



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

MINUTES
Jackson County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
April 21, 2021 (Wednesday), 1:00 p.m.
Zoom Teleconference

Call to Order/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Robert Jumper. Mr. Jumper reminded attendees of Zoom meeting etiquette.

- **Members in attendance:** Executive Director Nick Breedlove; Robert Jumper, Chair; Ann Self, Vice Chair; Megan Orr, Secretary; Board Members Dale Collins, Daniel Fletcher, Darlene Fox, Craig Smith, Scott Greene, Stephanie Edwards, Julie Spiro, and Jay Grissom.
- **Members absent:** Mark Jones
- **Others in attendance:** Sales and Marketing Manager Caleb Sullivan; Cheryl Osborne, Minutes Clerk; Deborah Stone and Melissa Webb, Pineapple Public Relations

Approval of Amended Agenda

Agenda was sent prior to meeting via email.

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

Public Comment: None

Recognize Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and County Commissioner

Robert Jumper, Chair, had no comments.

Ann Self commented how impressive a WCU Stage and Screen student production of *Into the Woods* at the Village Green. She is looking forward to more productions in the summer, even though masks and social distancing are required.

Secretary Megan Orr had no comments.

Mark Jones, County Commissioner, was absent.

Review and Approval of March Minutes

Minutes of the March 14, 2020. Minutes of the March meeting sent via email prior to meeting. No comments were made.

MOTION: Dale Collins moved to approve the March 14, 2021 minutes. seconded. The motion carried. Craig Smith seconded. Motion carried.

Review and Approval of March 31, 2021 Financial Report

Mrs. Fox presented the financial reports. Highlights for March include Occupancy Tax collections of \$90,884.13 penalties of \$712.03, and YTD collection totals of \$1,326,368, which is 126.37% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$33,780.04. The HomeAway and VRBO total was \$15,469.56. The Vacasa total was \$2,677.18. 83 accounts reported rentals for February rentals (decrease of 10 accounts from last year). Collections were up 66.05% (\$36,434.64) from the same period in 2020. The March 31, 2021 cash balance is \$954,630.06 with investments totaling \$400,000. March expenses were \$75,762.14 with YTD expenses totaling \$731,452.30 with encumbrances of \$49,236 for a combined total of \$780,688.30, equaling 71.99% of the budget.

MOTION: Ann Self moved to approve the March financial report as presented. Daniel Fletcher seconded. The motion carried.

Budget Amendment

A budget amendment was necessary to account for the increase in occupancy tax collected. Funds were placed in Ad Firm media, however, they will not be spent on media and will roll over into the general fund at the end of the fiscal year.

The Budget Amendment will increase expenditures as follows:

- Travel increases \$2,000
- Ad Firm Media increases \$630,197
- Total \$632,197

Revenue will increase as follows:

- Occupancy Tax increases \$600,000
- Marketing and Advertising increases \$7,000
- Mountain Bizworks-PPP increases \$24,497
- Total \$632,197

MOTION: Ann Self motioned to approve the Budget Amendment. Craig Smith seconded. Motion carried.

Review Draft Budget FY 21/22

Mrs. Fox explained that the estimated Room Occupancy Taxes for next fiscal year would be an estimated \$1,375,000. Penalties are estimated at \$5,000, \$10,000 for Marketing revenue, \$10,000, and \$500 for investment earnings.

Mr. Breedlove commented that the Draft Budget is traditionally presented in May, but he wanted to give it to the Board now since the May Board meeting is usually busy and the Board would have a chance to review the Budget prior to voting.

Key expense components of the Budget are as follows:

- There is a proposed salary increase for Mr. Sullivan. He has worked very diligently in the past year by taking on various responsibilities and will take over paid social media management which is contracted to Rawle Murdy for approximately \$9,000/year. Mr. Breedlove is proposing that Mr. Sullivan's salary be increased to \$45,000/year starting September 1 because of increased duties. No vote is needed, but Mr. Breedlove would like a consensus to program this into the Budget. Mr. Jumper called for comments. There were no comments.
- A contract with Chris Cavanaugh is proposed for an official study related to Incentives and Compensation and benefits for the Executive Director and Sales position.
- Travel has increased because due to having two staff members now attend conferences with the addition of group travel trade shows.
- The cost of printing and advertising has increased.
- A \$10,000 line item has been added for funds to be split equally between the Visitor Centers for improvements related to the Visitor Experience.
- Funds have been included to either remodel or to rent a new building. Space has become an issue at the existing building.
- \$50,000 has been budgeted for capital projects. These are brick and mortar type of projects. The committee is looking into the next step regarding what type of projects will be undertaken. Mr. Smith asked for an example of the type of projects to be undertaken. Mr. Breedlove responded that since the committee is still evaluating the type of projects and will present recommendations at the next meeting.
- The Grant Program line item has been increased since the focus of the program is changing.
- \$20,000 has been budgeted for an additional part-time staff member. The workload hasn't been large enough to justify a full-time position, however, with staff's current duties, additional part-time staff member is needed.

