

**Tryon Tourism Board**  
*(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)*  
**Minutes**  
**February 6, 2023**  
**4:30 P.M.**

Vice-Chairman Jackson announced her resignation effective February 2023. Tryon BOC Representative Bill Crowell called the meeting to order at 4:35 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with five members present.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep; Marie Mason-Freeman; Allan Casavant, Jeff Fissel, and John Vining

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** Jim Fatland, Tryon Interim Town Manager & Ex-Officio Treasurer; Meg Rogers, Secretary; and Michelle Newman, Tryon Downtown Director

**Welcome New Member John Vining**

Crowell welcomed newly appointed member John Vining.

**Approve Minutes from November 7, 2022**

Minutes from the November 7, 2022 regular meeting were reviewed. Casavant made a motion to approve the November 7, 2022 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mason Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

**Approve Financial Reports for November & December 2022 and January 2023**

The FY 2022-23 Tryon Tourism Development Fund financial reports for November & December 2022 and January 2023 were presented by Ex-Officio Treasurer Fatland.

Occupancy tax collections for the month of October 2022 remitted to the Town in November 2022 totaled \$3,682.13. Total Revenues for the month of November 2022 were \$3,682.13. November 2022 expenditures totaled \$1,714.68. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund revenues as of November 30, 2022 totaled \$12,813.08. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund expenditures as of November 30, 2022 totaled \$10,445.32. Fund balance as of November 30, 2022 was \$65,685.65.

Occupancy tax collections for the month of November 2022 remitted to the Town in December 2022 totaled \$2,698.84. Total Revenues for the month of December 2022 were \$2,698.84. December 2022 expenditures totaled \$1,447.62. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund revenues as of December 31, 2022 totaled \$15,511.92. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund expenditures as of December 31, 2022 totaled \$13,787.78. Fund balance as of December 31, 2022 was \$65,048.96.

Occupancy tax collections for the month of December 2022 remitted to the Town in January 2023 totaled \$1,313.07. Total Revenues for the month of January 2023 were \$1,313.07. January 2023 expenditures totaled \$1,447.62. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund revenues as of January 31, 2023 totaled \$16,824.99. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund expenditures as of January 31, 2023 totaled \$16,208.96. Fund balance as of January 31, 2023 was \$64,022.54.

Fatland noted that the Ending Cash Balance date for the January 2023 Monthly Report was incorrect and requested amending that date to January 31, 2023. Mason-Freeman made a motion to approve the monthly financial reports for November 2022 and December 2022 as presented and the Monthly Financial Report for January 2023 as amended. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

### **Website & Social Media**

Tracey Daniels was not present but had submitted a printed report for January 2023:

#### **Social Media Status Report-ExploreTryon Facebook Page (for last 30 days)**

- 3-5 posts per week; tourism focused,
- Total Facebook likes – 7,673 (21 new past 30 days, 59 new since November 2022)
- Average post reach: back up to 5,200 (last report in November: down from 4,588 to 3,700)
- Post engagement: 817 shares, likes, etc. (238 likes, 11 comments, 158 links to website.)
- Most liked posts = KD's brunch post; Upstairs Artspace 3 New Exhibits
- Note: Posted 12/29 Flat Rock Together blog did a fantastic feature story on Tryon Toy Makers which had 129 comments for this singular post
- Will focus on Valentine's Day and upcoming 4<sup>th</sup> Fridays

#### **Website**

- Business Changes and updates
  - Removed the following:**
    - Huckleberries
    - Mountainscape Gallery
    - Taste of Olives & Grapes
  - Added or updated the following:**
    - Haven Salon and Boutique
    - Rylee Woods Boutique
    - Avalon
    - Carri Bass Studio (new location)
    - Marengo Restaurant
    - Big Guns Coffee
    - New Outlook (new location)
    - Watermark Studio (new location)
    - Pop-up shop (on Depot Street)
    - Gloessence Studio/Skylar Talbot
    - Back Alley Bud Bar
    - Alcove Beauty Salon
- Lodging Changes & Updates
  - Removed the following:**
    - Alicia's Dream
    - Mostly Hall
    - Renvyle Cottage
  - Added or updated the following:**
    - Peaceful Tryon Cabin
    - Embury Street Cottage
    - Laurelwood
    - Cozy Cottage
    - Brick Bungalow
    - Loft on Trade Street
    - Tryon Mountain Manor

