

Tryon Tourism Board
(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)
Minutes
April 7, 2025
4:30 P.M.

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with four members present. A fifth member, Allan Casavant, arrived at 4:32 pm.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Maria Mason-Freeman, Chairman; John Vining, Vice-Chairman; Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep; Steven Siler; and Allan Casavant (arrived 4:32 pm);

MEMBERS ABSENT: Melanie Jackson

STAFF PRESENT: Jim Fatland, Ex-Officio Treasurer; Meg Rogers, Secretary; and Lourdes Gutierrez, Tryon Downtown Development Director

Approve Minutes from March 3, 2025

Minutes from the March 3, 2025 regular meeting were reviewed. Crowell made a motion to approve the March 3, 2025 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Approve Financial Report for March 2025

The Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 financial report for March 2025 was reviewed. Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 Revenues as March 31, 2025 totaled \$ 12,632.88 (45.61%). Tourism Development Fund FY 2024-2025 expenditures as of March 31, 2025 totaled \$ 17,414.65 (62.87%). Fund balance as of March 31, 2025 was \$ 50,702.66.

Fatland reported that the March 2025 financial report did not include the budget amendments reflecting the allocations approved at the February 2025 Tourism Authority meeting - \$14,500 for the downtown interactive information kiosk and the \$1,200 for the 4th Friday live music for March, April, May and June (\$300 each). However, Fatland would include those allocations in the budget amendments for FY 2024-25 he would be presenting for adoption at the next Tryon Board of Commissioners meeting.

Fatland answered questions regarding the status of the proposed county-wide tourism authority (TDA). Fatland reported that Tryon and Saluda representatives met with Polk County representatives and a consultant about the proposal. The Town of Columbus was unwilling to participate because their occupancy tax legislation and ordinance had fewer restrictions on how the occupancy tax revenues could be used. The proposed Polk County TDA would have two members appointed by each of the participating municipalities and four members appointed by the County. The three options were 1) to apply for legislation to create the County TDA without Columbus as a hybrid system, 2) convince Columbus to participate so all the towns were involved or 3) do nothing. The Tryon Tourism Development Authority members discussed the pros and cons of the options briefly. Chairman Mason-Freeman was concerned that funding requested by Tryon for promotion projects might be declined by the County TDA for arbitrary reasons. Mason-Freeman did not like to have to ask permission for each use of funds. Tryon Authority members did not want marketing expenditures limited to "heads-in-beds" options only. Tryon occupancy tax revenues were decreasing due to decreasing numbers of vacation rental properties and delay in reopening of Pine Crest Inn. Hospitality operating members confirmed that many property owners were discontinuing short-term rentals in favor of long-term rentals not

subject to occupancy tax. Some members projected that short-term rentals would increase when the Saluda Grade Trail opened and wanted to wait and keep municipal occupancy taxes controlled locally. Other members did not believe that the trail would reverse the decline in short-term rentals. The expected opening of the Saluda Grade Trail was not confirmed but could be as short as a few years for the segment in South Carolina or up to 5 – 7 years before the entire route would be open to visitors.

The lawsuit filed by property owner to recover value of land taken for the trail was discussed briefly. The Town of Tryon owned four parcels along the route and had filed for settlement funds. Fatland had recommended to the Tryon Board of Commissioners that funds recovered from the settlement be used to build trail support infrastructure to accommodate visitors.

Vining made a motion to approve the March 2025 Tourism Financial Report as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget Discussion

Fatland noted that the July 1, 2024 beginning balance on the monthly financial report (\$55,596.81) was very close to the confirmed beginning balance from the auditors after all adjustments applied (\$55,691).

