



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

To: TDA Board
From: Nick Breedlove, TDA Executive Director
Date: August 9, 2024
Subject: Monthly Director's Brief

Dear Board Members,

Please see below for updates.

Website Issues and Proposed Solutions

Last month, our website experienced a significant outage that rendered it largely non-functional for nearly five days. This incident, along with other critical errors in the last several months, has highlighted the ongoing burden placed on both Kara and me as we log these issues, must continue to check status of fixes, and work to resolve these issues. While our current provider, BGRM, has restored functionality, the failure of backups and the subsequent loss of work underscore the need for a more reliable platform for this work. We are postponing all current web projects (including Wedding related website changes) until our new provider has the platform in place, so we are not duplicating efforts.

We've identified SimpleView as a superior provider that excels in managing DMO websites, currently supporting over 1,000 such sites globally. Transitioning to this platform will enhance our website's reliability and performance. Additionally, this change presents an opportunity for a brand refresh to coincide with the new website launch, which BGRM will handle due to their expertise in this area.

We'll ask for your approval for a budget amendment of \$65,000, which, combined with our existing unspent website project funds, will cover the costs associated with this transition. We aim to have both the new website and brand refresh completed by March, aligning with the start of our peak visitor season.

Grant Applications

We have two grant applications up for review in this meeting:

1. Mountain Heritage Day Grant - Requesting \$7,500.
2. District 4 Conservation and Eco-Tourism Plan - Requesting \$40,000.

While the Mountain Heritage Day grant is straightforward, the District 4 plan is more complex and warrants thorough review. We will have the applicant(s) on hand at our meeting to address any questions you may have.

Occupancy Tax Rate and Board Structure

In comparison to neighboring destinations like Swain and Haywood counties, which have or are moving towards a 6% occupancy tax rate, Jackson County remains at a competitive disadvantage with its current rate. Raising our tax rate, paid by visitors (not residents), could provide additional funds for strategic marketing efforts to bring visitors here during need periods (winter and low-occupancy times) and capital projects that benefit both visitors and residents. Our recent capital project(s) have proven successful, and we need a funding source beyond our COVID-era surplus fund balance to maintain the momentum going forward.

We are facing challenges with our current board structure that need to be addressed. Over the past year, two board seats have remained vacant, highlighting the need to broaden the categories of eligibility for board participation. The vacancies have been a byproduct of consolidation of ownership of lodging properties where we might traditionally draw candidates from. This will help ensure that we can effectively fill these crucial positions.

Given these circumstances, it is essential to reassess and recommend adaptations while looking at occupancy tax modifications to our board structure to better accommodate the realities of our current situation. Expanding eligibility criteria and exploring more flexible participation options could help us fill vacancies and improve attendance, ensuring that the board can continue to function effectively and support the important work of the TDA.

Please see the final two pages of my report for recommended structural changes for the Board to consider recommending to County Commissioners.

Brand Photoshoot

Kara and I recently collaborated with BGRM and a professional photographer on a multi-generational photoshoot in Cashiers and Sylva. We look forward to sharing these new visuals with you, which will be instrumental in our marketing and public relations efforts.

Networking and Industry Involvement

While I was unable to attend Destinations International due to illness, Kara attended and effectively networked with industry colleagues. I will be traveling to Columbus, Ohio, to attend the U.S. Travel Association's ESTO (Educational Society for Tourism Organizations) conference this weekend.

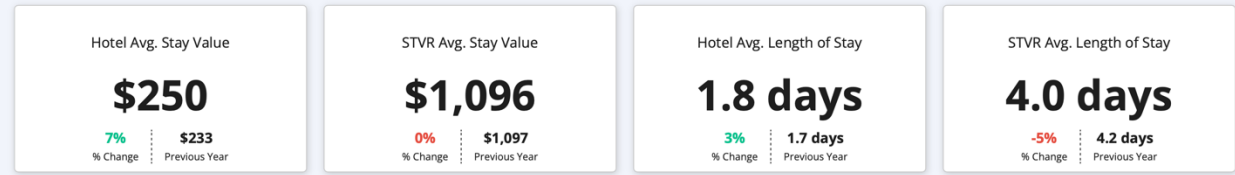
Recently, I presented tourism statistics and trends to the Main Street Sylva Association and have a similar presentation scheduled for the full Town Board later this month. Additionally, I shared tourism updates with the Kessler Collection principals during their visit to Cashiers. My recent report to the County Commissioners was well received and garnered media attention, highlighting our ongoing efforts to support the communities we serve.

This revised brief should better reflect the key points while maintaining a professional and forward-looking tone.

Lodging Trends for July 2024

Summary KPIs

Source: Zartico Lodging Data.
KPI metrics display short-term vacation rental (STVR) and hotel performance for your primary geographic area.
Use the filter at the top to filter all insights by STVR or hotel performance. Twelve-month rolling trends can be found in the sections below.



