



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

MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
May 25, 2022 (Wednesday) @1:00 p.m.
Zoom Teleconference

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; Daniel Fletcher, Vice Chair; Megan Orr, Secretary; Board Members Craig Smith, Scott Greene, Ashlie Mitchell-Lanning, Julie Spiro, Darlene Fox, Stephanie Edwards, Mark Jones, and Dale Collins
- **Members absent:** Jay Grissom and Daniel Fletcher
- **Others in attendance:** Caleb Sullivan, Sales and Marketing Manager JCTDA; Cheryl Osborne, Minutes Clerk, Ann Bernard and Carter Long, Lou Hammond Group; John Kautz and Rachel Covey, Rawle Murdy; Heather Baker, Jackson County Attorney

Approve Agenda

The proposed Agenda was sent by email prior to meeting.

MOTION: Dale Collins moved to approve the agenda. Craig Smith seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment: None

Recognize Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and County Commissioner

Robert Jumper, Chair, stated Cherokee is needing to overhaul the Cherokee Indian Fairgrounds since the amphitheater has structural issues. The tribe is looking at alternate locations for upcoming events.

Daniel Fletcher, Vice Chair, was absent.

Megan Orr, Secretary, is looking forward to a busy summer season.

Mark Jones, County Commissioner, stated that the County Commission is working on the county budget for the coming year. The bids for construction of the swimming pool in Cullowhee are very close to the \$20 million bond that voters of Jackson County approved. If construction costs rise in the next year, then the construction of the pool will have to be reconsidered.

Review and Approval of March 23, 2022 Minutes

Minutes of the meeting sent via email prior to meeting. No comments were made.

MOTION: *Megan Orr moved to approve the March 23, 2021 minutes. Scott Greene seconded. The motion carried.*

Review and Approval of March 31, 2022 and April 30, 12022 Financial Reports

Ms. Fox presented the financial report as follows. Highlights for March include Occupancy Tax collections of \$120,426.64 penalties of \$67.39, and YTD collection totals of \$1,801,969.41, which is 81.91% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$37,197.10. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$18,315.17 and the VACASA, NC total was \$3,590.29. 70 accounts reported rentals for February rentals (decrease of 13 accounts from last year). Collections were up 31.55% from the same period in 2021. The March 31, 2022 cash balance is \$315,460.76 with investments totaling \$2,000,000. March expenses were \$105,693.37 with FYTD expenses totaling \$1,322,887.58 with encumbrances of \$99,799.01 for a combined total of \$1,422,686.59, equaling 61.36% of the budget.

April 30, 2022 Financial Report

Ms. Fox presented the financial report as follows. Highlights for April include Occupancy Tax collections of \$138,221.08 penalties of \$24.93, and YTD collection totals of \$1,940,190.49, which is 88.19% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$40,458.89. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$25,649.89 and the VACASA, NC total was \$4,826.74. 65 accounts reported rentals for March rentals (decrease of 21 accounts from last year). Collections were up 6.06% from the same period in 2021. The April 30, 2022 cash balance is \$370,806.63 with investments totaling \$2,000,000. April expenses were \$77,472.11 with FYTD expenses totaling \$1,406,580.83 with encumbrances of \$85,794.59 for a combined total of \$1,492,375.42, equaling 56.76% of the budget.

MOTION: *Craig Smith moved to approve the March and April financial reports as presented. Dale Collins seconded. The motion carried.*

Closed Session – G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel

MOTION: *Megan Orr motioned to go into closed session. Ashlie Mitchell-Lanning seconded. Motion carried.*

The closed session ended with no action taken. Board members returned to the main meeting to vote on approving the Executive Director contract.

MOTION: *Ashlie Mitchell-Lanning motioned to renew the Executive Director contract at \$98,000/year for three (3) years. Dale Collins seconded. Motion carried.*

Review and Approve Contracts

If each Board member has read and understood the contracts to be renewed, then a vote can be taken to approve the contracts as a group instead of one at a time. Should anyone have any questions about any contract, that contract can be discussed separately. Dale Collins stated that he could not get the Jackson County Chamber of Commerce contract to load on his computer. Mr. Breedlove showed the

contract on the screen and explained that the contract was the same as last year, except for the increase in space utilization payment, which increased 3% to reflect the current real estate situation. The goal is to increase the payment annually. A line item in the amount of \$1,000 for Dillsboro Projects has been added in case the Dillsboro town hall relocates and the space there utilized by the Visitor Center is no longer available.

- **Bandwango**
- **BGRM (Rawle Murdy)**
- **Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce**
- **Jackson County Chamber of Commerce**
- **Executive Director Contract**
- **Lou Hammond Group**
- **Smoky Mountain News**
- **Zartico**

MOTION: *Megan Orr motioned to approve all the above contracts. Ashlie Mitchell-Lanning seconded. Motion carried.*

Draft Budget Presentation

The draft budget was emailed as an attachment to the agenda. Mr. Breedlove explained the highlights of the budget as follows:

- There is a mistake on page one. The "position of Social Media Content Manager is set at \$50,000" should be "Social Media Content Specialist set at \$46,000." The correction will be made in the final version of the budget.
- The budget is balanced at \$2.6 million. Mr. Breedlove initially said that the budget would be \$2.1 million. The difference in the anticipated amount versus the amount presented is an increase in the total capital projects. The \$500,000 that was appropriated in 2022 was not used and has been rolled into the budget for 2023 and the amount was increased a total of \$750,000.
- Staff salaries will be lower since the position of Social Media Content Specialist will be part-time initially and no benefits will be paid for at least 90 days until the person is transitioned to full-time.
- Travel is increased due to the addition of an employee.
- Postage and printing have been increased due to rising costs.
- Visitor center allocation is 3% higher than the previous year.
- Added a \$30,000 project fee is included in Public Relations to bring travel writers and social media influencers to the area; this is similar to the \$25,000 the board budgeted in the current fiscal year.
- The Software line item now includes Bandwango and Zartico platforms which were previously included in Rawle Murdy's budget and executed by them, but now they are in JCTDA budget.

