

Explore ASHEVILLE

Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority A Joint Meeting of the Public Authority and Nonprofit Corporation

Via Zoom Webinar due to the COVID-19 Pandemic/State of Emergency

Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 23, 2022

- Present (Voting):** Kathleen Mosher, Chair; Brenda Durden, Vice Chair; Andrew Celwyn, Larry Crosby, Matthew Lehman, HP Patel, Leah Ashburn, Michael Lusick, Scott Patel
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore
Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- CVB Staff:** Vic Isley, Marla Tambellini, Pat Kappes, Whitney Smith, Jonna Sampson, Julia Simpson
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bisette/BCTDA Attorney
- Online Attendees:** Timothy Love, Buncombe County
Eric Hardy, Consultant for Town of Woodfin
Glenn Cox, Hannah Dosa, Marshall Hilliard, Connie Holliday, Jennifer Kass-Green, Khal Khoury, Sarah Lowery, Holly Oakley, Kathi Petersen, Tina Porter, Sha'Linda Pruitt, Charlie Reed, Dodie Stephens, Michael Poandl; Explore Asheville Staff
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
Demp Bradford, Asheville Buncombe Regional Spots Commission
Jane Anderson, Kim Murray; Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Meghan Rogers, Asheville Downtown Association
Dawn Chavez, Asheville GreenWorks
Robert Michel, Asheville Homestay Network
Amanda Bryant, Asheville Museum of Science
Nicole Will, Asheville Wellness Tours
Edie Weichert, Bob Moog Foundation
Lynn Pegg, Buncombe County Recreation Services
Crystal Camacho, Comfort Suites Outlet Center/Virtelle Hospitality
Rick Bell, Engadine Inn & Cabins
Jim Muth, John Ellis; Past BCTDA Board Members
Ruth Summers, Grove Arcade Public Market Foundation
Lacy Cross, Movement Bank
Lisa Raleigh, Susan Andrew, Jack Henderson, Anne Keller; RiverLink
Louise Glickman, Sand Hill Artists Collective and ArtsVille NC Podcast

Helen Chickering, Blue Ridge Public Radio
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas
Tiana Kennell, Asheville Citizen-Times
Bryan Overstreet, WLOS TV
Sunshine Request

Executive Summary of Meeting Minutes

- Chairwoman Mosher called the virtual joint regular meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:01 a.m.
- Minutes from the January 26, 2022, BCTDA meeting were approved with an 8-0 vote.
- The January 2022 financial statements were reviewed and approved with an 8-0 vote.
- Chairwoman Mosher appointed Leah Ashburn, Larry Crosby, and Himanshu Karvir to serve as the BCTDA's Nominating Committee.
- In her President & CEO's report, Ms. Isley reviewed recent lodging metrics.
- Ms. Kappes presented an annual report on Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) projects that are currently under contract.
- Tim Love and Eric Hardy shared an update on the Woodfin Greenway & Blueway project.
- Tim Love provided an update on the Enka Recreation Destination project and indicated additional funding is needed. A motion to approve assigning Buncombe County's request for increased funding to the TPDF Committee to review and make a recommendation to the BCTDA was approved with a 9-0 vote.
- With a 9-0 vote, the board approved assigning Asheville Community Theatre's contract amendment request to the TPDF Committee to review and make a recommendation to the BCTDA.
- Ms. Kappes shared a timeline and details related to the 2022 TPDF funding cycle.
- With an 8-0 vote, the BCTDA's Vice Chair was approved to be a standing member of the TPDF Committee.
- With an 8-0 vote, Gary Froeba, Stephanie Moore, Jim Muth, and Scott Kerchner were appointed to serve three-year terms on the TPDF Committee.
- An *Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences* pillar update was provided by Ms. Tambellini and Ms. Smith.
- An update from Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley was heard.
- Chairwoman Mosher reported there were no emailed public comments, nor requests to speak, received for this meeting.
- With a 9-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 10:52 a.m.

Call of the Joint BCTDA Meeting to Order

Chairwoman Mosher called the virtual joint regular meeting of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA), a Public Authority and BCTDA, a Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:01 a.m. She said the agenda and meeting documents are provided on AshevilleCVB.com and the recording and additional materials will be posted after the meeting.