The final draft Budget ordinance will be presented in May to be voted on in June.

Contract Approval – Zartico and Key Data

The contract with Zartico is in the amount of \$50,000/year to provide data dashboard services that will combine various sources of information about the people coming into Jackson County who are using cell phone technology and geolocation in addition to combining all data sources about travelers coming to this destination. The data dashboard can then be shared with our agencies and generate automatic emails when key metrics change. It will give the Board insight into who is visiting Jackson County.

Key Data will give an overview of all vacation rentals in the county by feeding in data from third party vacation rentals. The contract for Key Data is \$8,500.

Even though the contract effective dates are this year, no payments are due until next fiscal year.

MOTION: *Ann Self motioned to approve the Chair's signoff on these contracts. Scott Greene seconded. Motion carried.*

Proposed Grant Program application for FY 21-22

Mr. Breedlove stated that the Grant Committee has been meeting for several months and is pleased with the direction the Committee is taking to streamline the grant application process. There is a link on the agenda to provide information on the Committee's work. The proposals do not have to be voted on today and Mr. Breedlove called for feedback before the May Board meeting.

With the streamlined process, potential grant funding requesters will know up front what metrics are evaluated, how the grant application will be scored, and the category has been broadened to make the wording "initiatives" so that the grants will be available to other endeavors besides festivals and events.

JCTDA Staff Report/Marketing Report/PR Report

Executive Director: Mr. Breedlove provided the board with a written report listing all the activities of the month prior to the meeting via email and presented the following updates that were not included in the report:

- Mr. Sullivan was named to Destinations International 30 Under 30, which is the one of the top designations in the tourism industry in the United States.
- Mr. Breedlove is training to become a Certified Diversity Travel Professional. This is a pilot program offered by the Southeast Tourism Society, the purpose is to include diversity, equity, and inclusion in the travel industry.
- There will not be a Board Meeting in July.
- The August 18th Board meeting will be held at the Village Green in Cashiers. There will be Zoom participation also.
- Visitation has been steadily increasing and is comparable to pre-Covid levels in 2019.
- WCU graduation is May 14-15, which is traditionally a busy time for lodging in Jackson County.
- Last week the TDA and Rawle Murdy partnered with VISAVue to obtain data about credit & Debit card usage which allows us to see what the visitor bought and what origin market the credit card originated. TDA marketing can be fine tuned to target advertising with this data.
- The TDA is currently working with Rawle Murdy to create a group meetings webpage.

Directors' Reports

Jackson County Chamber: Highlights of the Jackson County Chamber report was emailed prior to the meeting.

- The Chamber has been collecting data about what people are doing when they arrive in Jackson County.

- The Chamber issued a letter of support for PPP loans deductibility for Jackson County businesses. The PPP loans previously were not deductible on income taxes.
- The Wonderful Wednesday program in Dillsboro has been launched for the third year.

Cashiers Area Chamber: The Cashiers Area Chamber report was given by Mrs. Edwards.

- The Chamber is finishing the Cashiers Visitor Guide.
- The Shopping and Dining Guide has been approved and printing of 25,000 copies are printing.
- Litter pickup in the area has been a primary focus since the Chamber received a grant of \$1,500 for safety equipment since U.S. 64 is dangerous for volunteers.
- The Leadership Cashiers class is taking place in about two weeks with about 18 participants.
- The work on the Cashiers/Highlands Trail is progressing and the group has received the first \$50,000 pledge to support the effort.

COVID-19 Update

Mr. Breedlove, who is a member of the Harris Hospital roundtable, updated the Board on the latest COVID statistics in Jackson County. The hospital is seeing that cases of COVID have dropped to only 1-2/day versus 20+ per day during the peak last year. Only about 5% of people are testing positive. Vaccinations have hit a plateau with running out of people to vaccinate. The recent hold on the Johnson and Johnson vaccine may have discouraged people to get a vaccination.

Recent research has shown that 87% of travelers plan to travel within the next six months and the number one thing that people want to do it relax. The respondents want to go dining, shopping and visit a National Park or Monument. Jackson County is perfectly poised for all the activities.

Report from Pineapple Public Relations

- Melissa Webb reported that Pineapple staff recently hosted Bill Boyer with Upstate Living Magazine who visited Jackson County. Mr. Boyer had a good time visiting the elk trail, dining, and fly fishing, and experiencing Jackson County.
- Pineapple has been working with Forbes Magazine to visit the Cashiers area and doing a story on the area.
- The Wedding Giveaway is wrapping up.

New Business and Updates from Individual Board Members

Scott Greene reports that High Hampton is opening April 22 with more than 80% occupancy on the first weekend.

Announcements

None

Adjourn

MOTION: Craig Smith *motioned to adjourn.* Scott Greene *seconded.* Motion *carried.* The meeting was adjourned at 1:54 p.m.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be Wednesday May 19, 2021 TDA Full Board Meeting will be at 1:00 pm via Zoom Conferencing.

Megan Orr, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: May 19, 2021