

Tryon Tourism Board
(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)
Minutes
April 1, 2024
4:35 P.M.

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with four members present with a fifth member arriving shortly thereafter.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Maria Mason-Freeman, Chairman; John Vining, Vice-Chairman; Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep (arrived 5:37 pm); Allan Casavant; and Melanie Jackson

MEMBERS ABSENT: Jeff Fissel

STAFF PRESENT: Tracey Daniels, Website/Social Media Contractor; and Meg Rogers, Secretary

Approve Minutes from March 4, 2024

Minutes from the March 4, 2024 regular meeting were reviewed. Casavant made a motion to approve the March 4, 2024 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Approve Financial Report for March 2024

The Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-24 financial report for March 2024 was reviewed.

Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-24 Revenues as of March 31, 2024 totaled \$15,513.04 (55.40%). Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-2024 expenditures as of March 31, 2024 totaled \$23,640.48 (66.59%). Fund balance as of March 31, 2024 was \$ 56,439.91.

Vining noted that Website Design line item was running at 91.71% of annual budgeted amount as of the end of the ninth month of the fiscal year. Website/social media contractor Tracey Daniels stated that her annual contract fee rate had been unchanged over the last four years.

Mason-Freeman made a motion to approve the financial report for March 2024 as presented. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Tourism Advertising Grant Application from Polk County Film Initiative

A revised grant application submitted by the Polk County Film Initiative (PCFI) for \$1,500 funding for advertising for the 2024 Tryon International Film Festival (TRIFF) was reviewed. Casavant made a motion to approve a \$1,500 grant for the PCFI 2024 TRIFF event advertising as requested. Vining seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0. PCFI President Tom Trobaugh was present and provided information about the TRIFF 2024 educational programs offered to area students at low cost or for free during the event. Trobaugh was asked if scholarships and outreach to the North Carolina School of the Arts students had been considered. Trobaugh responded that most of the educational outreach had been directed to western North Carolina and upstate South Carolina students. Tracey Daniels asked that the ExploreTryon.com website and logo be included as well as the Town of Tryon logo in the advertising and marketing materials at the 2024 TRIFF event with inclusion as an event sponsor as part of the grant terms. Daniels would send the graphics for the ExploreTryon.com logo to Trobaugh for inclusion in the event marketing.

Saluda Grade Trail Update

Commissioner Bill Crowell reported little progress so far. \$5 million was needed. The project group was asking Representative Jake Johnson for help in obtaining \$4.2 million from the North Carolina Legislature for the project. Johnson had indicated he would support a train route over the Saluda Grade route connecting to Asheville, Waynesville and Bryson City tourism rail systems. The Saluda Grade Trail group wanted to keep the project in front of the public to build and retain support. It was suggested that 7 to 10 representatives from each municipality along the proposed route, Saluda, Landrum and Tryon, should meet jointly with lunch provided to discuss ways to support the project. Casavant suggested a joint meeting of Polk County Board of Commissioners and Tryon Board of Commissioners. North Carolina open meeting laws made such meetings complex to coordinate to be in compliance. Inclusion of Columbus in such trail support meetings was suggested since they would experience economic impact from the trail even though the route did not go through Columbus. Crowell suggested that the Tryon Board of Commissioners, Tryon Tourism Development Authority, Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) and other organizations sent letters to the North Carolina Legislature in support of the Saluda Grade Trail. Chairman Mason-Freeman said she would draft a letter from the Tryon Tourism Development Authority to support the Saluda Grade Trail. Daniels offered to assist with editing or writing the letter, if needed.

Website & Social Media

Tracey Daniels presented her reports for April 2024.

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

- 5-8 posts per week; tourism focused
- 45 new followers; 38 new likes (organic); (compared to 5 new followers in February)
- Average post reach 4,100
- Post engagement: 792 (likes, shares, comments, etc.)
- 240 clicks to website
- Most liked posts
 - * “Big News for Downtown Tryon & Visitors” – Event Center (double the reach of other posts this month)
 - * April Fool’s Festival Schedule
 - * Beer Fest Date Announcement
 - * Airstream Rally date announcement

Website Update

- Worked on SEO for business listings & wording updates
- Researched pricing on updating site design (getting three quotes for budgeting)

Miscellaneous

- Answered incoming questions via e-mail
- Filled rack card request for Interstate 77 welcome center

Daniels reported that she had not been placing paid Facebook ads and only did so for events that would involve tourism, such as BeerFest or TRIFF. Daniels explained that paid ads attracting visitors to Tryon when there were limited activities going on would be counterproductive to tourism and result in poor social media reviews from visitors who were disappointed with the limited activities available during

their visit. Facebook ads that Daniels placed were targeted to markets 100 or more miles away from Tryon and included Nashville TN and Atlanta, GA.

Mason-Freeman asked about the procedures to place ads on AirBnB and VRBO websites. Jackson explained that AirBnB and VRBO were booking sites and did not allow external links from individual host listings.

It was reported that the information included in Southern Living Magazine varied for each issue depending on where the magazine would be delivered. Therefore, information or articles from Polk County Tourism might not even be in the issues distributed to other states, only in the issues delivered within North Carolina. Polk County Tourism had more funding and did some marketing in larger publications.

Daniels stated that the current Tryon Tourism rack cards had required approvals from NCDOT for placement at North Carolina welcome centers across the state and Daniels provided supplies of the cards to welcome centers as needed. Daniels suggested updating the cards in the next year or two and budget funds for 10,000 color rack cards. Daniels would request a quote for printing costs for 10,000 new rack cards.

Benefits of merging the Town of Tryon and ExploreTryon and TDDA websites to decrease effort needed to update multiple sites were discussed. Daniels stated that it was common for tourism websites to be redesigned every three to four years. Costs for website redesign could range from \$3,500 to \$15,000. Currently Tryon Downtown Director Gutierrez was focusing on the Main Street USA Model for marketing the downtown business area exclusively. Gutierrez was also working on renovating Tryon's gateway signs. Jackson stated that many town governments had municipal information and tourism information on the same website. Daniels asked permission of the Tourism Authority to prepare a proposal over the next month or two to design a combination website.

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Discussion

The Authority members discussed preferences for distribution of funds for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. It was agreed that the advertising grant program would be discontinued for FY 2024-2025 and the funds directed toward website redesign and merging, if feasible.

Casavant wanted to explore billboard advertising. Within the town, zoning code prohibitions prevented billboards. NC Department of Transportation (NCDOT) limited the number of billboards on state roads. Cost for a lighted billboard lease was beyond the limits of funds available in the Tryon Tourism Development Fund.

Casavant asked about participation in popular Facebook social media sites specific to Tryon, Columbus, Saluda, Landrum residents.

Other

- **County-wide Tourism Development Authority update** – Crowell reported that Polk County's efforts to establish a county-wide Tourism Development Authority (TDA) and dissolving the current Saluda TDA and Tryon TDA and their municipal occupancy tax districts was moving forward and was very likely to be passed by the North Carolina Legislature. The change would provide increased funding to all participants, Polk County, City of Saluda and Town of Tryon,

with Polk County enabled to collect 6% occupancy tax county-wide (twice the current maximum rate) and then distribute funds exceeding Tryon's and Saluda's current 3% collection annual totals for host providers in the respective municipal jurisdictions. After the change, the municipalities would apply to the County TDA for those increased funds for tourism promotion activities.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was confirmed for Monday, May 6, 2024 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room.

Adjourn

Mason-Freeman adjourned the meeting at 5:30 pm.

Prepared by

Approved:



Meg Rogers
Secretary



Marie Mason-Freeman
Chairman