



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

MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority Board of Directors Meeting March 18, 2020 (Wednesday), 1:00 p.m. Conference Call

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 Megan Orr, Dale Collins, Brad Herman, Andrew Harlfinger, Jay Grissom, Robert Jumper, Anna Thomas, Ron Mau, Darlene Fox, Julie Spiro, Stephanie Edwards.
- **Members absent:** None
- **Others in attendance:** Sales and Marketing Manager Caleb Sullivan; Rawle Murdy representatives John Kautz and Lindsey Lubanski ; and Cheryl Osborne, Minutes Clerk

Approval of Agenda

MOTION: Dale Collins moved to approve the agenda. Kathy Korb seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment: None.

Recognize Chair and Secretary

No comments.

Review and Approval of January Minutes

Minutes of the January 15, 2020. Minutes of January Meeting sent via email prior to meeting. There were no comments and/or corrections.

MOTION: Megan Orr moved to approve the January 15, 2020, minutes. Brad Herman seconded. Motion carried.

Review and Approval January and February 2020 Financial Reports

Ms. Fox presented the financial reports. Highlights for January include Occupancy Tax collections of \$79,375.00, penalties of \$277.13, and YTD collection totals of \$729,704.64, which is 73% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$11,130.39. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$12,449.42. 120 accounts reported rentals for December (decrease of 29 accounts from last year). Collections were up 32.30% from the same period in 2019. The total decrease for the fiscal year is 2.97%. The January 31, 2020 cash balance was \$210,758.66 with investments totaling \$400,000.00. January expenses were \$85,926.11 with YTD expenses totaling \$673,671.75 with encumbrances of \$9534.99 for a combined total of \$683,206.74, equaling 56.76% of the budget.

Highlights for February include Occupancy Tax collections of \$55,703.75 with \$175.00 collected for penalties. The YTD collection total is \$785,408.30 which is 78.57% of the budget. Airbnb total was \$16,625.19. The Home Away VRBO total was \$3,782.12. 96 accounts reported for January rentals (decrease of 6 accounts from last year). Collections were up 28.37% from the same period in 2019. The total decrease in February for the fiscal year is 1.14%. The cash balance on February 29, 2020 is \$179,241.91 with investments totaling \$400,000.00. February

expenses were \$87,804.98 with YTD expenses totaling \$761,476.73 with encumbrances of \$36,946.00 for a combined total of \$798,476.73, equaling 66.34% of budget.

MOTION: *Megan Orr moved to approve the January and February financial reports as presented. Brad Herman seconded. Motion carried.*

Appointment – Secretary Ms. Self recommended to appoint Kathy Korb as Secretary of the TDA Board.

MOTION: *Robert Jumper motioned to appoint Ms. Korb as Secretary. Anna Thomas seconded. Motion carried.*

Corona virus Update

Mr. Breedlove updated the Board on the current situation as follows:

- On March 12 the TDA staff put together a toolkit on sanitary and business best practices for industry partners which can be found on the Jackson County TDA website. Emails regarding best practices for restaurants and accommodations were sent to over 700 stakeholders of which 60% have been opened. Both Chambers may also share this information with their full membership.
- On March 15 every ad campaign was paused. In consultation with Rawle Murdy it was decided it would be prudent to focus on recovery, which is in line with what every major destination nationwide is doing.
- On March 16 an email was sent to our restaurant community to let them know that a ban on dine-in was possible and we wanted to gather information on what options they would have if the ban took place. We got back some (15) responses to the questionnaire that was included in the email.
- On March 17 we created a dedicated website, LoveJacksonNC.com as a resource for the public, businesses and restaurants county-wide informing of hour changes, procedure changes and what is offered changes and to promote the sale of gift cards to drive business to these places who are laying off staff, losing jobs and some are closing down for good. This is an effort to support the economy when the economy needs it the most.
- We are taking care of our community before we focus on visitors. We are encouraging people to shop local and support local businesses
- We are sending information on webinars to the appropriate audiences such as best practices such as take-out and curbside service to restaurants and lodging partners.
- The TDA is focusing on immediate needs in the next 1-3 months and long-term planning for recovery.
- We are optimistic and trying to provide comfort and support to our partners who are feeling the effects of the pandemic the most; however, according to several hotel executives such as Roger Dowell from U.S. Travel, the numbers are grim. The executives expect half of the hotels in the U.S. to close this year, approximately two million jobs will be lost nationwide. In Jackson County our tourism industry employs about 1,890 people in tourism related jobs. Rich Price is working on projections for Jackson County; however, there are not any points of reference or expert guidance for this pandemic.
- A recent survey by Longwood about plans to travel long term revealed optimistically that 87% of those surveyed planned to travel in the next 6 months with 66% plan leisure travel. Approximately 30% of those surveyed are changing their destination plans to one that they can drive to instead of flying. The demographic of our future traveler may change.
- The impact to the tourism industry of the pandemic is worse than 9/11 and the 2008 recession combined.
- How will pandemic impact our budget? Since we do not depend on business travel and conferences, we should feel less of an impact; however, we will feel an impact. Mr. Breedlove ran budget projections for a 20% reduction in Occupancy Tax for the next four months of the fiscal year. At 20%, we would still come out ahead of budget projections and would still exceed the budget by approximately \$1,000,000.