Videos Produced since our last board meeting:

Pet Friendly Jackson County: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/NaF17XeCj2c>

High Falls Dam Release: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/nV1cN0Uz9Hw>

Dillsboro Art Walk: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/6qAeKVI3yhk>

Hotel Sylva: <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/v4njzGSME3M>

Day of Relaxation: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/iP5E4laif_M

Accessible Jackson: https://youtube.com/shorts/_Aif2xbDREY

Where to Stay in Jackson: <https://youtube.com/shorts/Q8Bj06QmXS4>

Meatballs Pizzeria: <https://youtube.com/shorts/E7B0Es1UZzw>

Sapphire Valley Arts & Crafts Festival: <https://youtube.com/shorts/ZXRY5YZe6xs>

Schoolhouse Falls: <https://youtube.com/shorts/4nuhpyQvkIA>

Upcoming Events

I hope you'll mark your calendars for the following upcoming events in Jackson County:

August

23-31 Cashiers Designer Showhouse

September

21 Social District Celebration (former Brew Hop), Sylva

21 Green Energy Park Youth Arts Fest, Dillsboro

28 Mountain Heritage Day 50th Anniversary, Cullowhee

See next page for proposed Board Structural Changes

Current Legislation Board Makeup under R12-34:

Group One: (3) Lodging Properties; (2) Hotel/Resort/Inn Properties - North Jackson County; (1) from other occupancy tax remitters from establishments with 10+ units/rooms.

Group Two: (3) Lodging Properties; (2) Hotel/Resort/Inn Properties - South Jackson County; (1) from other occupancy tax remitters from establishments with 10+ units/rooms.

Group Three: (1) Tourism-related business representative from Jackson County At Large

Group Four: (1) representative from the Cashiers Chamber of Commerce in a non-lodging, tourism-related business (who is not employed by the CACOC). The Executive Director from the Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce. The Executive Director will be an ex officio member with no term limit.

Group Five - (1) representative from the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce in a non-lodging, tourism-related business (who is not employed by the JCCOC). The Executive Director from the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce. The Executive Director will be an ex officio member with no term limit.

Proposed Recommendations from Staff based on Discussion with the Executive Committee:

Group One: (3) Individuals from North Jackson County Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Group Two: (3) Individuals from South Jackson County Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Group Three - (1) Individual from Hospitality and Tourism Sector (county-wide)

Group Four - (1) representative from the Cashiers Chamber of Commerce in a non-lodging, tourism-related business (who is not employed by the CACOC). The Executive Director from the Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce. The Executive Director will be an ex officio member with no term limit.

Group Five - (1) representative from the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce in a non-lodging, tourism-related business (who is not employed by the JCCOC). The Executive Director from the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce. The Executive Director will be an ex officio member with no term limit.

See next page for proposed definition of Hospitality and Tourism Sector

Hospitality and Tourism Sector Category Definition:

This category is intended to ensure broad and effective representation on the Board from individuals and entities engaged in the hospitality and tourism industry within Jackson County. Appointments to this category will be made based on the following order of preference:

1. Primary Preference - Lodging Industry Representation:

- Hotel/Motel/Inn Representative: An owner, operator, or senior manager of a hotel, motel, inn, or similar establishment with a significant presence in Jackson County.
- Lodging Property Representative: An individual representing a lodging property that owns or manages five (5) or more accommodations and is responsible for remitting occupancy tax within Jackson County.

2. Secondary Preference - Broader Hospitality and Tourism Professionals:

- Hospitality and Tourism Professional: A professional with substantial experience in the hospitality and tourism industry, including but not limited to event management, destination marketing, guest services.
- Club or Resort Management: An individual involved in the management of a club, resort, or similar facility that contributes to the local tourism economy.
- Former TDA Board Member that may be in a different industry now (such as Real Estate).
- Key Community Stakeholder: A recognized leader or influencer in the community who is actively involved in initiatives that promote, support, or are closely linked to the local tourism and hospitality sectors. This individual could be from a Main Street group, local business group such as a merchant's association or similar.

3. Tertiary Preference - Tourism-Related Business and Community Engagement:

- Attraction Operator or Owner: An individual who owns or operates a significant tourist attraction within Jackson County, contributing to the destination's overall appeal.
- Restaurant or Food/Beverage Establishment Owner/Operator: An individual who owns or operates a dining or beverage establishment that serves tourists/visitors.

Flexibility Clause:

In cases where a preferred candidate from the primary or secondary preferences cannot be identified within a reasonable timeframe, despite diligent efforts, the Board may recommend qualified candidates from the tertiary preference category to the County Commissioners. This ensures that all board seats are filled and that the Board can continue to conduct business effectively. The TDA will submit a background brief of the individual in the letter to the Commissioners when recommending appointments to the board.