



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

MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority Board of Directors Meeting

September 18, 2019 (Wednesday), 1:00 p.m.

Holt Library Conference Room 112, SCC

447 College Drive, Sylva, NC 28779

Call to Order/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m.

- **Members in attendance:** Executive Director Nick Breedlove; Ann Self, Chair; Kathy Korb, Secretary; Board Members Bob Williams, Megan Orr, Dale Collins, Brad Herman, Andrew Harlfinger (arriving after roll call), Jay Grissom, Ron Mau, Darlene Fox, Julie Donaldson, and Eli Ramirez for Stephanie Edwards
- **Members absent:** Vice-Chair Laura Bowers
- **Others in attendance:** Caleb Sullivan, TDA Sales and Marketing Manager; Rich Price, Jackson County Economic Development Director; Debbie Coffey, Minutes Clerk

Approval of Agenda

A copy of the agenda, amended to approve the Closed Session Minutes in November, was provided prior to the meeting.

MOTION: Megan Orr moved to approve the amended agenda; Dale Collins seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment

Rich Price reminded the Board of the upcoming Mountain West Economic Development Partnership meeting November 6th, at Southwestern Community College, beginning at 9:30 a.m. The meeting will have a focus on tourism and will include tourism and destination leaders from the seven western-most counties.

Recognition of Vice-Chairman and Secretary

Secretary Korb had no comment at this time.

Review and Approval of Minutes

Minutes of the July 31, 2019 Specially Called Meeting and the August 21 Meeting were emailed prior to the meeting for review.

MOTION: Dale Collins moved to approve the July 31 Specially Called Meeting and August 21 Meeting minutes; Bob Williams seconded. Motion carried.

Review and Approval of August 31, 2019 Financial Report

Darlene Fox presented the August Financial Report which was emailed prior to the meeting. August highlights include Occupancy Tax collections of \$165,901.88, penalties of \$155.47, and YTD collection totals of \$288,318.27, which is 28.84% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$18,227.95. Collections were down 13.39% from the same period in 2018, and down 13.57% for the fiscal year. 216 accounts reported rentals for July. The August 31 cash balance was \$174,054.34 with investments totaling \$400,000. August expenses were \$43,451.80 with YTD expenses totaling \$141,000.42. Encumbrances of \$14,889.99 make a combined total of \$155,890.41, equaling 12.49% of the budget.

MOTION: Bob Williams moved to approve the financial reports as presented; Megan Orr seconded. Motion carried.

Appointment to Executive Board

Appreciation was extended to Laura Bowers for her service on this board. She will be relocating to Idaho due to a promotion within her organization. Dale Collins has agreed to fill her position on the Executive Board.

MOTION: Kathy Korb moved to appoint Dale Collins to the Executive Board; Bob Williams seconded. Motion carried.

HR Handbook Addition

Director Breedlove gave a brief overview of the Paid Parental Leave Policy discussed in the August meeting. This policy allows for up to four weeks per year of paid parental leave following the birth or placement of a child within the employee's home. This time must be used within the first three months following the birth or placement. These weeks may be consecutive or split during this three-month time frame.

As an additional staff benefit, the board recommends establishing a voluntary 401(k) for employees. Participation would be strictly discretionary by the employee and at no additional cost the TDA.

MOTION: Kathy Korb moved to approve the voluntary 401(k); Bob Williams seconded. Motion carried.

Request from Town of Sylva - Letter of Support for Bridge Park Green Infrastructure Project

The Sylva Board of Commissioners requested a letter of support for improvements to the Scotts Creek Watershed. This is a collaborative effort between the Department of Public Works and American Rivers, funded through the Environmental Enhancement Grant Program under the Department of Justice. Improvements will include trail ways along the river, solar panels, a fishing area, and adding paving to one of the parking lots.

MOTION: Dale Collins moved to approve a letter of support for the Bridge Park Green Infrastructure Project; Megan Orr seconded. Motion carried.

Occupancy Tax Discussion

The Executive Committee began discussions of occupancy tax in December 2018. The High Hampton closure was expected to be through Spring 2020 at that time. Based on that information the decision was made among the board and Finance Officer to spend down fund balance to offset the tax loss. With the High Hampton closure extended through Spring 2021, the revenue shortfall may reach a level that fund balance cannot support good cashflow.

Cash balance is at the lowest in June and July due to fiscal year end. Mr. Breedlove provided a timeline showing consideration of changes to the occupancy tax. The Executive Board would develop a Fund Balance Policy in conjunction with any occupancy tax adjustment recommendations during their October and November meetings. This plan would be presented to the full board in November. Any requests for tax adjustments would be brought to County Commissioners at the beginning of 2020.

MOTION: Megan Orr moved to follow the recommended timeline; Andrew Harlfinger seconded. Motion carried.

