selena Hyde were excused from the meeting. 11:00a.m.

Tanner Lawson made a motion to go back into regular strategic meeting at 12:15 p.m. Robin Fronrath seconded

The motion. All in favor. Motion carried.

Chairwoman, Pattijo made a motion to ask Mary Anne Shea to be the Interim TDA Director through the end of

The fiscal year ends June 30, 2026. Once discussion is made with Mary Anne, the dollar amount will be

Decided. Andy Bhakta seconded this motion. All the board in favor 100%. Motion carried. Pattijo will call Mary

Anne.

Board Discussion:

The TDA Finance officer Cally Elliott then proceeded to go over the budget line by line to see what may be

Trimmed up or added to for the coming year.

There will be no additions to the Christmas Light Show this year, more money spent on marketing the Light

Show. The audit amount will be going up this year per Cally. The only addition for Gabriel Christmas is a sleigh

To be put at the Appalachian Rivers Aquarium for photo purposes.

Erin Smith made a motion that all marketing contracts with vendors have Callys' stamp and at least 3 of the

Board members' signatures. Adrian Litzau seconded the motion. All in favor 100%. Motion carried.

TDA is possibly helping Swain County add bathrooms to the Four Corner area of downtown. Swain County

Be responsible for the cleaning of said bathrooms.

County Manager, Lottie Barker, has been instructed to start conversation with owners of the Airport Property.

Tanner Lawson made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion. All in favor.

Adjourned: 2:00 p.m.

Chairwoman, PattiJo Taylor _____

Andy Bhakta _____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith _____

Tanner Lawson _____

Swain County Tourism Development Authority

Board of Directors

Regular Meeting April 15, 2026

Attendance

Present (Voting): Chairwoman PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Robin Fronrath, Adrian Litzau

Absent (Voting): Janene Lancaster, Tanner Lawson, Erin Smith

Present (Ex-Officio): Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

TDA Staff: Mary Anne Shea, Selena Hyde, Rita Jones

Attendees: Brett Hackshaw (Town of Bryson City), Monica Brown (Chamber Chair), Troy Burns (Singing in the Smokies), Fred Crawford, Rob Hawk (Swain County Agricultural Fair), Sharla Stolfus

Call to Order

Chairwoman PattiJo Taylor called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, followed by a prayer given by Rita Jones.

Changes to

Agenda None.

Public Comment

Brett Hackshaw – Town of Bryson City Streetscape Improvements

Mr. Hackshaw provided an update on the Main Street Streetscape Project, which will run from the Visitor Center to IGA. Construction is scheduled to begin June 1 and continue through at least November 15.

The TDA has allocated \$75,000 in the 2025–2026 budget for benches, trash receptacles, and brick inlays as needed. Mr. Hackshaw requested an additional \$75,000 be included in the 2026–2027 budget for Phase I of the project.

Sponsorship Requests

Swain County Agricultural Fair – Rob Hawk

- Request: \$15,000
- Dates: August 21–22
- Estimated attendance: 2,100 visitors staying in Bryson City
- Includes return of Battle of the Bands

Singing in the Smokies – Troy Burns

Request: \$7,500–\$10,000

Dates: July 2–4

Attendance: ~3,500 per night

Visitors typically stay 3–4 nights

Total event cost: ~\$196,500

SBG Productions Smoky Mountain Train (Presented by Mary Anne Shea)

- Request: \$10,000
- Dates: June 5–6, 2026
- Description: Live music experience aboard the train to Nantahala Gorge featuring six musicians performing throughout the ride
- Company based in Durango, CO

Approval of Meeting Minutes

- Motion to approve March 11, 2026 minutes: **Adrian Litzau**
- Second: **Robin Fronrath**
- Approved unanimously
- Motion to approve Executive Session minutes (G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6)) for March 11, 2026: **Robin Fronrath**

- Second: **Adrian Litzau**
- Approved unanimously

Executive Report – Mary Anne Shea

Mary Anne presented the need to hire a **food photography consultant** to better showcase the growing culinary offerings in Bryson City.

- Proposed vendor: Erin Adams Photography (Asheville)
- Cost: \$46,000
- Scope: One week of photography in early June for immediate marketing use

Motion: Adrian Litzau

Second: Robin Fronrath

Result: Approved unanimously

Budget

FY 2026–2027 budget review scheduled for May 13

Possibility of two meetings in June

Marketing Updates

- Securing pricing for FY 2026–2027 marketing contracts
- Review of Google Analytics
- Christmas Light Show update to be presented at May meeting
- New Saturday vendor market and children’s activities planned at the Aquarium to increase visitation (including bounce houses, face painting, and yard games)

Administrative Updates

- Meetings with NOC and Great Smoky Mountains Railroad; presentation at Regional TDA Executive Directors meeting in Cherokee
- Caboose painting scheduled for completion by May 15 (\$6,500 contract)

- Budget preparation underway
- Succession planning for Executive Director position
- Employee development and leadership planning (Years 1–2)
- Asset organization (photos, video, websites, social content, travel writers)
- Development of Policies & Procedures Manual
- Exploration of Community Grant program similar to neighboring counties

Logo Update:

It was identified that the caboose design included an AI-generated logo instead of the official logo.

