

Tryon Tourism Board
(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)
Minutes
January 8, 2024
4:30 P.M.

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:35 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with three members present.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Maria Mason-Freeman, Chairman; John Vining, Vice-Chairman; Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep (arrived 4:37 pm); Jeff Fissel; and Allan Casavant (arrived 5:20 pm)

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Meg Rogers, Secretary

Approve Minutes from December 4, 2023

Minutes from the December 4, 2023 regular meeting were reviewed. Fissel made a motion to approve the December 4, 2023 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 3 to 0.

Approve Financial Report for December 2023

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

Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-24 Revenues as of December 31, 2023 totaled \$11,940.87 (33.64%). Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-2024 expenditures as of December 31, 2023 totaled \$15,735.77 (44.33%). Fund balance as of December 31, 2023 was \$ 61,000.98.

Fissel made a motion to approve the financial report for December 2023 as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 3 to 0.

Mason-Freeman stated that her vacation rentals had a good Christmas season. Fissel reported that Tryon Resort had a good winter season. The Authority members discussed options for tracking distance of travel for overnight visitors. Atlanta, Georgia was identified as a significant target market for non-equestrian events such as multi-day music festivals. Overflow visitors from regional events in Cashiers and Highlands was also noted as a significant market for the Tryon-Polk County area accommodations with lower cost and better availability compared to rentals in those two cities.

Saluda Grade Trail Update

Commissioner Bill Crowell reported briefly on the current status on the Saluda Grade Trail project. The North Carolina group was still \$25 million short for funding its part of the project. The Town of Tryon Saluda Grade Trail Advisory Committee had not yet met. Current appointments to the new committee to prepare Tryon for the rail trail included Bill Crowell, Michelle Newman and a few Tryon residents. Crowell was hoping that former Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) Executive Director Michelle Newman would stay on as a TDDA volunteer and Tryon's representative on the Saluda Grade Trail Project Committee. The Town of Saluda was asking the Project Committee about railroad property that could be allocated for parking northwest of downtown Saluda. Parking along the trail would be a big deal. Crowell wondered if McCown Street might be redesigned to increase parking.

Possible parking along spurs off the Saluda Grade Trail along Town of Tryon sewer rights-of-way like the one along Pookie Lane were discussed briefly. With parking and public restrooms needed in downtown Tryon to prepare for the Saluda Grade Trail, it was suggested that an engineer be appointed to the Town's advisory committee to assist with these plans. Crowell hoped that the Tryon Board of Commissioners would commit funds to provide permanent public restrooms downtown. Vining had found a Polk County news article from 1915 that stated that Tryon needed public restrooms even back then.

The potential dangers at the location where the railway crosses US 176 in front of Sidestreet Pizza were discussed and might require NCDOT to install stoplight at that intersection.

Crowell stated that when the Saluda Grade Trail project was ready to start, it would probably proceed quickly with a few stop & start periods. Some potential trail issues, such as narrow bridges, on the Ecusta Trail and the Virginia Creeper Trail were discussed briefly.

Website & Social Media

Tracey Daniels was not present, but her written report was reviewed.

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

- 5-8 posts per week; tourism focused,
- 7 new followers in past 30 days
- Average post reach 4,210
- Post engagement: 929 (likes, shares, comments, etc.) up 42% and 181 clicks to website
- Most liked posts –
 - * December Holiday post (general happy holidays post)
 - * December "4th Friday" post
 - * Christmas Parade post

County Update

- Unofficially, County tourism rates seem steady to growing slightly
- Saluda and Tryon occupancy numbers have been down. (Tryon showed impact of Pinecrest unofficial closure and loss of Melrose Inn.) Overnight stays appeared to be moving into the "county".

Miscellaneous

- Answered incoming questions
- Conversation with Melinda re website event coordination and overall update (since December County Tourism meeting canceled.)
- County Tourism meeting for 12/12/2023 was cancelled. Next meeting scheduled for 3/12/2024.
- Melanie Jackson (rep. of Yonder) said she would be willing to rejoin the board
- Daniels would be able to attend February, March, April and May Tryon Tourism Authority meetings (due to change in conflicting meeting schedule moving forward, plus other side of chemo/radiation)

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Discussion

Fissel stated that the “Work Plan Discussion” item was no longer relevant and suggested that the agenda item be changed to “SWOT Goals Update”. The members agreed.

Increasing marketing targeting the Atlanta, Georgia market was recommended. They would check with Tracey Daniels on social media ads for the Atlanta GA and Charlotte NC markets. “Cost per click” ads were discussed briefly and would provide more targeted marketing, but cost could be a factor. Fissel did not recommend radio ads because they were hard to use effectively. The members wanted to request information from accommodation providers on customer zip codes to have a better idea of the current tourism market sources.

Work plan objectives were discussed. They included:

- 1) Where to advertise and define target market
- 2) Encourage better business hours downtown
- 3) Need designated professional photographer or budget to buy photos for events in Tryon to use for website and marketing. Fissel suggested that the Authority consider expanding Tourism Advertising Grant Program to include grant to Town of Tryon to pay for photos and videos for marketing. Videos were better than still photos for marketing and current SEO standards. Facebook Reelz for short video posting and ads were needed because Facebook would decrease social media priority for accounts without videos. Mason-Freeman suggested a local contest for submitted videos with full rights to use the submitted videos in marketing as a requirement for entry. Fissel suggested offering influencers a gift card to encourage video posts related to Town of Tryon. Vining agreed that the Authority should pursue development of a digital library for marketing.
- 4) Need to develop a brochure or booklet less than 10 pages for distribution to guests at local B&Bs and vacation rentals. Including a pull card for requesting more information could provide e-mail addresses for marketing by e-mail and encouraging return visits.
- 5) Set a goal of increasing Facebook followers to 10,000 or more from the current 4,200 steady number.

Casavant wanted to pursue roadside billboard advertising for upcoming events. However, Crowell informed Casavant that cost for outdoor billboard ads exceeded available funds and allocating all funds to billboards would eliminate funding for website, social media and other important marketing options.

Casavant made suggestions for expediting infrastructure renovations in Tryon. He recommended that a contractor be considered to serve on the Tryon Board of Commissioners to help expedite the renovations as well as projects to bury downtown power lines. Casavant updated the Authority on the evolving plans for the event center and other properties he was developing on Pacolet Street. A space he hoped to develop as a bar had been leased for gallery space. Casavant stated the need for a good bar with space for pool tables and socializing in Tryon.

The need for more hotel rooms downtown was discussed briefly. Fissel reported that Tryon Resort would be adding an 84-room hotel in the near future. Vining asked Fissel if shuttle transportation between Tryon Resort and downtown Tryon would be feasible. Fissel suggested that shuttle service would only be feasible for transportation from Tryon Resort accommodations to big music festival events staged in Tryon.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

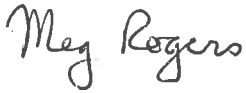
The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was confirmed for Monday, February 5, 2024 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room.

Adjourn

Mason-Freeman made a motion to adjourn. Meeting was adjourned at 5:47 pm.

Prepared by

Approved:



Meg Rogers
Secretary



Marie Mason-Freeman
Chairman