



MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority

Board of Directors Meeting

May 16, 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 1:00 p.m.

- **Members in attendance:** Executive Director Nick Breedlove; Chairman Vick Patel; Secretary Laura Bowers; Board Members Megan Orr, Bob Williams, Ann Self, Dale Collins, Stephanie Edwards (arriving after roll call), Julie Spiro, Ron Mau, and Andrew Harlfinger; Finance Officer Darlene Fox (arriving after roll call)
- **Members absent:** Vice Chairman Kathy Korb, Tom Garcia
- **Others in attendance:** Heather Baker, County Attorney; Debbie Coffey, Minutes Clerk
- Representing Pineapple PR: Haley Barton, Melissa Webb, Deborah Stone
- Representing Magellan Strategy Group: Chris Cavanaugh
- Representing Rawle Murdy: Jeff Webster, Susannah Runkle, Katherine Scott, Katie Prechter, John Kautz

Approval of Agenda

MOTION: Ann Self moved to approve the agenda; Megan Orr seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment – none

Recognize Vice-Chairman and Secretary

Chairman Patel recognized Secretary Laura Bowers who had no comments at this time.

Review and Approval of April Minutes

Minutes of the April 18, 2018, TDA meeting were emailed prior to the meeting for review.

MOTION: Bob Williams moved to approve the April minutes. Ann Self seconded. Motion carried.

Review and Approval of April Financial Report

The April Financial Report was presented by Mr. Breedlove. Highlights include April Occupancy Tax collections of \$43,976.59, penalties of \$140.00, and YTD collection totals of \$819,265.13, which is 75.86% of the budget.

Collections were up 8.14% from the same period in 2017, and up 8.68% for the fiscal year. Airbnb collections totaled \$6,665.78.

The April cash balance was \$68,422.74 with investments totaling \$400,000.00. April expenses were \$98,917.52 with YTD expenses totaling \$831,464.46. Encumbrances of \$4,895.10 make a combined total of \$936,359.56, equaling 80.39% of the budget. 107 Accounts reported rentals for March.

MOTION: Megan Orr moved to approve the financial report as presented. Ann Self seconded. Motion carried.

Presentation on Visitor Centers – Magellan Strategy Group

Chris Cavanaugh presented the findings of the report on the declining use of the Jackson County Visitor Centers. The study was an assessment of conditions in the local environment as well as national trends, looking at what has been done to improve the experience of visitor centers' guests, and additional action steps that could be taken. Findings included:

- Nationally, most visitor centers are reporting a decline in use. Potential reasons for the national decline include a shift in travel planning due to improved web sites and smart phone use.

- Locally, research from DOT traffic counts were inconclusive as affecting Jackson County Visitor Centers' use, but the correlation between the tremendous growth in Airbnb and short-term rentals and the decline in visitor centers use may be made.
- Both visitor centers serve as Chambers of Commerce offices, provide important services to their members and visitors, as well as serve as the "front porch" of their communities.
- Improved signage in Cashiers and the partnership with the EBCI in Sylva were noted as positive improvements.

Nine strategies recommended for overcoming the decline include:

- Developing strategic objectives for the visitor centers.
- Rethinking the role and expectations of the visitor centers.
- Creating a social media product or brand to achieve "Instagram-ability" at the visitor centers.
- Growing local referrals and awareness of the visitor centers.
- Enhancing signage for the visitor centers.
- Identifying and growing potential partnerships for the visitor centers.
- Going very high tech to utilize technology for the visitor centers
- Listing the visitor centers as area attractions on the TDA website.
- Implementing a mobile solution to augment the brick and mortar location.

Mr. Breedlove stated the board would give further discussion to implementation ideas at a future work session.