Motion: Use official logo with correct colors and adjusted sizing

- Motion: Adrian Litzau
- Second: Robin Fronrath
- Approved unanimously

Financial Report

- Budget review scheduled for May meeting
- Occupancy tax collections update
- Financial reports reviewed

Executive Session

Motion to enter Executive Session under G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel:

- Motion: Adrian Litzau
- Rita Jones and Selena Hyde were excused •

Session began at 1:40 p.m.

Adjournment

Upon return from Executive Session:

Motion to adjourn: Adrian Litzau

Second: Robin Fronrath

- Approved unanimously

Meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Chairwoman, PattiJo

Taylor_____ Andy

Bhakta_____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Tanner Lawson_____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith _____



Swain County Tourism Development Authority

Board of Directors

Regular Meeting - May 13, 2026

Present (Voting): Chairwoman PattiJo Taylor, Andy Bhakta, Robin Fronrath, Adrian Litzau, Janene Lancaster, Tanner Lawson, Erin Smith

Absent (Voting): None

Present (Ex-Officio): Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

Absent (Ex-Officio): None

TDA Staff: Mary Anne Shea, Rita Jones, Selena Hyde **Attendees:** Mike Drinkwater, Monica Brown, Fred Crawford **Public Comment:** Larry Smith, Al Desilets

Chairwoman PattiJo Taylor called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, followed by a prayer led by Tanner Lawson.

Changes to the Agenda None.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Tanner Lawson made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes from April 15, 2026. Robin Fronrath seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Erin Smith made a motion to approve the executive session minutes from April 15, 2026. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Executive Director Report

Mary Anne Shea reviewed the Inter-Local Agreement prepared by Attorney Rockoff for the TDA. Following discussion, the Board agreed to approve the agreement with the following revisions:

Section #2 shall be revised to read:

“The County shall remit to the SCTDA, on a monthly basis, the net occupancy tax collected for the prior month.”

Section #5 shall be revised to read:

“The County, in its role as Finance Officer ensuring compliance with the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act, shall provide the annual audit and corresponding report to the SCTDA as prepared by the auditor selected by the Finance Officer.”

Once revised by the attorney, the agreement will be forwarded to the County Manager for presentation to the Board of Commissioners.

Erin Smith made a motion to approve the Inter-Local Agreement pending the above revisions. Janene Lancaster seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

The Board also revisited discussion from the April meeting regarding spending authority. Janene Lancaster made a motion authorizing the Executive Director to approve expenditures up to \$2,500 in TDA funds. Any expenditure exceeding \$2,500 must receive prior TDA Board approval. Adrian Litzau seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Draft Budget Review – 2026-27

Mary Anne reviewed the draft budget in detail, specifically pointing out detailed spreadsheets for payroll, marketing, and other ancillary budgets. Board members made some suggestions for revisions, and Mary Anne will present a final budget at the June regular meeting for Board approval.

Review of TDA Board Candidates

The Board reviewed the applications for the TDA board.

Financial Report

The Board was reminded of two important upcoming June meetings:

June 10, 2026 – Regular Meeting to finalize the FY 2026–2027 budget

June 24, 2026 – Public Comment Session and final Board vote on the FY 2026–2027 budget

Administration & Committees

- All full-time employees will be enrolled in County insurance coverage by June 15.

Marketing Report Food Photography Project

- Scheduled dates: June 15–19. Selena Hyde will coordinate participating restaurants, food trucks, and breweries.

Google Analytics

- Handouts were distributed and reviewed.

Light Show & Marketing Plan

Due to ongoing budget discussions, the topic was deferred to the June meeting.

Preliminary ideas presented by Mary Anne Shea, Rita Jones, and Selena Hyde included:

Launching pre-sale ticket promotions immediately, and looking at promotional opportunities

Sponsorship Requests

Janene Lancaster made a motion to award \$15,000 to the Swain Agricultural Fair. Robin Fronrath seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Janene Lancaster made a motion to award \$10,000 to Singing in the Smokies. Andy Bhakta seconded the motion. Erin Smith abstained from voting. Motion carried.

Tanner Lawson made a motion to deny funding for the SBG Productions Smoky Mountain Train project. Janene Lancaster seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

Additional Discussion

Chairwoman PattiJo Taylor opened discussion regarding the potential installation of a digital advertising sign. Possible locations within town limits will be explored, along with discussions with the County Commissioners and Town Aldermen regarding property ownership and approvals.

Finance Officer Cally Elliott also noted that, with TDA employees transitioning back under the County umbrella, a decision must be made regarding the annual longevity payment schedule. Historically, longevity pay has been issued with the first paycheck in July.

Public Comment

Larry Smith addressed the Board regarding potential TDA funding assistance for pickleball courts at the Swain County Recreation Park. He noted that pickleball continues to grow in popularity and that many travelers seek destinations offering pickleball facilities.

