



MINUTES

**Jackson County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
November 17, 2021 (Wednesday) @1:00 p.m.
Zoom Teleconference/Virtual/Hybrid in Person**

Call to Order/Roll Call

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

- **Members in attendance:** Executive Director Nick Breedlove; Robert Jumper, Chair; Ann Self, Vice Chair; Board Members Dale Collins, Daniel Fletcher, Craig Smith, Scott Greene, and Jay Grissom, Megan Orr, Secretary; Mark Jones, Julie Spiro, Darlene Fox, Stephanie Edwards
- **Members absent:** None
- **Others in attendance:** Cheryl Osborne, Minutes Clerk; Rachel Croyle, Rawle Murdy; Ann Bernard, Gina Stouffer, Lou Hammond Group; Caleb Sullivan, Sales and Marketing Manager JCTDA

Approve Amended Agenda

The proposed Agenda amendment was sent by email prior to meeting.

MOTION: Craig Smith moved to approve amended agenda. Daniel Fletcher seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment: None

Recognize Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and County Commissioner

Robert Jumper, Chair, stated that Cherokee has been very busy.

Ann Self, Vice Chair, commented on the fall colors and number of visitors who enjoyed the fall foliage, and she extended an invitation to the Board to attend the Christmas tree lighting on the Village Green on Friday, November 26.

Megan Orr, Secretary, called and stated that she was ill and had no comments.

Mark Jones, County Commissioner, shared information on sales tax revenue that was presented to the County Commissioners. Sales tax and use tax presented in October but reflecting July sales was a record \$1,871,111. This tax revenue is \$321,422 (20.74%) over the amount in October 2020, which was a record month for tax revenue. Article 46 which was passed in 2016 increased the Jackson County sales tax $\frac{1}{4}$ of 1 cent was originally estimated to generate around \$200,000 additional revenue per year and has generated almost \$900,000. The revenue is now averaging 1.7% over the original projected

revenue each month. Additionally, 1,005 homes were sold in Cashiers/Glenville district alone in 2020. There are currently only around 200 homes in local realtor inventory as opposed to almost 2,800 in inventory two years ago. Mr. Jones speculates that most of the homes are going into Airbnb, which increases the sales tax revenue.

Review and Approval of September 14, 2021 Minutes

Minutes of the September 14, 2021. Minutes of the meeting sent via email prior to meeting. No comments were made.

MOTION: *Megan Orr moved to approve the September 14, 2021 minutes. Daniel Fletcher seconded. The motion carried.*

Review and Approval of September 30, 2021 Financial Report

Ms. Fox presented the financial reports. Highlights for September include Occupancy Tax collections of \$296,303.44 penalties of \$373.51, and YTD collection totals of \$698,147.78, which is 50.77% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$38,828.72. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$57,549.47 and the VACASA, NC total was \$8,937.77. 93 accounts reported rentals for August rentals (decrease of 23 accounts from last year). Collections were up 29.57% (\$67,704.51) from the same period in 2020. The September 30, 2021 cash balance is \$1,583,502.50 with investments totaling \$400,000.00. September expenses were \$233,003.59 with FYTD expenses totaling \$553,297.70 with encumbrances of \$87,564.64 for a combined total of \$640,862.34, equaling 35.52% of the budget.

Review and Approval of October 31, 2021 Financial Report

Ms. Fox presented the financial reports. Highlights for October include Occupancy Tax collections of \$236,397.79 penalties of \$98.13, and YTD collection totals of \$934,545.57, which is 67.97% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$46,898.15. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$31,717.20 and the VACASA, NC total was \$7,919.40. 93 accounts reported rentals for September rentals (decrease of 16 accounts from last year). Collections were up 23.65% (\$45,230.31) from the same period in 2020. The October 31, 2021 cash balance is \$1,632,411.81 with investments totaling \$400,000.00. October expenses were \$181,070.08 with FYTD expenses totaling \$740,251.31 with encumbrances of \$71,206.51 for a combined total of \$811,457.82, equaling 44.98% of the budget.

Mr. Jumper commented on how improved the financials in 2021 are over the state of the financial situation over when he first started on the JCTDA Board. He congratulated the TDA staff.

MOTION: *Craig Smith moved to approve the September and October financial reports as presented. Scott Greene seconded. The motion carried.*

Audit Acceptance

Matt Braswell from Martin-Starnes & Associates CPAs, PA explained the highlights of the JCTDA audit report during the September 14 meeting. Ms. Fox reiterated that the audit identified no weaknesses and had no findings. She further gave historical information on the growth of revenue over three years.

Mr. Jumper congratulated the TDA staff and Ms. Fox on their work in keeping the accounting activities so accurate.

MOTION: *Megan Orr motioned to accept the audit report. Daniel Fletcher seconded. Motion carried.*

Review and Approve Grant Request for BRNHA

We received a grant request in the amount of \$3,800 from the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. The grant is for a video production of artisans in Jackson County at work. The Executive Committee is in favor of granting this request. The background and information are found in the agenda under Grant Request, which was emailed with the agenda for this meeting.

