

Craven County Tourism Development Authority -  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Chamber of Commerce Boardroom  
Wednesday, February 14, 2024  
Minutes

**Present**

Chairman Paresh Pankhavala  
Vice-Chairman Nancy Figiel  
Dan Roberts  
Tracy Du Peza  
Bill Stafford  
Tyler Griffin  
Commissioner Tom Mark  
Commissioner Brenda Wilson  
Craig Warren, Ex-Officio  
Melissa Riggle, Executive  
Director

**Excused**

Matthew Paul

**Guest**

Judy Avery  
Brice Connors  
Sabrina Bengel  
Michele Watson  
Laura Ingram

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

Chairman Paresh Pankhavala called the Craven County Tourism Development Authority Board Meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. and thanked everyone for being there.

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

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Chairman Paresh Pankhavala asked if there were any questions about the minutes of the January Board Meeting. Vice-Chairman Nancy Figiel motioned to accept all the minutes in the board packet. Dan Roberts seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

**IV. FINANCIAL REPORT:** Craig Warren started with the Occupancy Tax Collection Report, noting taxes collected in January for hotel stays in December were \$142,256 compared to \$155,562 for the same time last year. The year-to-date total is \$1,227,488, slightly under last year's totals with a 1.1% difference. Online travel companies made up 25.7% of the total collected. There was \$0 in penalties and \$0 in late receipts.

Moving on to the financials, room tax revenues for January 2024 were \$44,846 compared to \$49,040 last year, showing an 8.6% change. The year-to-date room tax rate was \$501,780 compared to \$506,693 in 2023. The yearly room tax rate is slightly down by 1%. The investment account saw an interest collection of about \$862 of the initial deposit of \$300,000. On the expenditure side, you will see that the total spent for January was \$50,432 compared to \$41,088 last year. Total expenditure is running below the budget at 54% of 58% of the fiscal year. Total revenues collected have exceeded our expenditures by \$41,566.

Looking at the balance sheet as of January 31, 2024, the cash and investment balance is \$626,814. A new line has been added for NC Capital Management Trust. Adding to the net income through January of \$41,566 to the fund balance gives a total of \$669,948. Dan Roberts made a motion to approve the financials. Bill Stafford seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

V. **STR Report:** Chairman Paresh Pankhavala shared the STR report. New Bern occupancy is 49.9%, and Havelock occupancy is 37.1% for December 2023. The New Bern ADR is \$119.93, and the Havelock ADR is \$83.48. The New Bern YTD ADR is \$133.87, and the Havelock YTD ADR is \$94.33. The New Bern RevPar is \$59.86, and the Havelock RevPar is \$30.94. The New Bern YTD RevPar is \$88.95, and the Havelock RevPar is \$47.34.

VI. **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:** Melissa Riggle updated Visitor stats for January: 287 New Bern Walk-ins, and 47 Havelock Walk-ins. There were 224 emails, 26 phone calls, and 131 Southern Living Leads. | Top places of origin are North Carolina, New Jersey, Virginia, New York, & Pennsylvania. | Top attractions are Walking Tours, Tryon Palace/NC History Center, Local Events, Dining, and Shopping. | **VNB Highlights:** | Tammy attended the America 250 Committee Meeting and held the first collaborative event planning meeting| Melissa attended the EWN Airport Authority Board Meeting, Downtown Business Council, Advocacy Committee Meeting, Weekly EWN Marketing Committee Meetings, Chamber Board of Directors Interagency |Opened an account with NC Capital Management Trust, ACH Positive Pay Fraud Control & Reverse Positive Pay Fraud Control | Placer Demonstration for Craven County Parks & Recreation. | Distributed Trail to Tryon sponsor packages; check presentation to the American Legion will be the week of January 25. | Judy Avery exhibited in the 2 Ideal Living Shows (Parsippany, NJ & Greenwich, CT) for retirement and relocation. On average, a person interested in relocation will visit a destination 2-3 before deciding to move, then return for closing. In addition, people relocating may stay additional nights in hotels during move-in or construction builds/remodels. **Group Business:** Tarshi attended the Meeting Professionals International winter conference in Asheville and had several promising leads. NC Women in Tech Summit has locked in their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in New Bern. No lost business this month. **Placer AI:** Downtown January metrics show we have seen a decline in visitors, but we knew post-COVID travel would taper off. Jan – Feb 10 shows 32.4K visitors, down by 4%. **Media:** Our state magazine partnered with Tryon Palace to create a great article. | Business North Carolina had a feature article on Smoke from The Flame. | The Sunn Journal posted an article about our awards for Trail to Tryon and Arts in April. **Upcoming Events:** We will attend the Travel and Adventure show in D.C., The Hunt Air Service conference in Arizona, The NC Main Street conference, and the NC Visit NC 365 conference in Greenville.

**Marketing:** Brice Connors gave an update from BluePrint. | A New Family Friendly Itinerary has been created | Gospel Fest Landing Page has been built out | Arts in April landing page prep. | In January, based on Placer data, the digital strategy was modified to focus on New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. New York and Pennsylvania are already showing movement.

Focusing on these new markets can bring more affluent travelers into our town, which means more people in our stores and restaurants. Melissa demonstrated Placer at the Downtown Business Council meeting and showed that, on average, hundreds of people return to the downtown area after 5 pm. Placer data can help businesses see different trends and plan accordingly. Michele Watson shared that 75% of her customers came from timeshares and inquired about how we can bring in more highly affluent visitors. Dan Roberts advised that CIA and Jeff Wood have been working hard to get bigger companies to the industrial park and that we are nearly out of space.

**Digital:** (Google, Facebook, Instagram); Meta Ads: 14,864 clicks, Google Ads: 15,681 clicks | Ellie: Flights saw a slight decrease, but there was an increase in food & drink

**Print:** 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, Main & Broad: spread in the February issue.

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

Melissa Riggle: January Revenue: \$18,263.29 Statistics: Visitors 72, Event Gusts 541, Total Visitors 613 Telephone: 15, Email: 7, Ellie; 0. | Website statistics: New Visitors 555 Total Visitors 560 Page Views 7,752.

**VIII. NEW BUSINESS:**

- a. America's 250<sup>th</sup> Grant Opportunity: The department of Cultural Resources has put together grant opportunities that counties can apply for. Jack Veit requested that any funds be turned over to TDA for marketing.
- b. Budget Committee Appointments: Nancy Figiel, Dan Roberts, Matt Paul, Bill Stafford, Melissa Riggle, and Craig Warren will be this year's members.

**IX. OLD BUSINESS:** No Old Business.

- X. MEMBER COMMENTS:** Craig Warren: Audit has been completed. Dan Roberts: The Chamber will be hosting their anniversary dinner. They are celebrating 125 years. Sabrina Bangel: Tryon Palace Seafood will open as Front Street Fish Co. with a market and restaurant. Brad's Legacy/Pepsi Museum has brought in Armstrong McGuire to do a case study for fundraising. Hopefully, the announcement of the location will be soon. Melissa Riggle: A long-range strategic plan is in the works for plans to work with all the committees mentioned.

**XI. ADJOURNMENT:**

Bill Stafford made a motion to adjourn. Vice-chairman Nancy Figiel seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:21 am.