

Craven County Tourism Development Authority -
Board of Directors Meeting
Chamber of Commerce Boardroom
Wednesday, November 15, 2023
Minutes

Present

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

Excused

Commissioner Tom Mark
Matthew Paul

Guest

Judy Avery
Brice Connors
Matt Potts
Tammy Rodriguez
Pam Holder
Sabrina Bengel
Tarshi McCoy
Melinda Mowry
Garry Curry

I. CALL TO ORDER-ROLL CALL:

Chairman Paresh Pankhavala 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 Pankhavala asked for any questions regarding the minutes of the October 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 October for hotel stays in September were \$227,628 compared to \$226,790 for the same time last year. This sets a record for September. The year-to-date total is \$695,974 compared to \$703,137. Online travel companies made up 19.6% of the total collected. There was \$548 in penalties and \$1,717 in late receipts.

Moving on to the financials, room tax revenues for October 2023 were \$71,759 compared to \$71,495 last year, showing a less than 1% change. The year-to-date room tax rate was \$334,220. The yearly room tax rate is down by 1.1%. On the expenditure side, you will see the total spent for October was \$68,644 compared to \$57,463 last year. There is a credit in the contractual line from our partners with Placer AI. Total expenditure is running slightly ahead of budget at 36.6% of 33%. Total revenues collected have exceeded our expenditures by \$32,494.

As of September 30, 2023, the balance sheet shows that the cash balance is \$600,087. Adding to the net income through October of \$32,494 to the fund balance gives a total of \$660,875. Discuss what can be done with the fund balance to invest these funds into an interest-bearing account or CD. The board agreed to have Melissa look into options and report back. Bill Stafford made a motion to approve the

financials. Commissioner Brenda Wilson seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

- V. **STR Report:** Chairman Paresh Pankhavala shared the STR report. New Bern's weekly average occupancy is around 70%. Havelock's weekly average occupancy is around 55%. The New Bern ADR is \$143.82, and the Havelock ADR is \$95.82. The New Bern YTD ADR is \$134.74, and the Havelock YTD ADR is \$95.93.

Leisure travel is slowing down. More focus on business and group travel. As they grow, we need to monitor some of our neighboring communities, such as Edenton and Washington. In addition to requiring more hotels, we need to focus on events and new attractions to bring visitors into New Ben.

- VI. **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT:** Melissa Riggle updated **Visitor stats for October:** 722 New Bern and 126 Havelock Walk-ins. There were 161 emails, 20 phone calls, and 920 Southern Living Leads. | Top places of origin are North Carolina, New York, Florida, Virginia, & South Carolina. | Top attractions are Walking Tours, Tryon Palace/NC History Center, Trolley Tours, Local Events, and Bear Maps. | **VNB Highlights:** Melissa was a guest speaker at the Rotary meeting. | Trail to Tryon was held last weekend. | Tammy is working on three media projects from the Visit NC Media Mission she attended last month. | Met with C1A to present on Placer AI | VNB is also working with Gospel Fest 2024 planning to attract large audiences. | We are also meeting with several groups (Tryon Palace, Historical Society, SARs, DARs) to plan events for our nation's 250th anniversary. **Group Business:** We generated over \$300,000 in group leads and had over \$700,000 in lead production. We had over \$300,000 in lost business due to inventory levels. **Placer AI:** Welcomed over 7,000 visitors to Chili Fest in Havelock. | Mum Fest welcomed over 55,000 visitors over the weekend. | Bear-Not-So-Scary Halloween, we welcomed over 6,000 people for trick-or-treating and over 18,000 on Saturday **Trail to Tryon.** We received many compliments on how well-organized the race was. Thank you to all the behind-the-scenes staff (Judy, BluePrint, VNB) for all their hard work. We had 308 registrations this year, with 50% being from out-of-market. | **State:** Melissa attended New York Media Mission with select destinations from the state (Boon, Asheville, Raleigh, Chapel Hill) and met with various travel writers, freelancers, and digital influencers from various blogs and magazines. | We will be leaving today for the NCTIA annual conference and hope to return with a few more awards. | Melissa will be attending the AENC annual trade show in December.

Marketing: Brice Connors updated travel statistics, highlighting the need for budget-friendly travel. Staying proactive, we have created a new itinerary focused on budget-friendly attractions. We will bring a budget influencer/travel hacks to showcase this unique itinerary. | Influencer Meg Sangimino will be in the market Dec 1-3 to promote our budget-friendly itinerary and holiday events. | Fall photo shoot is complete. | Bear Town Bear Brochure is in for a redesign. | The RALtoday holiday campaign begins with two mini-articles, display ads, and engaging email newsletters. | We've added the Red, Gold, Black, and Brown parking lots to our Google Business Profile to help visitors identify parking.

Matt Potts provided updates on social media ad campaigns (Google, Facebook, Instagram); Meta Ads: 17,028 clicks, Google Ads: 12,505 clicks | Ellie: Flights saw a .5% decrease MOM, and the newly added parking options captured 6.1% of engaged traffic | Placer AI: we can use this data to not only track out visitor traffic, but we can compare our competitor markets as well.

Print: Our State: full page ad in the October Special Interest Publication: Local's Guide to Downtown. Southern Living: A spread was placed into the January/February issue. Heart of NC Weddings: A 2-page spread has been submitted for the 2024 issue.

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

Melissa Riggle: A farewell reception was for Erin Knight, Havelock Chamber Director. There was a charity ball for Arabian Court #42 with more than 400 guests. Convention South recognized the Tourist & Event Center with the 2023 Readers' Choice Award. | October Revenue: \$24,362
Statistics: Visitors 126, Event Gusts 1,467, Total Visitors 1,593 Telephone: 11, Email:8, Ellie; 1.
Website statistics: New Visitors 669 Total Visitors 677 Page Views 3,412.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS: No New Business

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

X. MEMBER COMMENTS: Melinda Mowry: We will have a Thanksgiving buffet at the DoubleTree. Tracy Du Peza: The 200 block of Pollock St will host the annual B&B Christmas Open House on December 3. Tammy Rodriguez: Calendar Updates. Mayor Lewis of Havelock announced last night that the Phoenix landfill near Tucker Creek has been granted grant funds to be cleaned up and used as a recreational facility. Sabrina Bengel: Beary Merry is still looking for sponsorships. Beary Merry will be doing year-round events to help bring visitors downtown.

XI. ADJOURNMENT:

Dan Roberts made a motion to adjourn. Tracy Du Peza seconded the motion at 10:36 am.