Public Relations Plan FY 18-19 – Pineapple PR

Deborah Stone, Haley Barton, and Melissa Webb gave a brief review of the events that shaped the 2017-2018 year. The Solar Eclipse, *Three Billboards*, and leveraging the natural tourism assets have provided an almost 10-million-dollar publicity value from July 2017 until April 2018. Each year has netted an approximate two million dollars in growth. The 2018-2019 Public Relations Plan will include:

- Using research data for a more specific and targeted outreach
- Updated messaging
- Targeting the Charlotte and Florida audience
- Consolidating to one FAM trip per year
- Increasing individual media visits
- Engaging and hosting more social media influencers
- Creating one blog post per month

Media messaging for 2018-2019 will include:

- Upcoming travel trends such as travel off the beaten path, outdoor adventure, solo travel, and pet-friendly travel
- Focus on attractions and activities that were identified in the visitor's center research such as outdoor recreation, history, and arts and culture
- Specific topics of interest such as off-season travel, women's fly fishing, a Jackson County travel bucket list, and travel on the Blue Ridge Parkway

Motion: *Dale Collins moved to approve the Pineapple PR plan. Andrew Halfinger seconded. Motion carried.*

Advertising Plan for FY 18-19 – Rawle Murdy

John Kautz gave an overview of the proposed Advertising Plan for 2018-2019. The primary targeted market is women 35 years of age and older, with a second targeted audience of men in the 25-to-44-year age range. Another targeted demographic is adults 55 years of age and older who own second homes. Targeted geographic areas include Charlotte, Atlanta, Nashville, Raleigh-Durham, Florida (the Orlando, Jacksonville, and Columbia areas,) and Birmingham. Core components of the plan include:

- Paid advertising
- Co-op programs through VisitNC
- Email campaigns
- Digital marketing

- Social media marketing
- Website design and strategy

Paid media advertising will evaluate a variety of print and digital media to produce quality leads and inquiries for visits. These ads can be hyper-targeted using analytics gained from research. Website enhancements will focus on mobile device usage and integrating user-generated galleries throughout the website. The plan will build on the Play On brand awareness to create very specific experiences to reach targeted markets, such as fly fishing or cuisine.

Mr. Breedlove asked the board to allow him authorization to program contingency funds for opportunistic ad buys that may arise from time to time; this has been done previously, but Breedlove wanted to make the new board aware of the procedure and get approval for such.

Motion: *Megan moved to approve the advertising plan for 2018-2019 and to authorize the director to program contingency funds into the advertising budget. Dale Collins seconded. Motion carried.*

Proposed Budget FY 18-19

Darlene Fox provided a printed copy of the proposed 2018-2019 Budget. Mr. Breedlove noted that Tom Garcia was not in attendance today due to on-site meetings at High Hampton Resort. Mr. Garcia asked Mr. Breedlove to share that the Resort will remain open for the 2019 calendar year, and possibly for 2020. Additional details on the new plan will be available soon. This has redirected some funds back into the budget due to that facility remaining open. The budget total is based on a 4% occupancy tax rate, and includes a 2% increase in payroll as recommended in the county's plan, expenditures of \$87,160 for public relations, \$616,900 for advertising, and \$173,590 for visitor center operations. Total projected revenues are \$1,165,005. A copy of the budget will be available for review prior to the public hearing to be held at this location at the June 20, 2018, Board Meeting.

Strategic Planning RFP

A copy of the Request for Proposals (RFP) for Strategic Plan/Tourism Master Plan and Destination Research was provided to board members prior to the meeting. Ann Self, on behalf of the Executive Committee, stated the need for a plan, noting that the TDA has accomplished much in the five years of its existence. The Executive Committee proposes the allocation of approximately 3% of the budget for the plan, and requests that the RFP be distributed throughout the southeast to reach as many firms as possible. The RFP includes five individual services:

- Strategic planning
- Visitor profile research
- Gap analysis and research
- Seasonal analysis
- Estimate of annual visitation

Firms will be allowed to bid on individual services and may collaborate on different services for cost savings purposes. RFPs will be reviewed at the June Executive Committee meeting, interviews will be conducted in July, and a proposal submitted at the July Full Board meeting for approval in August.

