

Tryon Tourism Board
(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)
Minutes
February 3, 2025
4:30 P.M.

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with five members present.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Maria Mason-Freeman, Chairman; John Vining, Vice-Chairman; Allan Casavant; Melanie Jackson and Steven Siler

MEMBERS ABSENT: Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep

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

Welcome New Member Steven Siler

New member Steven Siler was welcomed. Siler introduced himself and provided some of his background information. Siler was currently the Public Information Officer for the Tryon Fire Department and also a media company executive. Siler was a developer with local rental properties. He had experience with Edible Low Country Magazine and was an at-large writer for several tourism magazines.

Approve Minutes from January 6, 2025

Minutes from the January 6, 2025 regular meeting were reviewed. Casavant made a motion to approve the January 6, 2025 regular meeting minutes as presented. Vining seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Approve Financial Reports for December 2024 and January 2025

The Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 financial report for December 2024 was reviewed. Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 Revenues as December 31, 2024 totaled \$ 9,285.85 (33.52%). Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 expenditures as of December 31, 2024 totaled \$ 13,026.92 (47.03%). Fund balance as of December 31, 2024 was \$ 51,904.20.

The Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 financial report for January 2025 was reviewed. Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 Revenues as January 31, 2025 totaled \$ 10,390.91 (37.51%). Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 expenditures as of January 31, 2025 totaled \$ 14,621.13 (52.78%). Fund balance as of January 31, 2025 was \$ 51,904.20.

Secretary Rogers drew attention of the Authority members to the copies of the Tourism Authority enabling state legislation, municipal ordinance, and bylaws in their agenda packets for reference on allowed uses of occupancy tax funds.

Casavant made a motion to approve the December 2024 and January 2025 Tourism Financial Reports as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Digital Kiosk

Gutierrez distributed an information packet and updated the Authority about the specifications of a Meridian kiosk similar to the interactive digital kiosk at the Nina Simone Plaza in downtown Tryon. For the space at the Maple Street Plaza, she recommended a wall-mounted version using the existing metal frame and base of the information board currently installed at the plaza. The recommended model would cost just under \$29,000 and include a 3-year warranty, shipping and installation. Annual software support for the kiosk would cost \$825 per year. Daniels stated that the new digital kiosk could be linked to the ExploreTryon.com website providing fast updates for business openings/closings and mapping. Sponsorships and advertising on the digital kiosk were discussed. Kiosk “skins” or decals could be added to the external case for sponsors. Decals would be less expensive than a manufacturer provided “skin” layer. Adding an art element or “VISITOR KIOSK” in black lettering down the sides of the digital kiosk was discussed. Casavant asked if the digital kiosk would be able to drill down to menus when restaurant icons were touched. Mason-Freeman asked if events of the week could be displayed on the digital kiosk. The Authority members asked who would maintain and update info on the digital kiosk? Tryon IS/Planning Director Tim Daniels would manage software updates and Gutierrez would update information weekly on the digital kiosk. Gutierrez requested that Tryon Tourism Development Fund provide 50% of the cost of the wall-mounted kiosk (\$14,500) and Town of Tryon and Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) would each provide 25% (\$7,250) for a total of \$29,000. Gutierrez also asked that the annual support fee be paid as a budget item by Tryon Tourism Development Fund each year. The Authority members suggested seeking sponsors to pay the annual support fee.

Casavant made a motion to approve allocation of \$14,500 from the Tourism Development Fund for 50% of the cost of purchase, shipping and installation of the wall-mounted Meridian electronic kiosk at the downtown plaza. Jackson seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0. Gutierrez told the Authority that it would be March or April before the kiosk purchase contract was closed. It was suggested to include QR codes and consistent branding and look for the kiosk display. The digital kiosk might encourage downtown restaurants and businesses to stay up-to-date with technology to benefit from the kiosk’s features.

Jackson stated that better lighting was needed at the plaza fountain. There were lights at the fountain, but they were not working at this time. The Authority asked that the fountain lighting be repaired for the next year. Gutierrez reported that businesses on Pacolet Street had asked for more promotion of “Uptown Tryon” on Pacolet Street. Downtown holiday lighting was discussed briefly. It was suggested that Bill Crowell be asked if he could make ornament lights for the clocktower hillside at a lower cost than commercially available options.

