

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

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:42 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with three members present.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Marie Mason-Freeman; Jeff Fissel, and John Vining

MEMBERS ABSENT: Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep; and Allan Casavant

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

Approve Minutes from February 6, 2023

Minutes from the February 6, 2023 regular meeting were reviewed. Fissel made a motion to approve the February 6, 2023 regular meeting minutes as presented. Vining seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 3 to 0.

Approve Financial Report for February 2023

The FY 2022-23 Tryon Tourism Development Fund financial report for February 2023 was presented by Ex-Officio Treasurer Fatland.

Occupancy tax collections for the month of January 2023 remitted to the Town in February 2023 totaled \$1,022.38. Total Revenues for the month of February 2023 were \$1,022.38. February 2023 expenditures totaled \$1,448.41. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund revenues as of February 28, 2023 totaled \$17,847.37. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund expenditures as of February 28, 2023 totaled \$16,902.43. Fund balance as of February 28, 2023 was \$64,230.72.

It was noted that occupancy tax revenues for January 2023 were significantly less than January 2022. Mason-Freeman confirmed that Air B&B occupancy was slowing down. Fissel observed that occupancy rates during 2020 and 2021 had been much higher because Covid caused many travelers to limit their trips to locations within the United States. Fatland suggested that recent increases in credit card interest rates and inflation were also factors in reducing the occupancy rates. Vining stated the need to work on promoting tourism during the slow months of January through March. Fissel agreed that occupancy was slow due to lack of big events to attract visitors during those months. Vining suggested promoting Nina Simone's birthday in February with an event featuring jazz bands, possibly partnering with Tryon Fine Arts Center which already had a jazz series. Fissel warned that weather issues in February could negatively impact a major event in February. Other new events proposed for slow months included indoor wine tasting tours, indoor horse shows, restaurant week events, and organized market tours of restaurants, inns and businesses. Mason-Freeman suggested that local businesses and restaurants might be willing to offer discounts or discount codes during the slow season to support new winter events.

Fissel made a motion to approved the February 2023 financial report as presented. Vining seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 3 to 0.

Approve funds for March 17, 2023 Rail Trail event refreshments

Newman relayed a request from the Saluda Grade Trail steering committee for funding to help with refreshments for an invitation-only Rail Trail information meeting with elected officials, Conserve Carolina representative Michael Baughman, local organizations representatives and a featured speaker from Greenville, SC to be held on March 17, 2023. Both Tryon Downtown Development Director Newman and Tryon Mayor J. Alan Peoples were on the steering committee. Newman estimated the refreshments would cost \$300 or less for the approximately 50 people invited to attend. Vining made a motion that the Tryon Tourism Development Authority fund the refreshments for the March 17, 2023 event up to an amount of \$300, provided that Tryon Downtown Development Association volunteers would do the setup, serving and cleanup for the event. Fissel seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 3 to 0. The Authority Members viewed the rail trail development as a major tourism opportunity.

Website & Social Media

Tracey Daniels was not present but had submitted a printed report for February 2023. Daniels was planning to attend the tourism conference in Asheville on March 7, 2023 and planned to attend the April Tourism Authority meeting.

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

- 3-5 posts per week; tourism focused,
- Total Facebook likes – 7,679 (3 new past 30 days)
- Average post reach 3,488
- Post engagement was up: 1051 shares, likes, etc. (502 likes, 32 comments, 162 links to website.)
- Most liked posts = Super Saturday announcement
- Will focus on 4th Friday event in March, Spring and Super Saturday

Website

- Business Changes and updates

Added or updated the following:

Tryon Bottle request for updated category listing

Big Guns Coffee photo

Tryon Little Theatre

Remove Pop-Up Shop

Foothills Movement

Miscellaneous

- Answered incoming questions
- Attending NC Conference March 7, 2023
- Continued communication with Melinda Massey at Polk County Tourism regarding upcoming winter events and updating the shared calendar

Newman stated that local businesses, inns and vacation rentals should provide updated information to Tracey to be updated on the ExploreTryon.com website and social media pages. Vining reported that he had looked over the ExploreTryon.com website and noted some information that needed to be removed: Since Tryon Country Club was only available to TCC members, it should not be listed as a thing to do for visitors. Mill Spring Ag Center needed to be removed as it no longer had a farm store or displays for visitors, now only serving as the Polk County Soil and Water Conservation office. Ziglar Field was not really a scenic place for visitors even though it had an information kiosk about the Tryon All-Stars and