Board Member Roll Call: Board members responded as Chairwoman Mosher called roll verifying nine BCTDA members were virtually in attendance. Commissioner Pressley joined the meeting at 9:11 a.m., and Ms. Ashburn joined at 9:18 a.m., as per the webinar attendee report.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Vice Chairwoman Durden made a motion to approve the January 26, 2022, regular meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Celwyn seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0.

Financial Reports

January 2022 Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the January 2022 financial reports. Mr. Celwyn noted record lodging sales have occurred over the past seven months. There were no questions.

Mr. Lehman made a motion to approve the January 2022 financial reports as presented. Mr. Crosby seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0.

BCTDA Nominating Committee Appointments

Chairwoman Mosher appointed Leah Ashburn, Larry Crosby, and Himanshu Karvir to serve as this year's BCTDA Nominating Committee. She thanked them for their willingness to serve in this capacity.

President & CEO Report

Industry Metrics

Ms. Isley reviewed recent occupancy and room demand lodging metrics and provided comparisons to prior years.

Other Updates

Ms. Isley concluded her report by stating board members received the January Monthly Highlights Report which, as discussed last month, has been restructured to more closely align reporting and outcomes with Explore Asheville's four strategic pillars.

The Monthly Highlights and Destination Performance reports are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) Update

TPDF Projects Annual Report

Ms. Kappes said 25% of occupancy tax funds received are dedicated to funding community projects through the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF). She reported 39 projects have benefited from funding, totaling nearly \$44 million since the 2001 inception of the Fund. Ms. Kappes said 60% of funding has been awarded to the City of Asheville and Buncombe County for government-owned projects. She shared a [list of the projects that have received funding](#), noting thousands of local residents utilize these facilities every day.

Ms. Kappes provided a summary overview of the 17 TPDF projects that are currently under active contract. She said it is a requirement in all TPDF grant agreements that grantees submit

an annual update each January throughout the term of the contract, which begins at the time of award approval and continues for four years after project completion. Ms. Kappes noted a full report was provided to the board in advance of today's meeting.

Ms. Kappes said the impact of the pandemic on the grantee organizations was significant for projects in development, as well as those recently completed. She noted fundraising efforts were derailed as organizations turned their attention to supporting operations with limited staff or closed doors. Ms. Kappes said a request to change the scope of the Asheville Community Theatre project has been received and will be discussed later in the meeting, and one from Montford Park Players is anticipated in the coming weeks. Additionally, budgetary and timeline challenges will be outlined in updates later in the meeting by representatives from the Woodfin Blueway & Greenway and Enka Recreation Destination projects, which are managed by Buncombe County.

Ms. Kappes said recently completed projects that experienced pandemic-related closures or reduced capacities that were able to avoid closing permanently include the Asheville Art Museum, The Wortham Center, LEAF Global Arts Center, and Center for Craft. She said in contrast, projects that offer outdoor or open-air experiences or serve the sports market, including the Bob Lewis Ballpark, the WNC Nature Center, the North Carolina Arboretum, and the WNC Farmers Market, reported positive overnight lodging impacts.

African American Heritage Trail

Ms. Kappes reported on the progress of the African American Heritage Trail (AAHT). She said the project was proposed as part of the 2018 TPDF grant cycle by the River Front Development Group, when the BCTDA committed to fund the complete development, design, and installation of the trail, as well as provide staff support and resources throughout its development. She said the project goal is to develop content, in collaboration with the community, that documents and preserves the Asheville area's African American heritage and to create experiences in which these stories can be shared via walking trail markers. Project plans include a complementary website and digital trail and will be maintained in perpetuity as part of the BCTDA's Wayfinding signage program.

Ms. Kappes reviewed the AAHT's core project team and the four phases of development. She said Phase 1 - Community Engagement, was completed, and the project is currently in Phase 2 - the Interpretive Planning stage. Next will be Phase 3 - Concept Design, followed by Phase 4 - Project Completion, estimated in Spring 2023. Ms. Kappes reviewed the elements of Phase 2, responses received in the community input survey, and the roles and members of the newly established advisory committee.