Ms. Fox commented that she thinks that the revenues are conservative, and the budget is balanced. The TDA needs to approve this budget at their Regular Board meeting on June 15 @12:55. This meeting is public and can be accessed on Zoom.

JCTDA Director's Report/Staff Report

The director's report was emailed with the agenda. Mr. Breedlove gave highlights and updates.

- There is a slow-down in the increase in lodging in hotels and B&B's during the past year according to data from Smith Travel, however Airbnb collections are increasing.
- Visa Insights is confidential information; however, Mr. Breedlove did share that Visa spending is increasing in the county and this data is also used to know from what markets visitors are coming to Jackson County.
- The property purchase for the Cashiers East Village project, a \$150 million hotel and village at the Crossroads, has closed. It is scheduled to open in 2025. Details on the project and a press release will be sent to Board members.
- Mr. Breedlove has been working on the Capital Projects application and filling seats on the selection committee. The arts and culture position is yet to be filled and Mr. Breedlove welcomes suggestions for candidates. The initial presubmission meeting for applications is June 1.
- Mr. Sullivan did not add any information to his report that was emailed with the agenda.

Jackson County Chamber Directors Report

The reports for March and April were emailed as an attachment to the agenda. Ms. Spiro updated the report as follows:

- Concerts on the Creek starts this Friday to kick off the summer season.
- The Chamber has been working with businesses on how to handle their relocation due to the Highway 107 widening.
- Trout in the Classroom released trout into the Tuckaseegee River with funds from the Chamber's retail sales and Hook Line and Sinker festival.
- Five new businesses have opened in Downtown Sylva in the last six weeks.
- The Chamber's new website launched last Monday.
- Dillsboro Spring Fling is this Saturday.
- All kiosks have been cleaned and updated.
- Scott Greene asked how the Therapy Trail at Pinnacle Park is doing. Ms. Spiro responded that the Chamber is celebrating hikers who complete the trail. Many hikers have questions about the term "forest bathing". The Chamber had to explain the term many times prior to the QR code on signs, which has made a difference regarding the number of inquiries. There is also a new QR code at Pinnacle Park for hikers to obtain hiking permits in Pinnacle Park as a safety measure in case someone gets lost or injured.

Cashiers Area Chamber Director Report

The report for March and April were emailed as an attachment to the agenda. Ms. Edwards updated the report as follows:

- The Urban Planning Institute report was released on Monday and the full report will be sent to the Board members. There are significant observations about tourism in Jackson County.
- Ms. Edwards provided further information on the Kessler Cashiers East Village project and how the community is cooperating on making the project a reality.
- The Cashiers Area Visitors Guide has been published and is available. The Shopping and Dining Guide is at the printers.
- Ms. Lanning updated information on the activities at The Village Green.

Lou Hammond Group Annual Plan Presentation

The presentation was emailed with the agenda. Carter Long and Anne Bernard presented. The presentation began with a review of the last year's accomplishments and a review of the positive media comments about Jackson County.

Anne Bernard explained the LHG plans for publicizing and raising awareness of Jackson County in various target markets in the coming year. One of the goals is to have more overnight visits by social media influencers and travel writers. Another strategy is to promote sustainable travel and beautiful scenery in safe getaway for road trips, outdoor adventure, dining and culture.

LHG will continue to coordinate media visits, which hopefully will be in person to Jackson County with media representatives from markets that are targeted. The media targeted to visit Jackson County are in the travel industry, outdoor adventure, and food and beverage industries. LHG will focus on promotions and partnerships to develop mutual beneficial relationships and secure trade-for-mention co-branded opportunities for Jackson County.

Rawle Murdy Annual Plan Presentation

The Rawle Murdy presentation was emailed with the agenda. John Kautz and Rachel Covey presented highlights. Rawle Murdy has changed their name to BGRM.

Mr. Kautz discussed challenges, opportunities and goals for the coming fiscal year. The economic situation for gas prices and inflation is the number one challenge and creates uncertainty for tourism.

Opportunities are (1) people are ready to travel and COVID restrictions (2) 2023 is the Year of the Trail and Jackson County has many trails to promote (3) Jackson County has Pinnacle Park-the first certified forest therapy trail and (3) Secret Season to promote all year to increase awareness.

BGRM plans to target specific audiences in print and digitally as follows:

- Budget Traveler
- High Adventure Traveler
- Luxury R&R Traveler

Updates from Individual Board Members

Craig Smith informed the Board that the acquisition of Bear Lake has been finalized, giving Bear Lake new development and capital partners.

Nick Breedlove shared that the Balsam Mountain Inn has new owners after being vacant for several years and is being renovated.

Announcements

None

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m. by Mr. Jumper.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held June 16, 2022 via Zoom Conferencing unless otherwise posted.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Megan Orr", is written over a horizontal line.

Megan Orr, Secretary
Jackson County TDA Board

Approved: June 15, 2022