

Tryon Tourism Board
(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)
Minutes
August 7, 2023
4:30 P.M.

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:40 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with four 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: Meg Rogers, Secretary; and Michelle Newman, TDDA Downtown Director

Officer Elections

Mason-Freeman made a motion to keep the current officers – Maria Mason Freeman as Chairman, John Vining as Vice-Chairman and Meg Rogers as Secretary. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0. Possible candidates for the current open seat on the Authority were discussed briefly.

Approve Minutes from June 5, 2023

Minutes from the June 5, 2023 regular meeting were reviewed.. Crowell made a motion to approve the June 5, 2023 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Only one member of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority, Maria Mason-Freeman, attended the July 17, 2023 joint meeting of the Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA), Tryon Tourism Development Authority, the Tryon Historic Preservation Commission, and the Tryon History Museum Board of Directors, so no formal minutes for the Authority were recorded. The joint group meeting stated the intention of holding quarterly meetings with a open invitation for the members of the boards to attend.

Approve Financial Reports for June and July 2023

The Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2022-23 financial report for June 2023 and FY 2023-24 financial report for July 2023 were reviewed.

Occupancy tax collections for the month of May 2023 remitted to the Town in June 2023 totaled \$2,786.93. Total Revenues for the month of June 2023 were \$2,786.93. June 2023 expenditures totaled \$1,549.20. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund revenues as of June 30, 2023 totaled \$27,942.12. FY 2022-2023 Tourism Development Fund expenditures as of June 30, 2023 totaled \$23,631.19. Fund balance as of June 30, 2023 was \$62,581.90.

Occupancy tax collections for the month of June 2023 remitted to the Town in July 2023 totaled \$2,367.64. Total Revenues for the month of July 2023 were \$2,367.64. July 2023 expenditures totaled \$1,293.60. FY 2023-2024 Tourism Development Fund revenues as of July 31, 2023 totaled \$2,367.64.

FY 2023-2024 Tourism Development Fund expenditures as of July 31, 2023 totaled \$1,293.60. Fund balance as of July 31, 2023 was \$63,499.26.

It was noted that occupancy tax revenues were significantly decreased compared to 2021-2022, especially in the last three months. The projected \$35,000 budgeted for FY 2022-2023 was not realized. Aggressive promotion was suggested to address the problem. Decreasing use of AirBnB vacation rentals could hurt revenue and return occupancy tax revenue to pre-Covid levels. \$28,000 was budgeted for FY 2023-24 for Occupancy Tax revenue and this amount would have to be adjusted in the budget as revenues allowed. Vining asked if any B&Bs were doing post-visit e-mail surveys (possibly using QR codes or survey flyers at the host locations provided at start of stay). Events that attracted overnight visitors were praised such as Tryon International Film Festival, TDDA BeerFest, and large bicycle ride events. Problem areas identified were poor retail store and restaurant selection and limited hours and days of operation of many of these. Pros and cons of inviting more food trucks to operate in downtown Tryon during the days and times other restaurants were closed was discussed briefly.

Vining made a motion to approve the financial reports for June 2023 and July 2023 as presented. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Polk-County Film Initiative TRIFF 2023 Grant Application

Polk County Film Initiative (PCFI) President Tom Trobaugh distributed a handout with information on the 2023 Tryon International Film Festival (TRIFF) event and the new programs being initiated in 2023 such as the student film competition and free classes thorough the AWE Project. Ashley Crane would be in charge of the educational project. The TRIFF Gala event would be hosted at the former Bank of America building on Pacolet Street for TRIFF 2023. Trobaugh reported that the TRIFF event attracted 400 to 500 out of town visitors for the three-day event. Trobaugh reported that the primary complaint the participants had was that the downtown restaurants closed too early during the event. Trobaugh requested help in convincing downtown restaurants to adjust operating hours to complement TRIFF and similar events to serve visitors who wanted later evening dining options. TDDA Director Michelle Newman reported that the new restaurant, Brooks Pub, had committed to staying open late. Crowell suggested getting commitments from downtown restaurants to increase operating hours during TRIFF, or, if not, inviting food trucks to operate in downtown area during the TRIFF event.

PCFI had asked for a \$2,500 grant award in its application. According to the grant program guidelines, awards were limited to amounts up to \$1,000 and required applicant to provide an equal match of funds for advertising. There were no funds currently budgeted for grants in the FY 2023-24 Tourism Development Budget. Casavant made a motion to award \$2,500 to PCFI for TRIFF 2023 advertising. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0. PCFI and TRIFF 2023 were expected to provide an equal match of in-kind and cash for marketing as required by the grant program. It was noted that a budget amendment would be needed to allocate funding for the grant program in FY 2023-24. Crowell stated that the advertising funded by the grant needed to be restricted to out-of-area ads and marketing that would target potential overnight visitors.

