

**Tryon Tourism Board**  
*(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)*  
**Minutes**  
**January 6, 2025**  
**4:30 P.M.**

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:33 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with five members present.

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

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** Meg Rogers, Secretary; Lourdes Gutierrez, Downtown Development Director; and Tracey Daniels, Website/Social Media Contractor

**Approve Minutes from December 2, 2024**

Minutes from the December 2, 2024 regular meeting were reviewed. Casavant made a motion to approve the December 2, 2024 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

**Approve Financial Reports for November 2024**

Secretary Rogers reported that an extension amendment to the current Audit Contract for the Tourism Development Financials needed to be approved. Vining made a motion to approve the amendment to the Audit Contract. Mason Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

The Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 financial report for November 2024 was reviewed. Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 Revenues as November 30, 2024 totaled \$ 8,172.73 (38.01%). Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 expenditures as of November 30, 2024 totaled \$ 11,685.20 (54.35%). Fund balance as of November 30, 2024 was \$ 55,095.94. Jackson made a motion to approve the November 2024 Tourism Financial Report as presented. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0. Vining noted that the financial report indicated that expenditures had exceeded revenues as of November 30, 2024 in FY 2024-2025. The current operating loss was \$-3,512.47. Jackson reported that vacation rentals were slow and ten properties formerly listed with Yonder had been dropped from short term rental to be leased for longer term rentals in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Jackson reported that a slowdown had begun in 2023 with some vacation rental property owners getting out of the business due to lower profits than expected. Mason-Freeman reported seeing more rentals at active locations but fewer choices due to property owners getting out of the vacation rental business. Mason-Freeman stated that the opening of the new hotel at Tryon International Equestrian Center may have influenced revenues due to competition. It was suggested that the Authority may need to explore ways to attract more visitors.

**Proposal from Tryon History Museum-Visitor Center**

Tryon History Museum & Visitor Center Board Member Dick Calloway requested that a proposal from the Tryon History Museum Visitor Center be added to the agenda. The Authority members approved the addition of the Proposal from the Tryon History Museum-Visitor Center to the agenda after item 3. Calloway distributed a proposal handout to the Authority members. The proposal included the plan for the Tryon History Museum-Visitor Center to purchase a building at 104 North Trade Street in

downtown Tryon (site of the former Cowan's Hardware Store). The new location would provide better visibility, better accessibility, better parking availability, more than twice the wall and floor space for displays and racks of travel & tourism information to promote the local lodging, dining, meeting and convention facilities to help promote more heads-in-beds and vacation rentals in Tryon. The Museum-Visitor Center at its new location would also be doubling or tripling hours of operation and number of docents and be open seven days per week. The proposal outlined projected increase in visitors served at the new Museum-Visitor Center location doubling the current 1,200-1,300 visitors per year to 2,500-3,000 visitors per year and how this increased service would support and promote increased overnight visitor occupancy. Calloway presented a request that the Tryon Tourism Development Authority approve a \$12,000 grant for 2025 to help defray the expenses of the relocation and increased Museum-Visitors Center operating costs to help the facility meet the projected need for visitor services in the community going forward. The Tryon History Museum-Visitor Center would provide public restrooms closer to the projected Saluda Grade Trail at its new location. Calloway reported that the Town of Tryon would also be committing \$12,000 or more for 2025 for the Museum-Visitor Center. Casavant asked if the Museum-Visitor Center had any full-time employees. Calloway responded that the Museum-Visitor Center had a trained archivist and a trained curator, but there were no full-time employees at this time, however the Museum-Visitor Center planned to add one full-time employee by the end of 2025. Casavant asked about the demographics and mailing list for Museum-Visitor Center visitors. Visitors came from 25 states in 2024 and the e-mail list included more than 500 with some of those outside the local area.

