

**Town of Blowing Rock  
Tourism Development Authority  
Minutes – October 5, 2010**

The Town of Blowing Rock Tourism Development Authority met on Tuesday, October 5, 2010 at 3:30 p.m. in a regular meeting held at Town Hall. Present were Chairperson Kent Tarbutton, Vice-Chair Lynn Drury, Authority members Dean Bullis, Rob Dyer and Phil Pickett, Ex-officio members Nicole Norman and Scott Hildebran. Executive Director Tracy Brown was also in attendance.

**Call to Order**

Chairperson Kent Tarbutton called the meeting to order and welcomed those in attendance.

**Approval of Minutes – July 6, 2010**

Chairperson Tarbutton entertained the approval of the July 6, 2010 meeting minutes. Motion by Member Pickett and seconded by Vice-Chair Drury to approve the July 6, 2010 meeting minutes as presented. Unanimously approved.

**Financial Report**

Chairperson Tarbutton requested Ex-officio Member Norman provide an update on the financial statement and occupancy tax collections. Ex-Officio Member Norman briefly reviewed the monthly financial statement stating that revenues and expenses were in line with projections for the period. She noted that one-time expenses such as insurance and audit were paid early in the fiscal year.

Ms. Norman also advised that a clerical error had inadvertently left \$24,000 in expenses out of the adopted FY 2010-11 Budget. The Authority discussed various ways to make up the shortfall. It was the consensus to monitor the situation throughout the year and cutback where possible. Also, occupancy tax revenues may help to cover the unbudgeted expense.

Finance Officer Norman then reviewed the FY 2010-11 Occupancy Tax collections fiscal year-to-date through August 2010. She stated that occupancy tax revenues for July and August were up approximately 16.60% (or \$29,457) compared to the same two-month period in 2009. For the month of August 2010, occupancy tax revenue was up 16.43% (or \$12,835) compared to August 2009. (**Attachment #1**)

TDA lodging members stated current year occupancy numbers for their establishments were looking better than in the previous year.

With no further questions/comments, Chairman Tarbutton moved on to the Operations Activity Report.

**Operations Activity Report**

Executive Director Brown briefly highlighted several items from the Operations Activity Report. (**Attachment #2**)

Mr. Brown discussed –

- The Weather Channel will be in-town this weekend as they focus on fall leaf season. Blowing Rock will serve as their hub during their stay. NC Assistant Secretary of Commerce (Tourism, Marketing and Global Branding) Lynn Minges will conduct an interview with the crew.
- Quarterly Key Indicators – telephone inquiries up 3%, Visitor Center walk-ins up 20%, brochures mailings down 18% due to shift in distribution.
- Visitor Center basement experienced sewer backup, will pallet collateral materials and place waste receptacles in restroom stalls.
- Website continues to function well and receives great customer feedback, new emphasis on social media – adding blog element, some tracking issues but will work to resolve.
- Participated in Blue Ridge Parkway 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration at Cumberland Gap, Virginia, Blowing Rock Heritage Days and serve on Blue Ridge Parkway Association.
- Upcoming co-ops/marketing – Oprah Magazine, Better Homes and Garden, and Our State magazine. Blowing Rock is focus of November issue.
- Smith Travel marketing study was excellent. Received many worthwhile recommendations. Will begin to implement in future marketing efforts. We must remember to “listen to the customer”.

Chairperson Tarbutton thanked Mr. Brown for his report.

The Authority then discussed cooperative marketing with the High Country Host. Chair Tarbutton advised that the Host has established a handful of subcommittees to study the future of the organization over the next 60-90 days. Items being reviewed include – collateral, marketing, fulfillment, visitor center, call center, etc. and where does the Host play a future role.

Mr. Brown discussed the potential of the US 321 widening acquiring the TDA Visitor Center building and the possibility of collaboration with the High Country Host as a regional visitor center.

Mr. Hildebran stated that NCDOT acquiring the visitor center property was a strong possibility with a decision coming within 60-90 days. He advised the old Ice House owned by the Town might possibly serve as a relocation for the facility.

The Board briefly discussed the merits of a visitor center as a regional facility or a local facility, with the *regional approach* located on a highway and serving as a welcome center or the *local approach* located in-town and serving as an information center on what is there to do?, and how to lengthen stay.

Mr. Brown and Chair Tarbutton described how the advance in technology was changing the need for visitor centers as mobile phone travel applications for the I-phone and Google are allowing for download of information.

Chair Tarbutton suggested that Authority members spend some time thinking about the issue and be prepared to answer the following questions at our upcoming planning retreat – 1) do we continue to offer a local visitor center, 2) if yes – do we contract out the operation, 3) would the center be in-town or out-of-town and 4) would it be operated seasonally?

### **Downtown Retail Strategy - Update**

Ex-officio Member Hildebran reported that the Downtown Retail Strategy Steering Committee continues to meet monthly to work on elements of the study. Recent results include:

- Domed trashcan lids had been delivered and placed on cans downtown.
- Town Center zoning has been established and additional requirements will be considered over time.
- Downtown Parking Ratios have been amended and lessened.
- An Electronic Citation Unit has been purchased for downtown parking enforcement and a courtesy ticket program has been implemented.
- New downtown planters have been purchased and placed.
- New Dog Waste Receptacles have been purchased and placed throughout downtown.
- The Town has approved a permit for placement of cellular whip antenna boosters which should eventually aid cellular coverage in town.

### **Planning Retreat**

It was the consensus of the Authority to schedule their Annual TDA Planning Retreat on Monday, November 22, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. at The Best Cellar. Chair Tarbutton advised members to plan on 3-hours for the meeting.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business, motion by Member Bullis and seconded by Member Dyer to adjourn the meeting. Motion unanimously approved. Chairperson Tarbutton adjourned the meeting at 4:35 p.m.

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Kent Tarbutton, Chairperson

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Scott E. Hildebran, Secretary

### **Attachments**

**#1 - Financial Report**

**#2 - Operations Report**