Ms. Kappes noted additional information on the AAHT can be found on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

Buncombe County Project Updates

Ms. Kappes said Tim Love, Buncombe County's Director of Economic Development and Governmental Relations, and Eric Hardy, Special Projects Consultant for the Town of Woodfin, will present updates on two projects that were awarded TPDF funding.

Ms. Kappes said Mr. Hardy will provide an update on the Woodfin Greenway & Blueway Project, which was awarded \$2,250,000 in 2018 to the Town of Woodfin and Buncombe County. She said this is a recreation infrastructure project that includes five miles of new greenway trails,

development of Silver-Line Park on the French Broad River, creating an in-stream Whitewater Wave feature, a Riverside Park expansion, and the Beaverdam Creek Greenway.

Ms. Kappes said Mr. Love will provide an update on Buncombe County's Enka Recreation Destination project, which was awarded \$6 million in TPDF funding in 2018. She said this is a premiere sports facility that includes three turf soccer field conversions, lighting for the newly turfed fields, lighting at Bob Lewis Ballpark, and the Enka Heritage Trail, which includes two miles of greenway. Ms. Kappes said Mr. Love will share that a request for additional funding will be forthcoming due to an increase in scope and material costs for this project, and staff recommends that the board consider assigning the request to the TPDF Committee for review.

Mr. Love thanked Ms. Kappes for the introduction and overview and said Buncombe County is managing both of these ambitious community projects. He added the projects are assets that benefit both residents and visitors alike.

Mr. Hardy presented an overview of the Woodfin Greenway & Blueway project, sharing maps that show the location of each component, and provided status and budgetary updates and photos or renderings of Silver-Line Park, the Riverside Park expansion, and the Whitewater Wave feature.

Mr. Love provided an update on the five miles of greenway planned along Highway 251 and Beaverdam Creek. He then presented a summary slide of all the project components, which included anticipated timelines and completion dates. Mr. Love said Silver-Line Park will open in April 2022 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. He added there is an ongoing effort to reassess project costs and funding sources as they move through design processes.

Next, Mr. Love provided an update on the Enka Recreation Destination project. He noted the BCTDA is one of the largest funders currently at \$6 million and thanked board members for their support. Mr. Love shared an overview of this recreation, sports, and greenway destination that provides connectivity between the Buncombe County Sports Park, the Bob Lewis Ballpark, A-B Tech, Enka Intermediate School, and Enka Commerce Park.

Mr. Love presented a funding update, noting costs have increased since the initial grant budget was developed, and additional unplanned costs have been identified. He noted he will be requesting funding from Buncombe County next week to cover the shortfall for the turf project so it can be completed this fall. Mr. Love said he will be seeking additional TPDF funding from the BCTDA to help make up the difference in other costs, although he did not offer a specific dollar amount.

When the presentation ended, Mr. Love and Mr. Hardy answered all related questions. Board members expressed enthusiasm related to these projects becoming available to our community.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked Mr. Love and Mr. Hardy, and then requested a motion.

Ms. Ashburn made a motion to approve assigning Buncombe County's request for increased funding for the Enka Recreation Destination project to the TPDF Committee to review and make a funding recommendation to the BCTDA. Mr. Crosby seconded the motion.

Discussion included Mr. Celwyn sharing his understanding that the goal of putting TPDF funding on hold a couple of years ago was to make more strategic investments. While he believes this is a great project for the community, he thinks it is best to have projects go through funding cycles,

and it is not a good idea for the board to do spot approvals outside of those cycles. Mr. Celwyn said he wants to make sure funding requests are not considered in isolation, but in a space where projects are compared to each other to make sure the board is spending money in the best way possible for our community.

Ms. Kappes responded that requests being received outside of funding cycles on approved projects is not unprecedented. She said that in the past, staff has received requests for contract amendments in relation to construction timelines, project scope, and budgetary challenges. Ms. Kappes said this project was heavily vetted and recommended by the TPDF Committee in the past and was approved by the BCTDA. She offered it is appropriate to consider a request outside of a grant cycle. Ms. Kappes said putting the request through a full application process again would mean Buncombe County would have to start from scratch, and a funding decision would not be made until October. Considering the urgent need to get the project done for our community and visitors, Ms. Kappes said staff is recommending the request be reviewed by the committee now for quicker assessment.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked Mr. Celwyn and Ms. Kappes for their comments. A roll call vote was taken and with all in favor, the motion carried 9-0.

