



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

MEETING MINUTES

Jackson County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting

May 17, 2023 (Wednesday) @1:00 p.m.

In Person Meeting and Remote Meeting

98 Cope Creek Rd., Suite D

Sylva, NC 28779

Call to Order/Roll Call

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

- **Members in attendance:** Executive Director Nick Breedlove; Daniel Fletcher, Chair; Megan Orr, Vice Chair; Ashlie Mitchell, Secretary; Board Members Robert Jumper Craig Smith, Darlene Fox, Dale Collins, Mandy Cantrell; Mark Jones, County Commissioner and Stephanie Edwards
- **Members absent:** Julie Spiro
- **Others in attendance:** Cheryl Osborne, Minutes Clerk; Carter Long & Anne Bernard, Lou Hammond Group; Kara Addy, TDA Social Media Manager; John Kautz, BGRM; Tiffany Henry, Jackson County Economic Development. Part-time attendance: Rachel Croyle Covey and Gena Shelnut, BGRM.

Approve Amended Agenda

MOTION: Ashlie Mitchell moved to approve the amended agenda. Dale Collins seconded. Motion carried.

Public Comment: None

Recognize Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and County Commissioner

Mr. Fletcher thanked the board members for their attendance.

Vice Chair and Secretary had no comments.

Mark Jones, County Commissioner, noted that the County Commissioners approved funding in the amount of \$50,000 for the Pinnacle Park master plan study.

Review and Approval of April 19, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Minutes of meeting is available on the JCTDA website. They were also attached to the agenda for this meeting. No comments were made.

MOTION: *Craig Smith moved to approve meeting minutes. Megan Orr seconded. The motion carried.*

Review and Approval of March 31, 2023 Financial Report

Ms. Fox presented the financial report as follows. Highlights for April include Occupancy Tax collections of \$127,313.30 with penalties of \$20.79 and YTD collection totals of \$1,936,443.91 which is 94% of the budget. Airbnb collections totaled \$45,273.62. The Home Away and VRBO total was \$10,624.77 and the VACASA, NC total was \$4,633.77. 67 accounts reported rentals for March rentals (increase of 2 accounts last). Collections were down 7.89% from the same period in 2022. The April 30, 2023 cash balance is \$360,085.42 with investments totaling \$3,000,000. April expenses were \$114,219.60 with FYTD expenses totaling \$1,402,330.91 with encumbrances of \$29,357.76 for a combined total of \$1,431,688.67, equaling 53.50% of the budget.

MOTION: *Dale Collins moved to approve the April financial report as presented. Ashlie Mitchell seconded. The motion carried.*

Review and Approve Contracts

BGRM (Buffalo Group Rawle Murdy)

BGRM is the JCTDA advertising agency. The contract remains basically the same as last year. The media spending is decreased to account for a slight decrease in revenue downturn and potentially economic slowdown. After six months, depending on economic factors, the contract can be amended to increase the media spending. We and BGRM feel confident that our goals can be attained with the current funds allocated for the various programs, Breedlove said.

Lou Hammond Group

Lou Hammond Group is the JCTDA public relations agency. The contract remains the same as last year with no substantial changes.

Love Communications (Search Engine Marketing)

This is a new independent contractor contract for Search Engine Marketing which will perform search intent analysis, audience segmentation analysis, and weekly industry trend updates. The company has previously worked with the Utah Office of Tourism to increase impressions on Utah's five national parks. The company is highly recommended and is approved by the Executive Committee.

Smoky Mountain News

The contract with Smoky Mountain News is for the publication of the Visitor's Guide and is standard. It is the same as last year.

Zartico

The Zartico contract is unchanged from last year.

Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce and Jackson County Chamber of Commerce

There have not been any adjustments made to these contracts in ten years. The contracts for services, space and utilities have been adjusted to consider inflation. The Cashier's Area Chamber contract is now \$85,889/year for services, \$11,946 for space and \$4,000 for utilities and a new computer.

The Jackson County Chamber of Commerce contract is now \$93,697/year, \$13,304 for space, \$2,264 for copier lease, and \$3,500 for utilities.

MOTION: *Craig Smith motioned to approve the BGRM contract, Lou Hammond Group contract, Love Communications contract, Smoky Mountain News contract, Zartico contract, Cashiers Area Chamber of Commerce contract, and Jackson County Chamber of Commerce contract. Ashlie Mitchell seconded. Motion carried.*

Draft Budget Presentation

Mr. Breedlove and Ms. Fox presented the draft budget for FY 2023/2024. The draft budget was emailed to the board with the agenda.

The total budget is \$3,399,472. The estimated Room Occupancy tax to be collected is \$2,500,000, a significant increase due to excess collections during COVID from leisure travel. TDA penalties \$5,000. Marketing and advertising \$10,000. Investment earnings \$50,000. Fund Balance appropriated is \$834,472. The Visitor Centers contracted services and rent have been increased.

The budget draft is presented to give the board time to review the budget and ask questions/clarifications prior to voting at the next meeting.

