



MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority

Board of Directors Meeting

February 21, 2018 (Wednesday), 1:00 p.m.

Cordelia Camp Building, Room 143, WCU

Cullowhee, NC 28723

Call to order/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 1:10 p.m.

Members in attendance: Executive Director Nick Breedlove, Board President Vick Patel, Laura Bowers, Dale Collins, Stephanie Edwards, Mark Jones, Kathy Korb, Ron Mau, Megan Orr, Julie Spiro, Bob Williams

Members absent: Ann Self

Others in attendance: Chris Cavanaugh, Magellan Strategy Group; Heather Baker, Attorney; Joyce Pope, Debbie Coffey (minutes).

Public Comment - none

Approval of Agenda

MOTION: Dale Collins made a motion to approve the agenda; Mark Jones seconded. Motion carried.

Recognize Vice Chair and Secretary

Kathy Korb and Laura Bowers were recognized. They had no reports at this time.

Review and approval of January Minutes

The board reviewed the minutes of the January 24, 2018 TDA meeting.

MOTION: Bob Williams moved to approve the January minutes. Stephanie Edwards seconded. Motion carried.

Review and approval of January Financial Report

Executive Director Breedlove presented the Financial Report for January 2018. January room occupancy tax collections totaled \$55,899.08 with \$1,300 collected for penalties. The YTD collection total is \$705,336.21, or 65.14% of budget. The Airbnb total was \$3,159.61.

119 units reported for December rentals. Collections were down 0.09% from the same period in 2017. The total increase for the fiscal year is 4.11%, which is on track compared to 2016. The cash balance on December 31, 2017 was \$267,090.02. December expenses were \$65,135.80. YTD expenses totaled \$615,453.91 with encumbrances of \$11,264.23, for a combined total of \$626,718.14, or 54.27% of budget.

MOTION: Mark Jones made a motion to approve the financial report as presented. Megan Orr seconded. Motion carried.

Appoint Ann Self to Vacancy on Marketing Committee

Ann Self has been appointed to the Marketing Committee. The committee is reviewing FY 18-19 marketing and public relations plans.

Appointment to Gareth Daley's Seat Vacancy

Since Gareth Daley has left the TDA board, potential candidates are being considered for the open seat. Executive Director Breedlove will present recommendations for that position at the next meeting.

Requested Appointment change – Board Member Mark Jones

Mark Jones officially relinquished his chair effective March 5, 2018, prior to the Commissioners meeting. Jones requested that his seat be ceded to Tom Garcia, General Manager of High Hampton Resort. Jones feels Garcia will be an excellent addition to the board with his extensive experience in the hospitality industry. Jones added that Garcia would be an important contributor to the board, particularly as relates to the southern end of the county. Jones will attend the first few meetings with Garcia. Requests to fill the seats vacated by Daley and Jones are being submitted to Commissioners.

Study on Visitor Center declines

Executive Director Breedlove reported that the Executive Board met last week to discuss Cashiers and Sylva visitor center declines in both on-site visits and phone calls. The unanimous recommendation of the Board was to proceed with a study on how to increase traffic to those centers, which will benefit the centers, the TDA and the visitors. Magellan Strategy Group has been asked to present a proposal to do the study. Magellan Strategy Group's Chris Cavanaugh distributed a proposal to the board with a scope of work to include:

- Identifying local, regional, and national factors influencing visitor center traffic in Jackson County
- Surveying other regional centers about their level of visitation
- Researching national trends in visitor center experiences, and how DMOs are stimulating traffic
- Identifying ways of enhancing visitor center traffic and the visitor experience
- Recommending action items that the TDA and the two Chambers of Commerce should pursue to stimulate visitor center traffic and enhance the visitor experience
- Action items will be categorized as a quick win, short-term tactic, or long-term strategy

The project is based on a schedule of approximately 6 weeks at a proposed fee of \$3,000. Magellan Strategy Group has the benefit of offering the TDA a perspective based on experience with many other visitor centers, and with national averages and trends. A number of other locales have successfully implemented new strategies to either bring in new traffic or invent new experiences.

A question was asked if website visits will be considered. Cavanaugh advised that website visits are generally driven by separate factors and are addressed by social media strategies. While TDA website traffic is up, Chamber website visits are a bit different in scope than the TDA website, Breedlove said. Edwards suggested that the TDA website and Chamber websites don't coordinate as well as they perhaps could, since the TDA site does not seem to encourage or link to chamber visits. Edwards added that she is excited about the purchase of the new displays and getting literature out into the area.

Edwards questioned performance of the TDA's SEO and optimization for promoting the Visitor Centers. Breedlove noted that the website is now two years old and advised that he will discuss concerns about SEO opportunities with Edwards.

Further discussion suggested tapping the talent already present on the board for information, as well as using Magellan Strategy Group, to increase the usefulness of a study that addresses the specifics of the local chambers, their properties, local trends, etc. Breedlove pointed out that the visitor centers are the second largest expense for the TDA, which adds to the need to proactively address the declines.

MOTION: Mark Jones made a motion to proceed with the study. Laura Bowers seconded. Motion passed.