Directors' Reports

Jackson County Chamber Director's Report: Highlights of the Jackson County Chamber report include:

- By the numbers: 1592 visitors were served in the Dillsboro and Sylva Visitor Centers, 793 direct inquiries were fulfilled, 146 phone calls were answered, 49 businesses were restocked, and 3 ribbon cuttings were held in August.
- Marketing of the 2020 publications will continue through October.
- A new look for the 2020 Concerts on the Creek will be rolled out soon and plans for the 2020 Hook, Line and Drinker Festival are well underway with the band booked and an exciting new collaboration to assist with sustaining the festival to be announced in the near future.
- August saw new WCU students and parents welcomed with popcorn, Pepsi, water, and plenty of local information to prepare them for the next four years.
- Mrs. Donaldson encouraged everyone who was not a member to join the Chamber. Both Chambers are 501(c)6 organizations that work very hard to represent area businesses.

Cashiers Area Chamber: Highlights of the Cashiers Area Chamber report that was emailed prior to the meeting include:

- The 27th Annual Tour de Cashiers Mountain Cycling Experience and 5K was held on September 7th. Approximately 250 riders participated as this event continues to grow.
- The crosswalks have received a facelift as the Chamber continues to campaign for pedestrian safety.
- The Chamber's Retail Roundtable has launched a Holiday and Year-round Light Initiative to create visual statements of hospitality.
- The Chamber is partnering with Jackson County to promote the "Clean and Green" anti-litter campaign.
- The 2019 Leadership Cashiers inaugural class will complete the nine-month program this month. The 2020 class will kick off in October.
- The Town of Highlands has completed a database using GPS data to allow data to be uploaded as first steps to establishing the Cashier to Highlands Trail Project.

Executive Director: Highlights from the Director's Report that was emailed prior to the meeting include:

- Mr. Breedlove commended both Chamber partners for the hard work and dedication benefiting our communities.
- An interactive website map will be rolled out in the coming weeks with all information geocoded to a location to allow users to zoom and scroll to find attractions and lodging/restaurants near them.
- Mr. Breedlove attended the Blue Ridge Parkway Association meeting in Floyd, Virginia last Monday and Tuesday. Road resurfacing on the Parkway is continuing.
- Mr. Breedlove has been invited to serve on the WCU Hospitality and Tourism Program Advisory Board. The Hospitality and Tourism department has undergone a complete restructuring over the last year.
- Mr. Breedlove will be interviewed by Blue Ridge Public Radio tomorrow to highlight the new Jackson County Ale Trail.
- The Strategic Plan has been posted to the website and printed copies for board members are forthcoming.
- Jackson County has been named as a top ten location for leaf looking by USA Today, generating valuable publicity for this season.
- Midweek visits are being encouraged through social media and PR platforms based on the Strategic Plan initiative.
- The TDA Strategic Plan and Tourism Impact Numbers press releases received excellent coverage from our local newspapers.

- Winter specials are being solicited to encourage winter visits for January through March and midweek to promote the off-peak times.
- Mr. Breedlove has shared the Crisis Management Plan with Jackson County Emergency Management Director Todd Dillard who will review before the comes to the full board for approval.
- Reprints of the Hiking and Waterfall maps have been ordered and new guides that will come out soon include the Wedding Guide, Accessible Jackson, and the Motorcycle Guide to Jackson County.
- A Trip Advisor buy has been underperforming so future buys have been canceled and these funds will be repurposed for more effective marketing purchases.
- TWSA sewer line expansion in the Cashiers area has been slowed down by a few months. An update by McGill Engineering will be provided at the November 12th TWSA meeting.
- Action Committees for the Strategic Plan will be formed in the coming months. Board volunteers and outside stakeholders are needed to serve on these committees.

Caleb Sullivan provided a marketing update:

- Social media posts have been transitioned to in-house, and all recent posts have been his work.
- Mr. Sullivan has used "national days" as a platform to engage visitors.
- Facebook views have increased approximately 1% over the past two weeks.
- Hashtag research is being done to investigate the best hashtags for Twitter and Instagram.
- The leading Facebook and Instagram story for this month has been Pinnacle Park on a Rainy Day.

Announcements/Adjournment

Mrs. Self attended a meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers last week on the restoration of Cashiers Lake. Public comment on the project is open until mid-October. There will not be a full board meeting in October.

MOTION: *Megan Orr moved to adjourn. Kathy Korb seconded. Motion carried.*

The meeting was adjourned at 1:58 p.m.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, November 13, 2019, TDA Full Board Meeting at 1:00 pm in the Holt Library Conference Room 112, Southwestern Community College, 447 College Drive, Sylva, NC 28779.

Kathy Korb, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: November 13, 2019