Commissioner Crowell stated that the Authority must consult the Town Attorney to review North Carolina's occupancy tax statutory rules to determine if this project would be in compliance with the statute for Tryon and qualify for funding. It was noted that the County-wide Tourism Development Authority (TDA), when it was implemented in the near future to replace the municipal Tourism Authorities, might have rules that would affect constraints on funding for a project of this type going forward. Tracey Daniels offered to reach out to Polk County Tourism Director Melinda Massey regarding rules for the County-wide TDA and initiate getting the Town Attorney to review the legal constraints for use of Tryon occupancy tax revenues. Daniels would relay information on occupancy tax use constraints from Massey and the Town Attorney to the Authority members. Chairman Mason-Freeman stated that any project to be funded by occupancy taxes must address the goal of heads-in-beds and the Authority would have to see a detailed plan for the expansion as well as for tourism marketing and visitor center operation. Calloway was directed to contact Daniels with any questions. Calloway stated his intention to come back to the Tryon Tourism Development Authority with more information.

### **Digital Kiosk**

Gutierrez updated the Authority about types of digital kiosks available on the market and associated costs. An Android-based kiosk suitable for the location at the downtown plaza was quoted at \$72,000.

### **Saluda Grade Trail Update**

Crowell reported that the North Carolina Legislature passed a bill allocating \$21 million to purchase the North Carolina portion of the Saluda Grade Trail property from Norfolk Southern. The sale was expected to close mid-summer to early autumn of 2025. The South Carolina portion of the Saluda Grade Trail was expected to open sooner than the North Carolina portion. Crowell recommended partnering with Landrum to open the trail through downtown Tryon as soon as possible.

### **Website & Social Media**

Tracey Daniels had submitted a printed report for January 6, 2024.

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

- 5-8 posts per week; tourism focused
- 6 new likes (organic)
- 15 new followers (total followers = 7,897)
- Most liked posts
  - \* Tryon Midnight – next day photo request post
  - \* Tryon Midnight
  - \* Santa Morris cake photo share from Valhalla Cakes
  - \* New Years at The Fitz

### **Website Update**

- Worked on SEO for business listings & wording updates
- Updated and added new listings
  - Missi and Company
  - Throwbax Bar and Grille
  - Tryon Yoga Center
  - The Fitzgerald – updated
  - Bodega Noir – coming soon
  - Chef Sharone – created separate listing
  - Sheer Magic – deleted
  - Alcove Beauty – deleted

### **Miscellaneous**

- In-person coffee meeting with Melinda Massey
- Distributed rack cards to First Peak Visitors Center and two NC Welcome Centers and Lourdes put Tryon rack cards at Tryon International Equestrian Center (TIEC)
- Our State magazine would be doing a feature on Tryon Toymakers for its December 2025 issue which would have great potential for marketing Tryon tourism for the 2025 holiday season.

Casavant asked if there was a way to get Tryon to rank better for online searches for “cute quaint NC Towns”. Daniels stated that Tryon needed many press releases and feature articles to build a higher ranking for web searches. Cassavant wanted to network with tourism feature writers for the southeast like Southern Living, Guns & Garden, etc. Daniels stated that attracting these feature writers usually involved providing all-expenses paid visit to Tryon. Daniels expressed concerns about potential for negative online posts resulting from disappointing visitors when promoting high expectations for Tryon’s amenities online and then not delivering because of issues in the existing downtown business environment. When more restaurants and retail businesses open downtown with longer operating days and hours in the coming year, the time would be more appropriate for active marketing efforts to generate a more reliably positive outcome.

**SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Discussion**

Casavant praised Gutierrez, Tim Daniels and the town staff on the great job they did with holiday lights for downtown Tryon. Casavant asked about the feasibility of a seasonal ice-skating rink or major light show in Tryon like TIEC was doing each Christmas. Up front cost of \$250,000 for skating rink could be prohibitive. Casavant suggested themed lights for downtown featuring the Tryon Toy-Makers images located along the railroad tracks. Gutierrez confirmed that Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) had plans to add more holiday lights in phases each year. Gutierrez hoped that issues with wind blowing over some decorations in 2024 would be resolved for future holiday displays.

**Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting**

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was scheduled for Monday, February 3, 2025 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room. The meeting date was confirmed.

**Adjourn**

Mason-Freeman adjourned the meeting at 5:38 pm.

**Prepared by**

**Approved:**



Meg Rogers  
Secretary

Maria Mason-Freeman  
Chairman