Motion: *The Executive Committee moved that the Jackson County Tourism Authority engage in the Strategic Plan Process to begin with the proposed RFP. Dale Collins seconded. Motion carried.*

Approval of annual contracts

Mr. Breedlove noted minor changes to the annual contracts from the previous fiscal year as follows:

- Jackson County Chamber of Commerce: A slight increase in the utilities for the Dillsboro office.
- Both Chambers may mail new Sylva/Cashiers maps using TDA-provided postage
- Ashley Evans (Event Photography): This will provide photography for six festivals
- Smoky Mountain News (Visitor Guide Production): No changes.
- Pineapple PR: The contract will increase by three hours per month.
- Rawle Murdy: Increase in retainer, amounts were updated, with no changes in terms.

Motion: *Ann Self moved to approve the annual contracts. Megan Orr seconded. Motion carried.*

Directors' Reports

Jackson County Chamber: Julie Spiro provided the board with a written report prior to the meeting which included the following highlights:

- Ms. Spiro encouraged everyone to attend the upcoming SCC Marketing Summit.
- A fall event at the Sylva Visitor Center including the new pet-friendly porch will be announced soon.
- *WNC Magazine* and *Our State* are featuring Sylva in articles centered on fishing in upcoming issues.
- Concerts on the Creek series will begin on May 25th and the Sylva Rotary will sponsor a field of flags to be displayed at the historic Court House to begin on Memorial Day.

Upcoming events include:

- May 18th: Tuck Trout Trot, 8:30, Jackson County Greenway
- May 19th: Hook, Line and Drinker Festival, 12:30 pm - 9:30 pm, Bridge Park
- May 24th: Grand Opening and STIR Event, Foragers Canteen, Dillsboro

Cashiers Area Chamber: Stephanie Edwards provided the following highlights from the Cashiers Chamber:

- The new Cashier's Area Visitors Guide will be available for distribution tomorrow.
- Seven new literature displays will be strategically around Cashiers offering visitor's information.
- Planning is underway for the Tour de Cashiers for the new date in September.
- The Rotary Arts and Crafts Show will be Memorial Day weekend along with the start of Groovin' On the Green.

Executive Director: Mr. Breedlove provided the board with a written report prior to the meeting which included the following highlights:

- The STR report showed a 46% increase in revenue for last week.
- The Cashiers map project is about 90% complete.
- The budget packets included statistical information from Rawle Murdy and Pineapple PR highlighting last year's tourism accomplishments.
- The July issue of *Our State Magazine* will focus on Jackson County.
- Mr. Breedlove will present at the NCDOT Conference on July 31 to highlight the successful planning process prior to the 2017 Solar Eclipse.
- The TDA and Jackson County Economic Development Directors partnered to host a WCU Leadership Conference on Monday to showcase the importance of tourism to future leaders of WCU.
- Approximately \$14,000 will be rolled into savings at the end of the fiscal year and may be used for the RFP if additional funds are needed.
- Mr. Breedlove recommended the TDA start a quarterly newsletter for industry news that would share information and advertising campaigns and would showcase TDA accomplishments.

Motion: *Megan Orr moved that a newsletter be produced quarterly. Bob Williams seconded. Motion carried.*

Mr. Breedlove ended his report with a slide presentation showing how invested the integrated marketing partners are in promoting tourism in Jackson County through regular communication with his office.

Announcements/Adjournment

Mr. Breedlove announced that the June meeting will be located at the Jackson County Public Library. Attorney Baker recommended a motion be made to issue a notice of the change in location for the Budget Hearing.

Motion: *Ann Self moved to issue a notice that the Budget Hearing location will be changed to the Jackson County Public Library. Megan Orr seconded. Motion carried.*

Dale Collins moved to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Next Meeting

The June 20, 2018, TDA Full Board Meeting will be held at the Jackson County Public Library Conference Room, located at 310 Keener Street. Please allow extra time for parking.

Laura Bowers, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: June 20, 2018