Tryon Fine Arts Center Aanika's Elephants Grant Application

Tryon Fine Arts Center (TFAC) had submitted a grant application requesting \$1,000 to cover some of the marketing costs of the recent Aanika's Elephants production hosted at TFAC. It was noted that grant funding for expenses for events that had already occurred (retroactive expenses) were not prohibited in

the current grant program guidelines. In person presentation of the application to the Authority members with an opportunity to ask questions was also not required in the current guidelines. It was stated that Aanika's Elephants filled TFAC three times for an estimated total attendance of more than 900 attendees. The production featured famous puppeteers from Sesame Street, the Muppets Workshop and Broadway. The event also offered workshops on puppet making for children and adults and offered discounted tickets so more area children could afford to attend. The event received lots of press coverage regionally. Vining stated that he had no doubt the production was a great show, but he had a problem with funding a grant after an event had occurred. After much discussion and learning the current grant application did not prohibit applications submitted after an event, Mason-Freeman suggested the Authority fund the proposal at a lesser amount of \$500. Vining agreed on the lower amount and he and Mason-Freeman supported approval of retroactive funding for a past event. However, the application materials were available before the production occurred and could have been submitted sooner. Crowell recommended adding a requirement that the application for grant funding be submitted at least a few months before the event. It was also recommended that the guidelines for the grants be more specific in requiring ads proposed in the application must include target audience specifications for any ads to be funded by the grant. Mason-Freeman suggested that a partial grant be approved for TFAC to apply to the out-of-area ads (further away than Greenville, SC).

Mason-Freeman made a motion to approve a \$500 grant to TFAC for the Aanika's Elephants production out-of-area marketing costs. Crowell seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Crowell made a motion to revise the Tryon Tourism grants guidelines to require that the grant application be received by the Tourism Authority at least 60 days before the event to be promoted and that any grant-funded ads had to target audiences more than 50 miles away from Tryon. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was discussed and amended to include that the applicant must make a presentation to the Authority and provide a written marketing plan to show the distance requirement would be met. Amended motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Saluda Grade Trail Update

Newman reported that the Conserving Carolina and its partners in the trail project had scheduled its next meeting for Friday, August 11, 2023. The Saluda Grade Trail group had asked for a letter of support from the Tryon Tourism Development Authority. It was noted that the Authority had already passed a resolution in support of the Saluda Grade Trail. The project group had also asked that supporters write letters to the editors of local newspapers supporting the project as public relations to generate local support. Newman briefly updated the Authority on the extended budgeting and negotiations with South Carolina and North Carolina state legislators and departments of transportation for project support. Newman would have more information after the August 11, 2023 meeting. Tracey Daniels had sent Newman her idea of developing a "Tryon Trot" event to connect Tryon to and publicize the South Carolina segments of the trail while waiting for the construction of the upper North Carolina section to Saluda and Hendersonville to be completed. Newman had recently attended the regional NC Main Street Directors training program and had networked with representatives from Elkin, NC, who had an active rail trail in their downtown, to get ideas for Tryon to consider as the trail project develops. Lockers and showers along the trail were some of the facilities that Elkin had added to support their rail trail users. The new steering committee created by the Tryon Board of Commissioners to prepare Tryon for the coming trail would be holding its first meeting in September. Members of the new steering committee would include the TDDA chairman, the Tryon Tourism Development Authority chairman,

the Tryon Planning Board chairman, the Tryon Parks Committee chairman, the Tryon town manager, Tryon Public Safety representative, Tryon Board of Commissioners representative Crys Armbrust and four at-large members selected from applicants from the area who support and/or have concerns about the project.

Website & Social Media

Tracey Daniels was not in attendance and a written report was not available.

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Assignments

Newman updated the Authority on the promotional activities coming up. These included the TDDA Tryon 4th Friday event in August that would feature a new Dog Mayor election. The Tryon 4th Friday event in September would feature Gardening for Life with music and vendors on McCown Street. TDDA's popular annual BeerFest event would be held the first Saturday in November. December marketing would include Christmas promotions, an improved Christmas Stroll, late hours for downtown businesses during the Christmas season and the Tryon Fire Department's annual Christmas Parade.

The quarterly Joint Committee (TDDA, Tryon Tourism, Tryon Planning, Tryon Historic Preservation, and Tryon History Museum), would be held in October. Five or six 10-minute interview slots were being scheduled with WLOS News. Newman would have more details later. TDDA was resuming its monthly networking coffee meetings for local business owners to connect and exchange ideas. TDDA's website was being redesigned to better interconnect to ExploreTryon website and Newman was working with Tracey Daniels, Tryon Tourism Development's website manager, for mutual support.

Other

Downtown Improvements – Casavant wanted to raise funds to change the current clock tower stairs to a spiral configuration with a waterfall element in the center. Conversion of the office building currently used by Pangaea to public restrooms and a small plaza in front was also suggested.

Volunteer Hours – Newman reported that TDDA needed volunteers for promotion efforts.

Local Rumors and Town's Financial Status – Current rumors regarding financial status of the Town of Tryon were discussed briefly. Crowell told the Authority members that the North Carolina Local Government Commission had some issues with delays in independent audits and assured the Authority that there was nothing to be concerned about. Tryon's departments were in good shape financially. Tryon Town Manager Fatland was praised for his financial skills.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was confirmed for Monday, September 11, 2023 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room.

Adjourn

Mason-Freeman made a motion to adjourn. Motion was approved unanimously by a vote of 4 to 0. Meeting was adjourned at 5:47 pm.

Prepared by

Meg Rogers

Meg Rogers
Secretary

Approved:

Marie Mason-Freeman

Marie Mason-Freeman
Chairman