should be taken off the ExploreTryon.com website unless the Town intended to keep it up as a showplace. Vining recommended evaluating ExploreTryon.com website places and things to do entries based on where would a local person send visitors if he/she could not go with them to tell them the story behind the site. Vining offered to work with Daniels on updating the website content. Mobile phone apps to access site stories for QR code posted and historic sites was discussed briefly. Sources for funding for development of a walking tour app were discussed briefly. Newman reported she was working with Town Planner Tim Daniels to update the downtown business and attractions map. The map of art galleries for the 4th Friday gallery tours was already up to date. Newman would contact the local historic museums regarding an updated historic walking tour. Listings of seasonal events such as the Tryon International Film Festival and Tryon Little Theatre plays were discussed briefly. Newman noted that these seasonal or low frequency events attracted regional tourism from Spartanburg and Greenville and a different market during the slow season. Potential development of Grover Mill building in Lynn as venue for shopping, breweries, dance hall, etc was discussed briefly. The big opportunity for food, beer and hospitality businesses from the proposed Saluda Grade Rail Trial was discussed briefly. Bumper stickers with ExploreTryon.com for promotion of the area by residents and supporters was discussed. Newman worked with TDDA on Tryon merchandise with the new brand “Your Best Life. In Stride.” . The Authority asked Neman to relay a suggestion to add ExploreTryon.com to brand stickers and merchandise. It was reported that the current Tryon Visitors Center at the Tryon History Museum would be moving when the museum moved into its new space sometime in September 2023.

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Assignments

Newman distributed handouts detailing the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 SWOT work plans for the members to review to see if the goals and strategies were still valid.. Updates to the four main strategies were:

- 1) Make Tryon a known tourism destination
- 2) Capitalize on unique regional attractions to draw visitors
- 3) Increase and support local occupancy numbers
- 4) Empower local organizations to partner through collaboration with town’s resources to promote tourism

The twelve initiatives (three for each main strategy) were discussed. Vining stated that the number of initiatives was too high and needed to be decreased.

Strategy 1 initiatives were discussed. Initiative to get Tryon into major publications was difficult but still relevant. Vining reported on the history of tourism promotion of the Tryon area through tapping national celebrities who had local contacts or were travelling through the Tryon area (i.e. movie star Jeanette McDonald) for major media exposure and wondered what could be done now along the same lines to attract major press coverage. Fissel stated that Tryon Resort employed a PR firm to develop a list of journalists to invite for promotional events prior to the Earl Scruggs Festival. The Authority members were advised to watch for articles promoting similar small towns that were especially well-written and add those journalists to a “Press List” to be invited to visit Tryon and write about this area. Development of video marketing content was strongly advised. Digital publications could be more feasible than print publications. Video using YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram platforms were much more effective than still photos in improving search engine optimization (SEO) for Tryon’s website and social media as well. Initiative to represent Tryon at major tourism conventions was still relevant.

Tracey Daniels would be representing Tryon at the NC Tourism conference in Asheville this week. Initiative to attract visitors traveling major roadways in the region was discussed. Billboards were too expensive. Printed rack cards were being distributed to visitors center and was still relevant.. Internet digital marketing was recommended over billboards as a more viable approach.

Strategy 2 initiatives were discussed briefly. Capitalizing on ecotourism, equestrian and wedding markets was still appropriate.

Strategy 3 initiatives were discussed briefly. Initiatives to increase and support local occupancy tax numbers through working with the county on regional tourism efforts, attracting more of target markets to area B&Bs, and working with Town of Tryon on creation/update of airbnb policy/standards were discussed. Development of partnerships with area organizations was encouraged. Scheduling a joint meeting with Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) at least once a year was recommended to prevent duplication, promote cooperation and maximize effectiveness of both organizations' work plans. Advocating to local organizations to develop new events to attract visitors and offering tourism grant funding to assist in promoting the new events were suggested.

Strategy 4 initiatives were discussed briefly. The initiatives to make travel to and around easier, update face of downtown and board retreat and combined visions were not as relevant now.

Newman would update the Tourism Authority's work plan from the discussion at today's meeting.

OTHER

Downtown Shopping – Mason-Freeman stated that the store hours were getting better in downtown Tryon, but there were still some problems with empty spaces. There was a need to get the landlords and tenants working more effectively together to build a sustainable downtown shopping and dining environment.

Hospitality Train – Getting all the players on the same page with dinner, small business after hours networking, soft skills building for local business owners was discussed briefly

Leadership Class – Isothermal Community College Polk Campus was discussing offering a class for community leaders to learn about local assets.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was confirmed for Monday, April 3, 2023 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room.

Adjourn

Mason-Freeman made a motion to adjourn. Fissel seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned at 5:56 pm.

Prepared by


Meg Rogers
Secretary

Approved:

Marie Mason-Freeman
Chairman