

Craven County Tourism Development Authority -  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Chamber of Commerce Boardroom  
Wednesday, January 10, 2024  
Minutes

**Present**

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

**Excused**

Commissioner Tom Mark  
Tyler Griffin

**Guest**

Judy Avery  
Brice Connors  
Tammy Rodriguez  
Sabrina Bengel  
Gary Curry  
Chris Cavanaugh  
Melinda Mowry

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

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

Chairman Paresh Pankhavala asked if there were any questions regarding the December Board Meeting minutes. Vice-Chairman Nancy Figiel motioned to accept all the minutes in the board packet. Dan Roberts seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

**IV. FINANCIAL REPORT:** Craig Warren started with the Occupancy Tax Collection Report, noting taxes collected in December for hotel stays in November were \$169,219 compared to \$175,967 for the same time last year. This is a decrease of about 3.8%. The year-to-date total is \$1,085,231 which mirrors last year's totals with a \$100 difference. Online travel companies made up 22% of the total collected. There were \$3 in penalties and \$0 in late receipts.

Moving on to the financials, room tax revenues for December 2023 were \$53,346 compared to \$55,473 last year, showing a 3.8% change. The year-to-date room tax rate was \$456,934 compared to \$457,652 in 2022. The yearly room tax rate is slightly down by 5%. On the expenditure side, you will see the total spent for December was \$53,483 compared to \$46,298 last year. Total expenditure is running in line with the budget at 49.8%. Total revenues collected have exceeded our expenditures by \$46,290.

During our last board meeting, Tracy Du Peza asked about the grant-funded to the Gospel Festival. Melissa Riggle said that the funds had not been transferred yet, so they do not appear in this month's financial report.

As of December 31, 2023, the balance sheet shows that the cash balance is \$631,954. Adding to the net income through December of \$46,290, the fund balance is \$674,671. We have opened an investment

account for the TDA, so in the next few months, you will see some adjustments to the balance sheet. Dan Roberts made a motion to approve the financials. Tracy Du Peza seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

- V. **STR Report:** Chairman Paresh Pankhavalva shared the STR report. New Bern & Havelock's weekly average occupancy is around 68%. The New Bern ADR is \$126.75, and the Havelock ADR is \$87.56. The New Bern YTD ADR is \$134.82, and the Havelock YTD ADR is \$95.05. The New Bern RevPAR is \$74.81, and the Havelock RevPAR is \$36.70. The New Bern YTD RevPAR is \$91.64, and the Havelock RevPAR is \$48.86.

Group discussion on how the hotels are doing on business vs leisure travel. January and February are a little slow, but business is picking up. The convention center has events booked every weekend starting in February and throughout summer. While events drive local traffic, they're not bringing in as much out-of-town traffic as businesses. Sabrina Bengel asked how we could enhance local events to market to out-of-town visitors. Tammy Rodriguez will be hosting a calendar of events meeting later this week to talk about organizations collaborating when scheduling events to maximize New Bern's events.

- VI. **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:** Melissa Riggle updated visitor stats for December: 331 New Bern and 112 Havelock Walk-ins. There were 127 emails, 26 phone calls, and 177 Southern Living Leads. | Top places of origin are North Carolina, Florida, Virginia, South Carolina, & California. | Local Events, NC Symphony, Walking Tours, Tryon Palace/NC History Center, and Shopping are Top attractions. | **VNB Highlights:** Exhibited in the AENC Trade Show | America 250 Committee Meeting. | Melissa attended the EWN Airport Authority Board Meeting, C1A Planning, Advocacy Committee Meeting, Weekly EWN Marketing Committee Meetings, and NC Women in Technology Site Visit, | 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. | I distributed Trail to Tryon sponsor packages. Check presentation to the American Legion will be the week of January 25. | **Group Business:** We had over \$104,972 in lead production for December. The lost business was due to unavailable dates and rates being too high. **Placer AI:** New Year's Eve Bear Drop saw around 10,000 attendees; about 2,200 were visitors from out of town.

**Marketing:** Brice Connors gave an update informing us that Matt Potts is no longer with BluePrint. In Mid-2023, we brought in an account executive to help on the account, and she has successfully collaborated with Melissa and Tammy. | 2024 travel trends: the use of generic AI, Sober Travel, Slow Travel, Gig Travel, Private Group Travel, and Skip-Gen Travel | Updates continue to be made on the Craven County TDA Advocacy Website | A New Girls Weekend Itinerary is being created | Bear Town Bear Brochure is in for a redesign. | Arts in April Prep

**Digital:** (Google, Facebook, Instagram); Meta Ads: 13,686 clicks, Google Ads: 13,477 clicks | Ellie: Accommodations saw a slight decrease, but there was a significant increase in current event traffic | With the cost of CPC rising, we are piloting a carousel ad campaign in January to lower CPCs. Placer AI: allows us to enter new markets we have not been utilizing as we should.

**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.

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

Melissa Riggle: December Revenue: \$19,118.04 Statistics: Visitors 115, Event Gusts 983, Total Visitors 1,098 Telephone: 9, Email: 6, Ellie; 0. | Website statistics: New Visitors 261 Total Visitors 267 Page Views 614.

**VIII. NEW BUSINESS:** Tammy will be hosting a collaborative meeting for the calendar of events with several organizations throughout the county. Please join her at 10 am tomorrow if you would like to attend.

**IX. OLD BUSINESS:** There will be a working session for the board members directly after this meeting with Chris Cavanagh. Guests are welcome to stay.

**X. MEMBER COMMENTS:** Bill Stafford received a call from a new hotel looking to relocate to New Bern.

**XI. ADJOURNMENT:**

Bill Stafford made a motion to adjourn. Vice-chairman Nancy Figiel seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:03 am.