The Proposed Budget was presented for review and discussion:

ITEM	PROPOSED FY 2025/26 BUDGET
REVENUES	
Occupancy Taxes	\$ 20,000
Investment Earnings	0
Appropriation of Fund Balance	5,000
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 25,000
EXPENDITURES	
Salaries, Wages Regular	\$ 6,450
401K Fringe	130
FICA Expense	525
Retirement Expenses	920
Health Insurance	1,575
Supplies and Materials	2,000
Website Design	10,200
Event Marketing	2,000
Social Media	1,200
EV Charging Station at Depot	0
Transfer to General Fund	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 25,000

The proposed budget for FY 2025-26 included occupancy tax revenue of \$20,000 and appropriation from fund balance of \$5,000 for a total budget of \$25,000. Expenditures in the proposed FY 2025-26 budget included personnel costs for staff support and tax collection (\$6,450 + \$130+\$525+\$920+\$1,575 = \$9,600), supplies and materials (\$2,000), website design/management (\$10,200), event marketing (\$2,000), and social media (\$1,200) for a total of \$25,000 expenditures.

Decline in occupancy tax revenues was discussed. Tropical Storm Helene flooding and wildfires had negatively impacted tourism in western North Carolina. COVID did improve occupancy tax collections

in past years due to metropolitan residents opting for trips to rural areas of the USA instead of cruises and international travel, but that temporary effect was declining in the last couple of years. Increasing population in Landrum, SC and Columbus with new developments being approved could shift the housing market away from short-term-rentals toward single family homes and long-term rentals.

Vining made a motion to approve the proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 as presented. Crowell seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Saluda Grade Trail Update

Crowell reported that the Town of Tryon had sent a letter to request support for North Carolina state funding for the Saluda Grade Trail acquisition and development. Crowell reported that the lawsuits for property owners to be compensated for right-of-way appropriation would not be filed until the contracts for transfer of ownership were signed between Norfolk Southern Corporation and the Saluda Grade Trail project development group. The sale closing was scheduled for July 26, 2025. The Saluda Grade Trail project committee was scheduled to meet in Saluda on April 15, 2025. Representatives from the municipalities had been invited to attend that meeting for an update.

Website & Social Media

Tracey Daniels was not present since she was attending the VISIT-NC 365 Conference but had transmitted a brief e-mail report and hard copies were reviewed. Summary is below:

- Tracey Daniels and Steven Siler attended DIY Marketing Conference in Asheville, NC on March 17-18, 2025. Daniels had a few new ideas that she would share at the next meeting. Siler stated he was disappointed in the quality of the information provided at the DIY conference considering the high fee to attend. Most of the information provided focused on the Asheville market and was not applicable to Tryon.
- Daniels would be attending VISIT-NC 365 Conference in Hickory, NC on April 6-8, 2025 with grant funding from the Dogwood Trust. Daniels planned to attend sessions on Rural Tourism Development, The New VisitNC.com, How Weird Wins: Countering Audience Indifference, Exploring Cultural and Experiential Trails, plus all of the keynotes and group sessions.

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Discussion

A few issues affecting tourism were discussed. Decrease in number of B&Bs and vacation rental units in Tryon had been noted. Increasing demand for homes and increasing interest rates and property valuation were making short-term rentals less profitable. Having Brooks Tavern and Throwbax Bar & Grille with 7-day operating schedules was improving downtown vitality. Throwbax Bar & Grille was temporarily closed on Wednesdays for renovations and would return to its 7-day schedule soon. It was reported that Hendersonville restaurant closings had resulted in displaced Hendersonville workers seeking work in Tryon restaurants. Public safety and traffic enforcement issues were discussed briefly as they related to tourism and perceived hospitality and friendliness of downtown Tryon.

Other

Tryon Horse Trademark – Vining stated that he was against the Town of Tryon trademarking Morris the Tryon Horse and charging fees to use the Morris the Tryon Horse trademark. A flat fee as well as a percentage of sales above a minimum sales total was being charged. Casavant supported trademarking Morris the Tryon Horse but did not think the Town of Tryon should charge a fee to use the trademark on goods. Siler felt that the revenue generated from use of the Morris the Horse trademark could support downtown projects.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was scheduled for Monday, May 5, 2025 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room. Crowell would not be able to attend due to another commitment. The meeting date was confirmed.

Adjourn

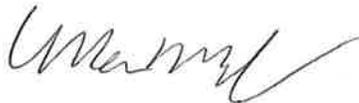
Mason-Freeman made a motion to adjourn. Crowell seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned at 5:37 pm.

Prepared by



Meg Rogers
Secretary

Approved:



Maria Mason-Freeman
Chairman