Budget transfer from Capital to Advertising, PR

For the remainder of this fiscal year there is not enough time to create, publicize and implement a new policy for capital projects. Since \$15,000 had been allocated for capital projects, two options were presented for those funds: (1) move \$15,000 to advertising for paid social media and PR work to generate a strong return on investment; or (2) roll the money back into the fund balance to soften the impact of High Hampton Resort's closure for renovations. The board discussed the fact that the TDA does have contingency monies set aside for market softening periods. Additionally, when High Hampton Resort comes back on line, marketing should be strengthened due to the resort almost doubling the number of rooms and continuing to make additions to activity offerings. Williams suggested that everyone, including High Hampton, would benefit from an advertising program. Cavanaugh was asked about market forecasts, responding that forecasts are for slight growth, but that pricing is keeping travel down. A suggestion was made to allocate some funds for marketing, but that \$15,000 may be too much.

MOTION: Megan Orr made a motion that \$10,000 be moved to advertising for FY 18-19 and \$5,000 be moved back into fund balance for FY 19-20. Williams seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Authorize Advertising Commitments for FY 18-19

At the VisitNC conference, co-op programs are presented at a 48-80% discount, and the TDA has taken advantage of these programs in the past. Board consensus was that Rawle Murdy should be allowed to make commitments at the upcoming conference.

MOTION: Orr made a motion to allow Rawle Murdy to make purchases; Collins seconded. Motion passed.

Jackson County Chamber Director's report

Spiro provided the board with a printed report and exhibited several souvenir items the Chamber will sell. Based on requests from visitors, the Chamber will offer for sale products that do not compete with items sold by Chamber members. Items include "GSM" stickers, apple butter, and other small items ranging from \$1.99 - \$12.99. Additionally, a line of John Muir products is upcoming, highlighting the Muir quote "The mountains are calling and I must go". For every John Muir product sold, a portion of proceeds will go to support removal of trash from waterways. Other products sold by the Chamber will also support local environmental efforts.

As a part of upgrades to the Chamber, a smart TV is coming in next week that will show promotional videos in the center, with categorized photographs in rotation. (All of the recent upgrades to the Jackson County Visitor Center were performed at the Center's expense.) Spiro congratulated Dillsboro Chocolate Factory for winning the recent cook-off in Cashiers, and announced several new businesses that are coming: Nantahala Brewing and The White Moon Café in Sylva; Lovely Lady Boutique in Dillsboro; and a new restaurant coming to Dillsboro in late May. Baxley's Chocolates is moving and expanding, and will reopen the first of March. Hook, Line and Sinker is upcoming and is being promoted.

Cashiers Area Chamber Director's report

Cashiers Area Chamber Director Stephanie Edwards presented highlights of her report:

- Improvements are underway (painting, pressure washing, hanging the signage, NCDOT signage) at the Chamber's expense
- The Outhouse Races had lots of participation and media coverage. The advance promotion helped greatly in the success of this event.
- Whiteside Brewery is opening in Cashiers in May, offering a restaurant and brewery. A Chamber event will take place there June 28.
- Workforce Development Roundtable hosted by High Hampton Resort will take place March 1.
- Brunch bill hearings are coming up on March 19 in Sylva and April 16 in Southern Jackson County. The Chamber will attend these hearings to promote post-wedding brunch opportunities.
- Commissioned Mau was recognized for his work to get the Horsepasture River Wastewater Treatment Plant approved. Increased water allocation will greatly improve workforce housing and business growth.
- Cashiers area waterfall and attractions map is coming soon.

Executive Director's Report

Executive Director Breedlove participated in a 4-hour marketing committee meeting yesterday and expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the committee. Breedlove gave an overview of the budget for the coming fiscal year. January hotel performance was strong, especially versus last year, and the first week of February was superior to all surrounding counties. Fund reserves currently stand above the goal of 4 months of operating cost. Breedlove proposed utilizing any fund balance above that threshold to balance this FY budget, including the anticipated loss of income during High Hampton Resort's closure for renovations. The board consensus was that this plan is appropriate.

Other updates:

- Visitor Guide: a proof is coming on March 9 and will be sent to Chamber Directors and the Marketing Committee. Feedback is needed by March 13 in order to go to press on March 15.
- Map Project: the Sylva map is now complete and will be in hand tomorrow. It be distributed to the two chambers, who will cross-promote both destinations. A redesigned waterfall map will be in that delivery also.
- Workforce meeting: on March 1 JCTDA is partnering with the Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce to hold a workforce development summit. About 30 stakeholders will be in attendance, in addition to county leaders, SCC representatives, and more. The meeting offers an opportunity to bring stakeholders together to collaboratively discuss solutions for issues they face in Cashiers.
- Website and VisitNC database refresh: the TDA website now has more information than ever before, offering a comprehensive trip planning tool to those looking to travel to Jackson County. Breedlove has been working extensively with the state tourism office on updates to the VisitNC site, striving to offer as much information on Jackson County as the site specifications will allow.

Announcements

Dale Collins announced a Fly Fishing Film Festival taking place on Saturday, February 24, at Quin Theaters at 7:00 pm.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:04pm.

Reminder: next meeting is Wednesday, March 21, 2018 at 1:00 pm at the WCU Cordelia Camp Building.

Laura Bowers, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: March 28, 2018