MOTION: *Daniel Fletcher moved to approve the grant request for BRNHA. Megan Orr seconded. Motion carried.*

JCTDA Staff Report/Marketing Report/PR Report

Executive Director: Mr. Breedlove provided the board with a report via email with the agenda for this meeting. Mr. Breedlove presented highlights as follows:

- Success with collections of revenue and visitor spending is exceeding expectations, even with a slight decrease in visitor spending in early November. Airbnb revenue is increasing (see Mr. Jones' report above). Airbnb listings in the Cashiers/Glenville area alone have increased by 327 new rentals since 2018.
- In the first two weeks in November, the occupancy rate was 63%. Airbnb's are driving significant increases in revenue.
- The Ale Trail Pass has launched this week. If a person visits 4 out of 5 breweries in Sylva and Dillsboro and check in on their smartphone, they will receive a souvenir glass and their choice of cooler or drink tumbler stickers.
- The Castle Dream Wedding was held November 4. The collaboration brought awareness of weddings in Jackson County. The wedding was valued at \$40,000 and the JCTDA, Bear Lake, and Castle Ladyhawke put on the contest.
- Jackson County ranked 2nd in the WNC area for visitor spending behind Buncombe County and 15th in the state of N.C. Visitors are spending a total of \$800,000/day in Jackson County.

Marketing Report

The marketing report was emailed with the meeting agenda. Rachel Croyle of Rawle Murdy commented that RM has been very busy with the Ale Trail Pass in the past month and on display advertising for leaf season. They are also getting ready to work on the Secret Season campaign. Anne Bernard of Lou Hammond Group gave an update on public relations activities, including magazine articles and hosting trips in Jackson County. Mr. Sullivan was interviewed by Popular Science Magazine on Leave No Trace and reducing environmental impact in the mountains. Mr. Sullivan updated the Board on social media activities. JCTDA exceeded 25,000 followers on Instagram. Mr. Sullivan attended two travel related conferences in September and cultivated various sales contacts.

Jackson County Chamber Directors Report

The report was emailed as an attachment to the agenda. Ms. Spiro updated the report as follows:

- The Harriett Tubman statue at Bridge Park will be there until January 6.
- Holiday fireworks are scheduled for December 17 in downtown Sylva. The Chamber is hosting a concert on the front porch of the Chamber.
- Christmas trees are up on the courthouse hill and along highway 107.
- The Chamber's website has a list of places to purchase a fresh Fraser fir Christmas tree.
- Lights and Luminaries in Dillsboro will take place for the next two weekends.
- The Chamber has been busy and has been open six days per week.
- The Chamber has run out of Our Town Guides, which the JCTDA prints. It is the first time that they have completely exhausted their supply. Many people are inquiring about being homeowners in Jackson County.

Cashiers Area Chamber

The report was emailed as an attachment to the agenda. Ms. Edwards updated the report as follows:

- Tom Sawyer Tree Farm in Cashiers is closed, and it is rumored that the land has been sold.
- The Chamber signed the contract with the Urban Land Institute for a study of development and land use in the Cashiers area. The JCTDA agreed in September to partially fund the study for \$35,000.
- The Cashiers Christmas parade will be held December 4 and the Village Green holiday lights will be lit during Thanksgiving weekend and will feature Santa. Ms. Edwards is hopeful that COVID protocols will be relaxed to give children a more normal Santa experience.
- Traffic has been remarkably busy during the shadow of the bear viewing. The Chamber is working with the NCDOT to regulate traffic in the future.

New Business

Mr. Jumper commented that there is a Board seat to fill when Ms. Self retires in December. Mr. Jumper will send out evaluation criteria for the proposed Board member soon. Mr. Breedlove announced that there will be a farewell and thank you recognition for Ms. Self next month.

Updates from Individual Board Members

Craig Smith gave an update on the Castle Giveaway Wedding event, which was extremely successful. A highlight of the wedding was that Matt Stillwell, a local recording artist, wrote and sang a song about the couple's romance. The Castle has monthly 'Castle Session' concerts featuring various musical artists and podcast on social media. These films not only show the concert but feature the artists visiting various attractions and participating in local activities in Jackson County. Mr. Smith announced that Bear Lake Reserve is under contract to be partially sold to an investment group and, if the deal finalizes, there will be an infusion of cash in Jackson County.

Daniel Fletcher requested that he would like to see print articles about media visits to Jackson County. Mr. Breedlove said he'd share the link to the media room where they compile those going forward.

Megan Orr reported that renovations are almost complete and Quality Inn is soon to be renamed Clarion Pointe.

Mr. Jumper reminded voting Board members to be thinking about officers for 2022.

Adjourn

MOTION: Craig Smith motioned to adjourn. Scott Greene seconded. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 1: 56 p.m.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held December 15, 2021 via Zoom Conferencing.

Megan Orr, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: December 15, 2021