

Tryon Tourism Board
(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)
Minutes
May 1, 2023
4:30 P.M.

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with four members present. Ex-Officio Treasurer Fatland asked that approval of the audit contract be added to the meeting agenda after agenda item 3. Approve Financial Report for April 2023. The addition to the agenda was approved by the Authority members present.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Maria Mason-Freeman, Chairman; John Vining, Vice-Chairman; Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep; and Allan Casavant

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jeff Fissel,

STAFF PRESENT: Jim Fatland, Ex-Officio Treasurer; Meg Rogers, Secretary; and Michelle Newman, TDDA Downtown Director

Approve Minutes from April 3, 2023

Minutes from the April 3, 2023 regular meeting were reviewed. Contractor Tracey Daniels had attended the April meeting and was directed to increase spending on social media advertising on Facebook and Instagram. The tourism advertising grant program for local organizations to receive matching grants from Tryon Tourism for advertising outside the local area was also discussed at the April meeting. Crowell made a motion to approve the April 3, 2023 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Approve Financial Report for April 2023

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

Occupancy tax collections for the month of March 2023 remitted to the Town in April 2023 totaled \$3,027.86. Total Revenues for the month of April 2023 were \$3,027.86. April 2023 expenditures totaled \$1,450.10. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund revenues as of April 30, 2023 totaled \$23,294.75. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund expenditures as of April 30, 2023 totaled \$20,538.52. Fund balance as of April 30, 2023 was \$61,219.07.

Fatland noted that the budgeted occupancy tax revenue for FY 2022-2023 was \$35,000 and he was concerned that the year-end total occupancy tax revenue would fall short of the budgeted amount. If so, the FY 2022-2023 budget could be amended if expenditures exceeded revenues to pull the necessary amount from fund balance with the approval of the Tryon Board of Commissioners. Fatland recommended setting a more conservative occupancy tax revenue amount in future budgets. Casavant reported that rumors were being heard around Tryon that the Town of Tryon was in financial difficulties because of water and sewer repairs and maintenance. Fatland reviewed the history of the Town of Tryon's water and sewer systems and estimated costs to renovate the entire systems and informed the Authority that grant funding was being sought to assist in local water and sewer projects, but those projects could be spaced out so that local funding would be adequate. Crowell stated that retaining ownership of the water and sewer infrastructure gave the Town of Tryon control of development incentives for the community.

Mason-Freeman made a motion to approved the April 2023 financial report as presented. Vining seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Approve Auditors Contract

Fatland reported that new auditors had been hired because the prior auditing firm was unable to complete the audit by the North Carolina mandated deadlines for municipal governments. The new auditing firm would be R. H. CPAs headquartered in Greenville, SC. North Carolina Local Government Commission requires annual audits for municipalities. Casavant made a motion to approve the audit contract with R. H. CPAs. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

FY 2023-2024 Tourism Development Budget Discussion

Fatland recommended that the Authority consider reducing the amount budgeted in FY 2023-2024 for Occupancy Tax Revenues from the \$35,000 budgeted in FY 2022-2023. Fixed expense items included the staff expenditures for a portion of the personnel expenses for Secretary Rogers and TDDA Downtown Director Newman and for the required annual audit. The remaining amount, up to the total budgeted occupancy tax revenues, could be allocated however the Authority chose. Newman stated that the Website Design expense line item included the website hosting and management costs as well as website updates and social media posting on ExploreTryon Facebook page and other services provided by contractor Tracey Daniels. Some confusion was noted about defining the differences between the various advertising line items, General Advertising, Co-op Advertising, Event Marketing, TIEC Marketing and Social Media Advertising. Co-Op Advertising reflected that amount budgeted for the local event advertising grant program, but no grants had been awarded so far in FY 2022-2023. Similarly, none of the amount budgeted for General Advertising had been used. Social Media Advertising had been budgeted at \$2,456.14 in FY 2022-2023 but only \$1,000.00 had been posted as expended. Supplies and Materials had been budgeted at \$200, but a much higher amount of \$1,232.48 had been posted because the brochures printed to distribute to North Carolina Welcome Centers and regional visitor centers had been posted to that account. The Professional Services Audit had been significantly under-budgeted in FY 2022-2023 at \$219.00.

Mason-Freeman, Vining and Casavant recommended increasing Supplies and Materials budget to \$1,200 for FY 2023-2024. Fatland asked how the Authority wanted to use the pot of funds available for marketing for the coming year. The Authority members wanted to increase Social Media Advertising expenditures in FY 2023-2024 for Facebook and Instagram ads. Casavant was against any advertising on Tik Tok. Adding banner ads with weblink on B&B and vacation rental hosting websites such as VRBO, AIRBNB, and Expedia was discussed briefly. It was suggested that the Authority set a budget amount and then Daniels, Newman and Fissel could develop a social media marketing plan with demographics for target market. Vining suggested doubling the amount for Social Media Advertising and asked if another line item could be added for website banner ads? It was suggested that at least 10% of the marketing expenditures be allocated to advertising on the VRBO or AIRBNB websites. Fatland suggested setting a \$6,000 digital advertising budget and allocating that amount to General Advertising with the stipulation that \$3,000 would be used for social media ads and \$3,000 would be used for website banner ads for a total of \$6,000.

Newman and Vining reported that downtown merchants had requested funding for event programming at St. Luke's Plaza with live music on Saturdays two times per month during the tourist season. They asked if funds could be budgeted for this under Event Marketing.

Fatland recommended that a general budget of \$28,000 Occupancy Tax Revenue and \$28,000 Total Expenditures be approved at the meeting today. Newman would develop and bring back a draft detailed expense budget allocating expenses to specific line items for discussion and approval at the next meeting.

Mason-Freeman made a motion to approve a Tryon Tourism Development Budget for FY 2023-2024 of \$28,000 total revenue and \$28,000 total expense. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Saluda Grade Trail Update

Crowell distributed a draft resolution for the Authority to send to the Tryon Board of Commissioners recommending formation of a committee to prepare Tryon for the Saluda Grade Trail. Composition of the planning committee was recommended to include citizens, business owners and other stakeholders, up to 10 to 12 members to provide recommendations to the Tryon Board of Commissioners on preparing Tryon for the opening of the Saluda Grade Trail to include parking, bike racks, public restrooms, water refill stations and other amenities that would be needed by visitors as well as development of promotional plans such as track-side concerts and other events.

Casavant and Newman, who were currently serving on the Saluda Grade Trail Committee formed by Conserving Carolina with its project partners provided an update on the project. The Saluda Grade Trail Committee was in communication with NC Legislator Jake Johnson for support of state funding to purchase and develop the Saluda Grade Trail. A new website had been created for the Saluda Grade Trail project. A request for proposals to do a feasibility study had been sent out with a goal of hiring a firm by Summer 2023 to complete the feasibility study by the end of December 2023. After the feasibility study is complete, the estimated project budget will be used to begin the search for contractors for the project construction.

Further discussion was tabled until the next meeting.

Website & Social Media

Tracey Daniels was not present to report.

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Assignments

Newman had sent a link to an online survey to the Authority members. She would resend the link to the members and asked that the members complete the online survey before the next meeting so the results could be reported and discussed.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was confirmed for Monday, June 5, 2023 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room.

Adjourn

Chairman Mason-Freeman adjourned the meeting at 5:42 pm.

Prepared by



Meg Rogers
Secretary

Approved:



Marie Mason-Freeman
Chairman