### **Miscellaneous**

- Rack cards replenished at NC Welcome Centers, Asheville Visitors' Center requested rack cards, sent week of 1/23/2023
- Answered incoming questions
- Attended Polk County Tourism meeting in December
- Continued communication with Melinda Massey at Polk County Tourism regarding upcoming winter events and updating the shared calendar

### **New Topic/New Business**

- Daniels would be at TDDA-organized "Arts Brainstorming Meeting" on Tuesday Feb 7, 2023 to represent Explore Tryon and tourism connections.
- Daniels requested change to different meeting date or permit her to submit written reports when Authority meeting dates conflict with dates she is required to attend meetings in Flat Rock.. The Authority members approved allowing Daniels to submit written reports for those conflict dates in lieu of attending.
- Daniels requested funds to attend the regional NC 360 Tourism Conference which would be held in Asheville NC this year. She requested \$250 funding for a one-day registration on Tuesday, March 7, 2023 which included the sessions that would be most valuable for Tryon Tourism Development Authority reference information. The list of workshops Daniels proposed to attend was provided..

Crowell made a motion to approve up to \$250 for a one-day registration to the NC 360 Tourism Conference for Tracey Daniels to attend as requested. Motion was seconded by Mason-Freeman. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Vining asked if there was any advertising on the ExploreTryon.com website. Newman reported that there was none at this time. Advertising was not prohibited specifically by ordinance, bylaw or statute. Crowell stated that, in the past, the Authority had prohibited promoting of merchants or inns outside of Tryon, NC. Vining suggested that website advertising could generate more revenue to promote tourism. It was noted that legal issues might arise if the advertising rules were not clearly spelled out and fairly applied to all advertising applicants.

### **SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Assignments**

The SWOT plan outline developed by the Authority Members with assistance from former Town Manager Zach Ollis and former Downtown Director Paige Henderson was reviewed with more recently updated priority areas listed as 1) Make Tryon a known tourism destination across NC, 2) Capitalize on unique regional attractions to draw visitors, 3) Increase and support local occupancy numbers, and 4) Town resources kick in to assist. Authority members proceeded to brainstorm on top priority needs which included more downtown parking and increasing traffic to Tryon's attractions such as the new Melrose Mountain Climbing Park. Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) was now in charge of gateway and central event signage. Vining asked which month of the year currently had the least tourism traffic and was told by Newman that would be January. High cost of advertising in major regional tourism magazines such as Our State and Upstate SC magazines and difficulties of building co-op advertising groups to pursue high cost advertising were discussed briefly. The Tourism matching grant program was discussed briefly (see update below Other). Vining suggested exploring advertising to promote tourism during the slow months, January to March. Website-social media contractor Daniels

would be the contact for promoting any events planned for the slow months on Tryon Tourism's website and social media pages. Mason-Freeman and Casavant asked about advertising in outdoor sports magazines and online sites to reach people already coming to this area for Saluda's zipline and outfitters destination businesses. Vining suggested developing a short list to hand out to visitors at local businesses when their visiting customers asked retail staff what to do in Tryon. Newman stated that ExploreTryon.com website had an events calendar, things to do pages and searchable clearinghouse of area information. Comparative value of billboards vs. print brochures vs. online information in relation to target market age groups was discussed briefly. Fissel pointed out the visual aspect of e-newsletters and websites in promotions used by TIEC for new attractions and services. Top attractions of the area were discussed and included Pearson's Falls, Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC), Gorge Zipline, Green River Tubing, Hiking Trails, and bicycling. Fissel reported that TIEC's ice skating facility, open from Thursday to Sunday through February 14 was doing well. The rink could accommodate up to 75 skaters. Casavant asked about ways to help visitors find out about new activities and attractions more easily. Print marketing vs. billboards vs. social media posts on attracting new visitors and helping returning visitors find new attractions was discussed. Vining suggested printed notebooks in B&B rooms or vacation rental cottages with monthly events and activities list. Mason-Freeman reported that she did this in her local vacation rental units.

Newman reported she would be attending an upcoming meeting to promote and discuss the proposed Saluda Grade Rail Trail project and would be reporting on that meeting to TDDA and Tryon Tourism Authority. It was noted that South Carolina was serious about the rail trail project and had already committed significant funding for the project. Crowell and Vining asked about adding a QR code to access the website with several Polk County trails. Newman reported that the state of North Carolina was increasing funding for trails in 2023.