Adjournment

Tanner Lawson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Robin Fronrath seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Signatures

Chairwoman PattiJo Taylor _____

Andy Bhakta _____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Tanner Lawson _____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith _____

Swain County Tourism Development Authority

Regular Board Meeting Minutes

June 10, 2026

Attendance

Present (Voting Members): PattiJo Taylor, Chairwoman, Robin Fronrath, Adrian Litzau, Tanner Lawson

Absent (Voting Members): Andy Bhakta, Janene Lancaster, Erin Smith

Present (Ex-Officio): Cally Elliott, TDA Finance Officer

Absent (Ex-Officio): None

TDA Staff Present: Selena Hyde, Rita Jones

Guests/Attendees: Mike Drinkwater, Monica Brown, Fred Crawford, Joe Holt

Call to Order

Chairwoman PattiJo Taylor called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited, followed by an opening prayer led by Tanner Lawson.

Agenda Modification

Rita Jones requested that the July TDA Board Meeting be rescheduled from its original date to July 15, 2026.

Motion: Robin Fronrath made a motion to change the July meeting date to July 15, 2026.

Second: Adrian Litzau **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

Approval of Minutes

Motion: Robin Fronrath made a motion to approve the May 13, 2026 meeting minutes.

Second: Tanner Lawson

Vote: Unanimously approved.

Public Comment

Monica Brown, representing the Chamber of Commerce, requested additional funding of \$6,000 for the Chamber's Fourth of July event. The TDA had previously approved \$14,000 in support of the event.

Motion: Tanner Lawson made a motion to provide an additional \$4,000 specifically for bounce houses and children's activities associated with the Fourth of July event.

Second: Adrian Litzau **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

Executive Director's Report

FY 2026–2027 Budget Review

Rita Jones presented the proposed FY 2026–2027 budget, including revisions discussed at the May meeting. She also reviewed a proposed increase in the retirement contribution for full-time employees to 14%.

Motion: Adrian Litzau made a motion to approve a 14% retirement contribution for full-time employees. **Second:** Tanner Lawson

Vote: Unanimously approved.

Robin Fronrath inquired about including funding for a flashing sign for the Christmas Light Show. Rita Jones reported that Swain County owns larger digital signage options that may be available for use during this year's event.

Motion: Adrian Litzau made a motion to approve the proposed FY 2026–2027 budget.

Second: Tanner Lawson **Vote:** Unanimously approved. **Motion carried.**

Board Appointments

The Board reviewed candidates for two upcoming board vacancies for the FY 2026–2027 term.

Motion: Robin Fronrath made a motion to recommend Dena Ensley and Mike Drinkwater to the Swain County Commissioners for appointment to the TDA Board.

Second: Adrian Litzau **Vote:** Unanimously approved.

Marketing Report

Selena Hyde provided a marketing update, including:

Food photography sessions conducted June 15–19.

Review of recent Google Analytics performance metrics.

Ongoing efforts to promote Island Park as a downtown attraction and visitor amenity.

Financial Report

Board members were reminded of the importance of attending the June 24, 2026 meeting, which will include public comment and the final vote on the FY 2026–2027 budget.

Events Report

The Board received updates on the following events:

Stampede in the Smokies was well attended and highly successful.

Riverfront Family Fest at the Appalachian Rivers Aquarium launched in May and continues every Saturday through Labor Day, with strong attendance reported.

Rebranding efforts for the Christmas Light Show are underway.

The **Smoky Mountain Music Train** event was well attended and received positive feedback.

Administrative Report

Employee Longevity Pay

The Board discussed establishing a consistent schedule for annual longevity payments to full-time employees.

Motion: Tanner Lawson made a motion to issue longevity payments annually on the second payroll in July. **Second:** Adrian Litzau

Vote: Unanimously approved.

Interlocal Agreement

Rita Jones reported that the Interlocal Agreement between the Swain County Tourism Development Authority and Swain County has been approved by the Swain County Board of Commissioners.

Airport Property

The Board discussed matters related to airport property. No action was taken.

Grants & Sponsorships

The following grant and sponsorship actions were reported:

Mary Anne Shea approved a \$1,000 Marketing Matching Grant for SBG Productions in recognition of the strong attendance generated by the recent music train event.

A sponsorship request from Kaye McConnell for a drug awareness event was denied because the event did not meet tourism-related funding criteria.

The Great Smoky Mountains Railroad was awarded a \$2,500 sponsorship for the annual Red, White & Boom Fourth of July Festival, a longstanding event supported by the TDA.

Adjournment

Motion: PattiJo Taylor made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Second: Adrian Litzau

Vote: Unanimously approved.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00 p.m.

Signatures

PattiJo Taylor, Chairwoman _____

Andy Bhakta _____

Robin Fronrath _____

Janene Lancaster _____

Tanner Lawson _____

Adrian Litzau _____

Erin Smith _____