

Craven County Tourism Development Authority -  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Chamber of Commerce Boardroom  
Wednesday, December 13, 2023  
Minutes

**Present**

Chairman Paresh Pankhavalala  
Dan Roberts  
Matthew Paul  
Tracy Du Peza  
Bill Stafford  
Tyler Griffin  
Commissioner Brenda Wilson  
Craig Warren, Ex-Officio  
Melissa Riggle, Executive  
Director

**Excused**

Vice-Chairman Nancy Figiel  
Commissioner Tom Mark

**Guest**

Judy Avery  
Brice Connors  
Matt Potts  
Tammy Rodriguez  
Pam Holder  
Sabrina Bengel  
Gary Curry  
Tracy Stuckrath

**I. CALL TO ORDER-ROLL CALL:**

Chairman Paresh Pankhavalala called the Craven County Tourism Development Authority Board Meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and thanked everyone for being there.

**II. ROLL CALL:** Tammy Rodriguez conducted a roll call. (A quorum was present.)

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Chairman Paresh Pankhavalala asked if there were any questions regarding the minutes of the November Board Meeting. Dan Roberts motioned to accept all the minutes in the board packet. Tracy Du Peza seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**IV. FINANCIAL REPORT:** Craig Warren started with the Occupancy Tax Collection Report, noting taxes collected in November for hotel stays in October were \$220,039 compared to \$206,258 for the same time last year. Year to date, the total is \$916,012 compared to \$909,395. Online travel companies made up 18.6% of the total collected. There was \$123 in penalties and \$0 in late receipts.

Moving on to the financials, room tax revenues for November 2023 were \$69,367 compared to \$65,185 last year, showing a less than 1% change. The year-to-date room tax rate was \$403,587 compared to \$402,179 in 2022. The yearly room tax rate is slightly above by .35%. Collections are running at 49.16% through 41.67% of the fiscal year. On the expenditure side, you will see the total spent for November was \$55,559 compared to \$66,494 last year. Total expenditure is running slightly ahead of budget at 43.35% of 41.6%. Total revenues collected have exceeded our expenses by \$46,424.

As of November 30, 2023, the balance sheet shows that the cash balance is \$622,491. Adding to the net income through November of \$46,424, the fund balance is \$674,805. Bill Stafford made a motion to approve the financials. Matthew Paul seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

V. **STR Report:** Chairman Paresh Pankhavalva shared the STR report. New Bern & Havelock weekly average occupancy is around 68.4%. The New Bern ADR is \$142.20, and the Havelock ADR is \$91.53. The New Bern YTD ADR is \$135.5, and the Havelock YTD ADR is \$95.5.

VI. **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:** Melissa Riggle updated Visitor stats for November: 497 New Bern Walk-ins and 94 Havelock Walk-ins. There were 148 emails, 17 phone calls, and 571 Southern Living Leads. | Top places of origin are North Carolina, Virginia, Florida, New Jersey, & Ohio. | Top attractions are Walking Tours, Tryon Palace/NC History Center, Trolley Tours, Local Events, and Bear Maps. | **VNB Highlights:** Attended the NCTIA Legislative Public Policy Dinner and the NCTIA Tourism Awards in Raleigh. | America 250 Committee Meeting. Melissa attended the EWN Airport Authority Board Meeting, C1A Planning, Advocacy Committee Meeting, Placer Training, Weekly EWN Marketing Committee Meetings, NC Women in Technology Planning Meeting, Rotary Familiarization Tour, IG Influencer Itinerary Development, Gospel Fest 2024 Planning Meeting. **Group Business:** We had over \$333,000 in lost business due to availability and space. **Placer AI:** Welcomed over 1,000 visitors to Havelock Tree Lighting on December 2. Since November 24, over 25,000 visitors (greater than 40 miles) have visited downtown, and Tryon Palace saw over 2,000 for Candlelight. The New Bern Tree Lighting saw 4.9 thousand visitors and 4.4 thousand for the air show in Union Point Park. Live Window Displays Friday saw over 18,000, peak time between 6-8 pm with 8.9 thousand visitors. \*Beary Merry Events did not have the 40+ mile filter\*| **Earned Media:** Our State reposted an article from 2 years ago that featured the Five Points area. This was worth \$50,000 earned media. **State:** Melissa attended the legislative policy dinner, which was attended by four state legislative members, including Jim Perry and Vicki Sawyer. It was a 2-hour dinner that discussed the importance of tourism to our state. Melissa will be attending the AENC trade show this week. Chris Cavanaugh will join us in January to conduct a work session with the board. Tammy will spearhead a county-wide calendar meeting with several large event planning groups to discuss how to schedule better events to work together or to help not overlap each other. Ideal Living will host a convention in New Jersey in January for relocation.

This year, we participated in our first Live Windows Display, and we won 2nd place in the judge's vote and 1<sup>st</sup> place in the viewer's choice!!