Mason-Freeman and Fissel asked who did press releases for the Town of Tryon. Newman reported that she was doing most of the tourism press releases. Vining offered to help with press release drafts and would send the drafts to Newman.

Casavant offered to work with Newman to develop new and better usage of downtown Tryon's existing kiosks and information brochure racks at the plaza at Maple Street for tourism. Newman would discuss downtown signage with Tryon Downtown Development Association and do further discussion of the topic with the Tourism Authority after the TDDA discussion. Vining wanted to work on updating the list of area attractions. Casavant wanted to work on central signage to cross promote with neighboring towns.

Mason-Freeman wanted to focus on doing something actively to promote tourism. Vining suggested focusing on a single annual project for Tourism each year to actively accomplish at least one primary goal to keep tourism promotion moving forward. Additional secondary activities could be pursued as opportunities arose during the year. Casavant supported the one annual goal proposal. In FY 2021-2022, the Tourism Authority developed the advertising grant program for local organizations' events. Newman was asked to find out what projects TDDA would be working on in the coming year. Mason-Freeman wanted to identify the market and Casavant wanted to pursue downtown signage for events and attractions. Vining stated that the top items to promote tourism seemed to be 1) a hospitality center with information downtown, 2) promotion of local wineries and encouraging partnerships between downtown restaurants and local wineries and 3) supporting multi-day events, festivals and workshops such as writers' retreats and craft workshops by encouraging event packages and partnerships. Newman stated

that the Authority needed a master plan for marketing. For event packaging, a list of VRBO's and B&Bs needed to be available for inclusion in enrollment materials for local workshops and events. Extending Tryon's tourism season with festivals and workshops scheduled in the slow months between January and March would be good. The Tryon Tourism Development Authority could focus on promotion and work with the Town of Tryon on any road closures needed for festivals. Casavant suggested speakers in downtown providing music to make the downtown seem more alive for an estimated cost of around \$5,000 with programmed music.

Christmas lights for downtown were discussed. Fatland suggested getting local groups to partner to make it happen, leveraging funds with partnerships. Vining stated that in the 1920s in Tryon, two civic clubs competed to decorate the downtown Christmas tree providing competitive incentive to improve each year. Revival of this competitive activity could become a festive event as prequel to TDDA's annual Christmas Stroll. It was suggested that a joint meeting with the TDDA Board of Directors might be a good idea in the future to explore partnership opportunities and getting on the same page in marketing downtown for tourism.

## **OTHER**

**Election of new Chairman and Vice-Chairman** – Casavant nominated John Vining for Chairman, but Vining declined the nomination. Casavant nominated Maria Mason-Freeman for Chairman and John Vining for Vice-Chairman. Fissel seconded the nominations. Nominations were closed. Mason-Freeman was elected Chairman and Vining was elected Vice-Chairman by a vote of 5 to 0.

**Recruiting new member to fill remainder of Jackson's term** – Jackson's resignation left a vacancy that needed to be filled by an occupancy tax collector. Newman suggested TDDA Board Member Ian Griggs' partner might be a candidate as they operated a VRBO in Tryon. Secretary Rogers was asked to give a committee appointment application form to Newman to relay to Griggs for his partner to consider. It was mentioned that a local documentary producer was interested in volunteering for the Tourism Authority when an appropriate vacancy opened up in the future.

**Update on tourism advertising match grant program** – Information for the Authority's matching grant program for local organizations to receive grants of \$250 to \$500 for event advertising had been posted on the ExploreTryon.com website. No application had been received to date. It was recommended that grants be directed to advertising targeting areas outside the local area to attract outside visitors to events like the Tryon International Film Festival and TDDA BeerFest. Vining offered to accompany Newman to visit local businesses and organizations to encourage applying for the Tourism advertising match grants. Newman would also be visiting local businesses to encourage them to apply for TDDA facade grants.

## **Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was confirmed for Monday, March 6, 2023 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room.


**Adjourn**

Mason-Freeman made a motion to adjourn. Crowell seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned at 5:50 pm.

**Prepared by**

  
Meg Rogers  
Secretary

**Approved:**

  
Marie Mason-Freeman  
Chairman