



NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAIN TOWNS OF CASHIERS,
CHEROKEE, DILLSBORO AND SYLVA

To: Full TDA Board

From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Director *Nick*

Date: February 16, 2018

Subject: Updates for TDA Board Meeting

Reminder – February Board Orientation meeting

Please be reminded of our Board Orientation session prior to our regular February meeting. The orientation session, conducted by Chris Cavanaugh, will begin promptly at 11:30 a.m. and last an hour. Following the session will be lunch, then our 1 p.m. regular meeting.

Visitor Guide

A significant portion of my efforts have been dedicated to the 2018-19 Visitor Guide and ensuring everything is up-to-date and that we use the best photography/content to drive visitation. Our partners, Pineapple and RawleMurdy, have also been involved in ensuring the content fits our brand and messaging well. The largest change is combining the towns pages (six pages of text/photos about each town) with the attractions pages to create a more cohesive, integrated guide rather than having them stand apart. Everything is proceeding according to schedule; as soon as I have a proof of the full guide, I will send to Marketing Committee for review. We should have the new guides in hand at the beginning of April.

Map Project

- The new Sylva map is printed and in the process of being distributed. I will provide copies of the map at our board meeting. I am pleased with the end result and think it will help tourists with wayfinding. We have padded copies for hotels and the Visitor Center and tri-fold copies that we will stock kiosks with.
- Our re-designed hiking and waterfall map has also been printed and is now available at the Visitor Centers.
- We received an early draft of the Cashiers Area Attractions and Waterfall map and it looks terrific. I worked with the map committee for that area (Ann Self, Kathy Korb and Stephanie Edwards) to provide feedback to the mapmaker. I worked to develop directions to area attractions and have supplied to Stephanie Edwards for her review and feedback. If all goes according to schedule, that project should be complete early April and once sent to the printer, we should have back in two weeks, just in time for the influx of tourists. We will place these maps in the new literature boxes around Cashiers that the JCTDA and Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center purchased.

Capital Projects for FY 17-18

In the remaining four months of this fiscal year I do not expect the board to have ample time to discuss capital projects, approve a capital projects plan, identify and fund a capital project. With that in mind, and in discussion with Executive Committee, we have reached the unanimous consensus to move \$15,000 to Advertising and PR which both generate a strong return on investment. With the full board's approval, I will work with those agencies to program those funds.

2018-19 Budget

I authored an early 2018-19 draft budget and shared with our partners (Pineapple and RawleMurdy) and incorporated their feedback, and subsequently shared with the Executive Committee at our Feb. 14 meeting. Our partner agencies need early guidance so they can begin developing their plans. I will go over the draft budget in full detail at our April meeting; we pass the budget at our May 16 meeting. While I am optimistic and see positive growth in our future, I am budgeting conservatively and accounting for construction that will take some of our room supply offline during remodeling.

Grant workshops

To assist grant applicants with changes to our grant program, I held a Feb. 16 workshop at my office in Sylva and will hold a Feb. 23 workshop at the Cashiers Area Chamber. In addition to issuing a press release about the availability of grants, I also emailed all applicants from last year advising them of the changes we made to the application and encouraged them to attend the workshop.

Board Seat Change

I received a request from Board Member Mark Jones to hand over his board seat to High Hampton Resort's new General Manager Tom Garcia. I have spoken with both involved; I do believe we will greatly benefit from Mr. Garcia serving on our board. The process for this change would require Mr. Jones resigning his seat and us making the recommendation to Commissioners for Mr. Garcia to fill his unexpired term. We could send this request along with one to appoint Gareth Daley's vacant seat to Commissioners for their March 5 meeting.

Workforce meeting

On March 1, the JCTDA is partnering with the Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce to hold a workforce development summit at High Hampton Resort. During the meeting, we will discuss challenges in recruitment and retention specific to the plateau. Attending the meeting are employers in the hospitality and tourism industry; WCU and SCC representatives in small business and workforce development, Rural and Metropolitan Planning Organization representatives, NC Works representatives (formerly employment security commission), Jackson County leadership, Economic Development and many others. I worked with Stephanie Edwards in setting up the meeting, coordinating invitations, and creating the meeting's agenda; the JCTDA will provide lunch following the forum. The meeting should bring everyone together to one table to collaboratively discuss solutions to help with the issues we face in Cashiers.