- The Smith Travel Report for March 14 which comes out weekly shows that Jackson County is down about 23%, which is the same for the rest of WNC and the state.
- Our Visitor Guide is on hold in light of current situation until staff feels confident and information contained in visitor guide be accurate. We have 44 cases of last year's guide and it should get us to the point where we need to reprint the guide.

Strategic Plan Committee Report

Mr. Breedlove has postponed in person committee meetings; however, work can continue remotely so that their work can continue. Committees are working diligently and are exploring new ideas. Next month there should be a progress report from each committee.

Absenteeism

Ms. Self reminded all of policy importance by email and emphasized by importance of attending meetings.

U.S. Forest Service Comments – Panthertown Valley

The U.S. Forest Service is in a 90-day comment period of their master plan for maintenance for the next 15 years at Panthertown Valley. Environmental stakeholders are reviewing the plan. Mr. Breedlove was approached by Friends of Panthertown in Cashiers who oversee Panthertown Valley such as trail maintenance and stewardship of the Valley to give comments since Panthertown Valley is one of Jackson County's premier outdoor destination.

The plan features four alternatives as follows:

Plan A: Do nothing and leave everything managed the same way as now.

Plans B, C and D: Relate to Panthertown Valley timber operations, logging, prescribed burns, etc.

Friends of Panthertown and the JCTDA executive committee are proposing that we come up with our own alternative that best serves the needs of an outdoor recreational area.

We are requesting two things: 1. Area Forest Service map now includes 2,700 acres as Panthertown Valley, but Panthertown Valley is closer to 10,000 acres. We want to ask them to consider the total area included in Panthertown Valley for future trail development. 2. Consider a large portion of Panthertown Valley as backcountry which will carry with it management practices for recreation. The Forest Service proposal would consider different areas of Panthertown Valley as different types of use areas that will allow logging in certain sections and prescribed burns in other sections. These activities would degrade the visitor's experience. Friends of Panthertown is already putting fire breaks to mitigate any fire related issues.

Mr. Breedlove would like to have the Board review the proposals, information and supplemental material will be sent by email, and consider action on the proposal at the April meeting.

Directors' Reports

Jackson County Chamber: Highlights of the Jackson County Chamber report, which was emailed prior to the meeting was supplemented by Ms. Spiro as follows:

- Information on the TDA website has been very helpful to businesses in Jackson County since information changes frequently.
- A billboard directing people to the TDA webpage information about activities in Jackson County is going up next week in Sylva.
- The Chamber is continuing to work and have outlined a schedule for the shelter in place 14 day period so that someone would come to the office to check and process the mail, check answering machine for phone calls, processing inquiries and do all the daily activities. The employees will not be in the office at any time.
- The golf tournament which was scheduled for April has been rescheduled until October 7.
- Hook, Line and Drinker will occur on September 12.
- Concerts on the Creek is still undecided.

Cashiers Area Chamber: Highlights of the Cashiers Area Chamber report, which was emailed prior to the meeting was supplemented by Ms. Edwards:

- The Chamber office is closed, and the employees are working remotely. Ms. Edwards has been checking daily that information kiosks are full, going to the office to check mail and telephone and process inquiries.
- Reaching out to community by putting CDC posters on high profile venues around town.
- The Nosh Mosh which was to occur on March 19 has been postponed.
- The community outreach Facebook page is updated for members on a periodic basis.
- Other Chambers of Commerce are networking and comparing what other Chambers are doing, which is reassuring in these times.

JCTDA Staff Report

Executive Director: Mr. Breedlove provided the board with a written report prior to the meeting via email and presented the following highlights:

- Upcoming travel has been cancelled. The VisitNC365 conference will now have its sessions online. TDA staff will attend online sessions.
- Marketing and Communication Plan is progressing well; however, due to present fluid situation, we are leaving the plan to Rawle Murdy and Mr. Breedlove regarding media buys and getting the recovery message out to the world.
- Resources for small businesses are on LoveJacksonNC.com along with resources for Main Street program and Downtown with links to funding opportunities with the SBA and upcoming webinars.
- The JCTDA social media strategy is changing due to the pandemic and focusing on recovery when travel does resume. The TDA is working on a student voice campaign with the Jackson County public school system to implement a Student Voice Campaign where the students draw pictures and write about what they love to do in Jackson County.
- Another campaign being planned in the future is Travel Memories where people talk about some of their best memories of Jackson County.
- Mr. Sullivan attended Travel South Showcase and met with about 30 tour providers from across the country. There was a lot of interest in our area.

Rawle Murdy John Kautz reinforced that they are working toward future recovery.

MOTION: *Jay Grissom moved to adjourn. Megan Orr seconded. Motion carried.* The meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Next Meeting

The Wednesday, April 15, 2020 TDA Full Board Meeting will be at 1:00 pm in the Holt Library Conference Room 112, Southwestern Community College, 447 College Drive, Sylva, NC 28779 if social distancing restrictions are lifted. If not, meeting will be held via teleconference.

Kathy Korb, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: April 13, 2020