Executive Director goals in the budget are as follows:

- The primary goal is to oversee the first round of applications and funding for the Tourism Capital Project Fund.
- On-going goals are work-force development, visitor experience, accessibility and inclusivity.
- Ms. Addy's goals for social media are found on page 4 of the draft budget.
- Spending has decreased by approximately 10% to account for an economic slowdown in the coming year.
- \$5,000 has been allocated for a study on the economic impact of the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad on Dillsboro. Trips to Dillsboro are expected to increase this year.
- A graph on budget trends is included in this draft. It shows the projected tax collections since 2015, which have increased, and actual annual tax collections.
- Budget notes are included which analyzes trends.

- The draft budget includes a breakdown of the individual items of the budget, which have not changed significantly except for some increases to account for inflation. Capital projects and grants have been increased.
- There is a new section of the draft budget called Occupancy Tax Trends which discusses seasonality of revenue.

JCTDA Director's Brief

Mr. Breedlove sent the Director's Brief by email with the meeting agenda. Items not listed in the report are as follows:

- Mr. Breedlove noted that VISA now provides a forecast for visitor spending for the next three months and the data looks positive.
- Mr. Breedlove met with the new General Manager of High Hampton to discuss trends in tourism.

Jackson County Chamber of Commerce Director

The report was sent with the agenda of this meeting. Ms. Spiro was absent from the meeting.

Cashiers Area Chamber Director Report

The report was sent with the agenda of this meeting. Ms. Edwards highlighted the following:

- Recodify Cashiers is underway to update and improve the development regulations and development application review process in unincorporated Cashiers regulated districts. This initiative is in response to several future projects in Cashiers.
- Leadership Cashiers Class V program will begin May 19. The year-long curriculum will inform, connect and engage students in preparation for civic, government and community leadership service.

Lou Hammond Group annual plan presentation

Anne Bernard and Carter Long presented the highlights from last year's public relations work and LHG's goals for the 2023/2024 FY.

Highlights of accomplishments include the following:

- Total earned impressions equates to 1,300,465,804 to date*
- Total media equates to \$1,795,656 to date*
- Sampling of Media Coverage:
 - Travel + Leisure
 - Southern Living
 - Matador Network
 - Garden & Gun
 - InsideHook

- Conde Nast Traveler
- Cobb Life
- Palm Beach Illustrated
- Best Life
- Men's Journal
- WFLA-TV News Channel 8

*July 22–Mar 23

- Coordinated 11 media stays July 2022 – May 2023 in exchange for editorial coverage.
- Coordinated 3 influencer July 2022 – May 2023 in exchange for social coverage.

Goals and Strategies for FY 2023/2024:

- Increase in-state and regional overnight visitation to Jackson County
- Promote sustainable travel to Jackson County and attract visitors who will stay longer and spend more.
- Raise awareness of Jackson County for dining and culture, road trip stops, outdoor adventure, couple's trips & fun for the whole family Strategies.
- Leverage existing relationships with freelancers to garner additional coverage from single visit.
- Develop new relationships through individual media and influencer hosting.
- Create multiple story angles segmented by audience and region.
- Continue aggressive pitch program.

Rawle Murdy annual plan presentation

John Kautz, Gena Shelnutt and Rachel Covey presented the accomplishments in advertising and marketing and BGRM's goals for the coming fiscal year.

Accomplishments:

- Web Sessions Increase: 12.8%
- Conversion Rate Increase: 11%
- Social Media milestones during the three-month interim period (Dec '22 - Feb '23):
 - Eclipsed 30k Instagram followers
 - Consistent six-figure reach volume
 - A single post hit 800k+ views
- Do Both was our new creative theme that showcased Jackson Co. as a destination that offers it all in an affordable and close location to our target audiences
- Updated style guide
- Fall for the Mountains social photo contest
- Performance improvements via hosting change, moving pages/files to CDN and making certain pages 'static' (html) on website
- Added zip code to form submissions
- Conducted SEO backlink audit
- Took a digital-first approach with media vendors on paid media

- Identified new media vendors that extended our reach and exceeded performance benchmarks
- Incorporated Adara data into programmatic display - unusually high conversion rate of 24.8%
- Ran a video campaign with Equativ
- Updated eNewsletter template on E-mail
- Quarterly competitive reviews
- Upgraded Mailchimp account
- New welcome series to gather audience interest data

Goals:

GOAL 1:

Position Jackson County as the best destination for adventures/experiences in the NC mountains.

GOAL 2:

Drive accommodations and fill need periods in occupancy, without sacrificing efforts that keep the high occupancy/high-rate periods at peak performance.

New Business

None

Updates from Individual Board Members

Ashlie Mitchell updated the board on the activities in Cashiers coming up this summer.

Megan Orr told about the renovations taking place at the Holiday Inn Express.

Announcements

Mr. Breedlove reminded everyone that the next meeting will approve the budget. There will be a budget hearing on June 14 at 12:55 for public comment.

Adjourn

***MOTION:** Ashlie Mitchell motioned to adjourn. Dale Collins seconded. Motion carried.*

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25 P.M by Mr. Fletcher.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held June 14, 2023 in person at JCTDA headquarters unless otherwise posted.

Ashlie Mitchell, Secretary

Jackson County TDA Board. Approved: June 14, 2023