**Marketing:** Brice Connors gave an update optimizing the holiday efforts, including the new OTT stream, The RAL Today Holiday Blitz, and Raleigh on a budget. | We created new Visit New Bern Brand Guidelines| We did a media professional website upfit so media members can utilize that when they work with us. | Creating a Craven County TDA Advocacy Geared Website| Influencer Meg Sangimino was in the market Dec 1-3 to promote our budget-friendly itinerary and holiday events. In 24 hours, her real hit almost 100,000 views. She highlighted budget travel, holiday travel, and pet-friendly travel. | Bear Town Bear Brochure is in for a redesign. | The RALtoday holiday campaign begins with two mini-articles, display ads, and engaging email newsletters. | Published two press releases regarding our NCTIA Awards. Awards were won for Arts in April and Trail to Tryon.

Matt Potts provided updates on social media ad campaigns (Google, Facebook, Instagram); Meta Ads: 14,836 clicks, Google Ads: 11,005 clicks | Ellie: Flights saw a 1.7% increase MOM, and parking saw a 1.8% increase MOM. Accommodations saw a redirect of 490 bookings | Placer AI: we have compared visitor traffic to the downtown area year-to-year. Results show similar patterns with occupancy tax collection. The average household income is \$59,000, 67.6% identify as white, and the average household size is 2.4 individuals. In addition, 1/3 have obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. This

data helps us to identify our target market but also helps identify areas of opportunity that we need to expand into other demographics.

**Print:** Our State: Full-page ad placed in December, Southern Living: a spread was placed into January/February issue, Heart of NC Weddings: A spread has been placed in the 2024 issue, NC Travel Guide: a full-page ad placed in the 2024 issue. We have locked in a new deal with Raleigh Magazine  
**Earned Media:** Raleigh Magazine: Tammy made this connection during the Visit NC Media Mission a few months back. The title is Feel the Burn and is in the November issue.

## **VII. HAVELOCK TOURISM & EVENT CENTER DIRECTOR'S REPORT:**

Pam Holder: November Revenue: \$18,324 Statistics: Visitors 94, Event Gusts 1,189, Total Visitors 1,283 Telephone: 15, Email: 8, Ellie; 0. | Website statistics: New Visitors 567 Total Visitors 573 Page Views 5,776.

**VIII. NEW BUSINESS:** a. Gospel Fest: Melissa Riggle introduced Bonnita Simmons and Rob Brock from Tried by Fire, a nonprofit organization that helps women transition back into society after prison. Gospel Fest is an event that raised money for My Sister's House, run by Tried by Fire. The 2024 event will be held on May 11 at Craven Community College from 12 pm to 5 pm. This event will feature local performers, performers from across the state, and even others from out of state. They want to see this grow from an afternoon event to an entire weekend festival, bringing multiple Gospel singers and workshops. They are requesting grant funding of \$13,500 to help market this event and increase its exposure. Funds would stay within the TDA and would be used to help with marketing promotions. Discussion among the board inquired about the ability to shift the date due to it already being a heavy event weekend with it being Mother's Day and Graduation weekend. Rob & Bonnita stated that this year's event location was donated in kind, so they did not have the option to choose the date. But they would like to see this event moved to a different date and location as it grows (ideally the Convention Center). Tracy Du Peza asked for additional marketing plans since nonprofits can advertise for free on local radio and TV. Melissa explained that those outlets are suitable for local advertising, and digital marketing placement can help bring in visitors from across the state and even surrounding states. It can also be customized to reach the demographic most interested in a Gospel Festival. Tyler Griffin made the motion to approve the grant request. Dan Roberts seconded the motion. Chairman Paresh Pankhavalala asked for the board's vote to move 13,500 from the fund balance to be used for the Gospel Festival. The motion was approved unanimously.

b. FCB Account Review and Recommendations: Dan Roberts met with Jeff Medlin from First Citizens to discuss savings options. After reviewing the options, we spoke to Craig Warren. Craig discovered that the state has a money market fund backed by US government security. It pays 5% and is liquid in one day. It is based on a daily rate, which means it could change rates in the future. Jeff suggested that we add fraud protection to our checking account. Melissa consulted with our insurance representative and discovered that we do not have any cyber protection or general liability for our employees. We will be receiving quotes for these.

c. Muck Rack: Melissa Riggle tabled this topic till January.

**IX. OLD BUSINESS:** a. Melissa Riggle gave an update on the Strategic Destination Planning; Chris will be back in January to continue gathering information. We will have a work session following the January board meeting.

b. Melissa gave an update on EWN Marketing: Since September, American Airlines, rates have been adjusted and lowered. They realized that they had been inflating rates driving traffic to Greenville. Andy is still having in-depth conversations with Americans to regain our market share. We will be attending the airline conference in Phoenix again in February 2024. We are continuing talks with other budget airlines to entice them to relocate to New Bern.

**X. MEMBER COMMENTS:** Merry Christmas!

**XI. ADJOURNMENT:**

Commissioner Brenda Wilson made a motion to adjourn. Tyler Griffin seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 11:08 am.