Visitor Center visits

The Executive Committee at their Feb. 14 meeting discussed the decline in foot traffic and phone calls that our Visitor Centers have experienced in recent years. It is the Executive Committee's unanimous recommendation to ask the full board to move forward with a study (through Magellan Strategy Group) of our Visitor Centers and what can be done to increase visits and enhance the visitor experience for those stopping in. The cost of the study is \$3,000 and funds are available this fiscal year. The expected outcome is recommendations for driving more traffic to those centers along with any enhancements we can make inside. The post-study actions and implementation should not only benefit our visitors, but also the Chambers' members who have materials inside the Visitor Centers often picked up by tourists.

Cashiers Visitor Center signage

I have been working with the NCDOT on signage for the Cashiers Area Chamber and Visitor Center which currently lacks any roadside signage.

The Chamber has a billboard they contracted in Sapphire and would like the TDA to share costs on; I am of the opinion that the NCDOT signage available for free would be a good place to start rather than an ongoing monthly cost to the TDA, which also sets a precedent for similar signage support in Sylva. The NCDOT prepared a map and schematics of three sign installations directing visitors to the Visitor Center. I have shared this with Stephanie Edwards who is seeking the Cashiers Planning Council to approve before proceeding.

Three Billboards

To capitalize on the success of *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, I asked Pineapple to create a longer form blog post that serves as an 'Insider's Guide' and a 'Behind the Scenes' piece about filming. We changed out a slated blog post on Spring Break travel for the *Three Billboards* feature. Since it launched ten days ago, it's had over 2,200 unique views and people on average spend 6m27s on that page (web site average is 1m25s). The piece, which encourages travel to Jackson County, is located online: <https://www.discoverjacksonnc.com/insiders-guide-to-ebbing-and-the-filming-of-three-billboards/>. I did some photography for the piece, utilized user-generated content and set Pineapple up to interview those whose businesses were used in the film. I am pleased with how it turned out.

Agency meetings

In late January, I traveled to Atlanta and Charleston for meetings with Pineapple PR and RawleMurdy where we held day-long strategy sessions for our marketing program this year. Both meetings were incredibly productive and having in-person meetings proved valuable.

Marketing Committee

The Marketing Advisory Committee will meet Tuesday, Feb. 20 (the day prior to our full board meeting) to review planning drafts to guide the creation of our FY 18-19 marketing and public relations plans.

Website and VisitNC database refresh

Our website now has more information than ever before and is the most comprehensive trip planning tool for those looking to travel to Jackson County. Over the last two months, through both my efforts and contract labor, lodging and dining listings have been updated with added information and photos. This will greatly assist the traveler trying to decide where to stay or eat. The work was substantial to get to this point, but really distinguishes our site from other sites that simply list restaurant or accommodation names, addresses and phone numbers. Visitors make decisions more often based on visuals than black type.

As part of the state tourism office's website re-design, we were required to eliminate most of our dining and attraction listings from their database that a tourist would not specifically drive an hour to eat at or visit. The discussion centers around what is a motivator of travel vs. a satisfier of travel. As the state tourism office explained to me, it has to be an attraction or restaurant that is the reason for the trip, not something to do or a nice place to eat while already here.

I relied on specifications and guidance from the state office as to which listings should remain; those remaining listings I am working with Pineapple PR on to update descriptions and editorial copy to support their presence as a 'signature' listing for our area. Strong editorial copy is required before they approve the remaining listings being live on their new website. While we (and every other destination statewide) will have significantly fewer listings, they will get considerably more attention, the state has assured me. In the accommodations section of VisitNC, they have eliminated all by-owner listings, which was the majority of our listings there. In all categories – dining, attractions and lodging, they now allow for the upload of up to 10 photos per listing; I have been working to compile these and this is a time-consuming process, but ultimately should enhance the potential to bring a visitor here.

Conferences/Travel

To remind the board of upcoming networking and conferences on the Director's Calendar this fiscal year:

- VisitNC365, Winston Salem, March 3-6
- STS Connections, Myrtle Beach, April 23-25
- STS Marketing College, Dahlonega, Ga., June 24-29

Other Director engagement:

- Attended Cashiers Area Chamber Mountain Biking meeting
- Met with Appalachian Regional Commission's Community Development Planner for the Western Region
- Coordinated the State Director of Outdoor Recreation Industry to attend a March 7 meeting with the MountainWest partnership which represents economic developers from the seven western counties. The meeting is in Sylva.