Music on the Plaza

Gutierrez presented a request for funding for live musicians to perform on the downtown plaza at Tryon 4th Friday events for four months in FY 2024-2025, March, April, May & June 2025 at \$300 per month for a total allocation of \$1,200. TDDA would provide any remaining funding for the bands. There was concern about access to the plaza tables & chairs. More chairs and tables had been added to the Maple Street Plaza as well as on the new deck on Depot Street. The Authority was assured that the new restaurant on the plaza, Throwbox, would not restrict access to the plaza tables & chairs. Scheduling live music on dates other than Tryon 4th Friday events to generate more overnight tourism instead of local or day-trip participation was discussed briefly. Jackson stated that it was good for B&B and

vacation rental guests to have things to do downtown such as the live music on the plaza. Once a month bigger band versus smaller local bands more often was discussed. Purchasing lighting and sound equipment to make the plaza more performance-ready to decrease the cost of band setup was suggested, but most small bands preferred to provide their own familiar equipment. Tracey Daniels suggested that sponsors could be sought for funding the live bands later. Gutierrez suggested that she could reach out to Throwbox restaurant regarding their indoor stage.

Jackson made a motion to approve funding of \$1,200 (\$300 per month for March, April, May and June 2025) for live music on the plaza. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Saluda Grade Trail Update

The lawsuit to recover property value by land owners along the Saluda Grade Trail right-of-way was in process but was not expected to stop the trail project, just compensate affected owners along the right-of-way.

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)

- 8-10 posts per week; tourism focused
- 14 new followers (total followers = 7,911)
- Most liked posts
 - * Tryon Midnight – asking for photos 1/1/2025
 - * Fitzgerald's Valentine's Day event post
 - * Trade Street Diner "Now open for dinner" announcements
 - * First Peak "things to do" posts

Website Update

- Worked on SEO for business listings & wording updates
- Cleaned up some categories and backend maintenance on the website

Miscellaneous

- Researched and wrote e-mail/memo related to the Tourism Development Authority expenditure restrictions with respect to the Tryon Museum/Visitor Center funding request presented at the January meeting.
- Coordinated week of 1/30/2025 First Peak newsletter and info distributed in six places in Tryon while First Peak Director Melinda Massey was short-staffed
- To attend the next Polk County Economic and Tourism meeting scheduled for March 2025
- Answered 10 incoming travel tourism e-mail questions from website/social media and referred along to direct contacts
- Worked with TRAVEL & LEISURE art editor for upcoming feature on Tryon. Daniels would send links and get more information
- OUR STATE magazine would be doing a feature article on Tryon Toy-Makers in December 2025 issue. Daniels and Gutierrez sent then photos for the feature.

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Discussion

Siler asked if a unified gift card for all downtown businesses might stimulate the downtown economy. Something similar had been attempted some years ago with “Morris” bucks but the promotion did not do well due to merchant reluctance to participate.

There was interest in what could be done to help attract more business traffic during slow months of the year. Inviting tourism professionals to Tryon for a workshop/conference with guided tours of the area was suggested. North Carolina Main Street sponsored annual conferences, but Tryon lacked the large capacity venues required to host these events. Potential venues for conference events included Tryon Theatre, Tryon Fine Arts Center, and The Fitzgerald. Partnerships with local accommodations such as Pine Crest Inn, Greenlife Inn at Mimosa, and other vacation rentals/air B&Bs as well as negotiated block of rooms with a larger hotel might work for workshop/conference events.

Partnering with non-profits like Tryon Arts & Crafts School or Tryon Painters & Sculptors and accommodation providers to host weekend immersive art or writing retreats was suggested. The members were asked to come up with more ideas to promote Tryon Tourism.

Other

Stackable Giant Christmas Ornament Balls - Gutierrez reported that purchase of stackable giant Christmas balls was being considered for display downtown next Christmas and business sponsors for each ball, if the purchase was approved. There was an opportunity to purchase four 24-inch stackable Christmas ornament balls for a discounted amount of \$2,800. Gutierrez would get more information before presenting a request for funding.

OPEN flags – Providing new “OPEN” flags for downtown businesses to replace the old light blue ones with black and white new ones similar to flags used in Shelby NC was discussed. The “OPEN” signs would encourage visitors/shoppers to go further down to the end of the streets throughout the downtown. New flags could be distributed for free with the requirement that the business would put them out and take them in daily.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

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

Adjourn

Mason-Freeman adjourned the meeting at 5:40 pm.

Prepared by

Approved:



Meg Rogers
Secretary

Maria Mason-Freeman
Chairman