Asheville Community Theatre Amendment Request

Ms. Kappes said a contract amendment request was received from Asheville Community Theatre (ACT). She said ACT was awarded \$1 million in TPDF funding in the 2016 grant cycle for a theatre expansion and renovation project, which included two phases. She said the Phase I was completed and \$430,000 of the TPDF grant was disbursed in 2017.

Ms. Kappes said due to significant setbacks caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, ACT will no longer pursue the full scope of Phase II. She said new, scaled-back plans include renovation of the basement area into a dedicated education space, which will include classroom, rehearsal, and office space, and an additional restroom.

Ms. Kappes said the grantee is requesting to reduce the scope of construction to only include renovation of the basement and reduce the amount of the balance of the grant from \$570,000 to \$100,000. She said staff is recommending that the BCTDA consider assigning this request to the TPDF committee for further review.

Chairwoman Mosher said that as the TPDF Committee reviews the request, they will ask project representatives to demonstrate room night criteria to support the BCTDA's investment in the project. There were no comments or questions posed by board members.

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve assigning the Asheville Community Theatre's contract amendment request to the TPDF Committee to review and make a funding recommendation to the BCTDA. Mr. Lehman seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

2022 TPDF Funding Cycle

Ms. Kappes reviewed the following timeline and steps that have been established to host the 2022 TPDF funding cycle:



Ms. Kappes said that, with the exception of the one-time \$5 million BCTDA Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund distribution, the TPDF program has been paused since 2019. She said the amount of TPDF funds available for community project investments as of this meeting is \$11.1 million, and the amount projected to be available by the end of the fiscal year is \$15.1 million. She noted these amounts are comparable to this year's paid media and marketing budget amounts.

Next, Ms. Kappes reviewed the following 2022 TPDF grant cycle core criteria, based on existing legislation and other requirements:

- Funding must be for capital investments only.
- Each project must demonstrate that it will create substantial new and incremental overnight lodging in Buncombe County.
- Funding is restricted to nonprofit organizations, including municipal partners.
- Additional criteria will be considered to assess if projects are in alignment with the BCTDA's strategic pillars.

Ms. Kappes said a new online portal will be implemented to improve and simplify the application process. She encouraged prospective applicants to attend the TPDF Information Session scheduled Wednesday, May 4, at 3:00 p.m., at Explore Asheville. More information can be found on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

TPDF Committee Appointments

Ms. Kappes said after board approval was received in November to issue a call for prospective candidates to fill four vacancies on the TPDF Committee, an application process was established, and a nominating subcommittee was appointed. She said before presenting the

recommendations for those vacancies, staff is making a requesting action to formalize a process for the BCTDA's Vice Chair to be a standing member of the TPDF Committee.

Mr. Crosby made a motion to approve the appointing the BCTDA Vice Chair as a standing member of the TPDF Committee for a term that coincides with that individual's service as BCTDA Vice Chair as follows: the Vice Chair's term on the Committee shall begin as of the beginning of the grant cycle in the calendar year in which the Vice Chair's term as Vice Chair of the Authority will begin and shall end as of the beginning of the grant cycle in the calendar year in which the Vice Chair's term as Vice Chair of the Authority shall end. Mr. HP Patel seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0, with Vice Chairwoman Durden abstaining from the vote.

Next, Ms. Kappes said eleven submissions were received in response to the call for prospective candidates to serve on the TPDF Committee. Vice Chairwoman Durden reviewed the process and criteria the nominating committee followed to consider candidates to recommend to serve alongside Ken Stamps, Jay Curwen, Fielding Lowe, David McCartney, and herself. She said the nominating committee recommends the following four candidates be appointed to the TPDF Committee:

- Gary Froeba, The Omni Grove Park Inn
- Stephanie Moore, Center for Craft
- Jim Muth, Muth Management Inc. Consulting
- Scott Kerchner, Element Asheville Downtown

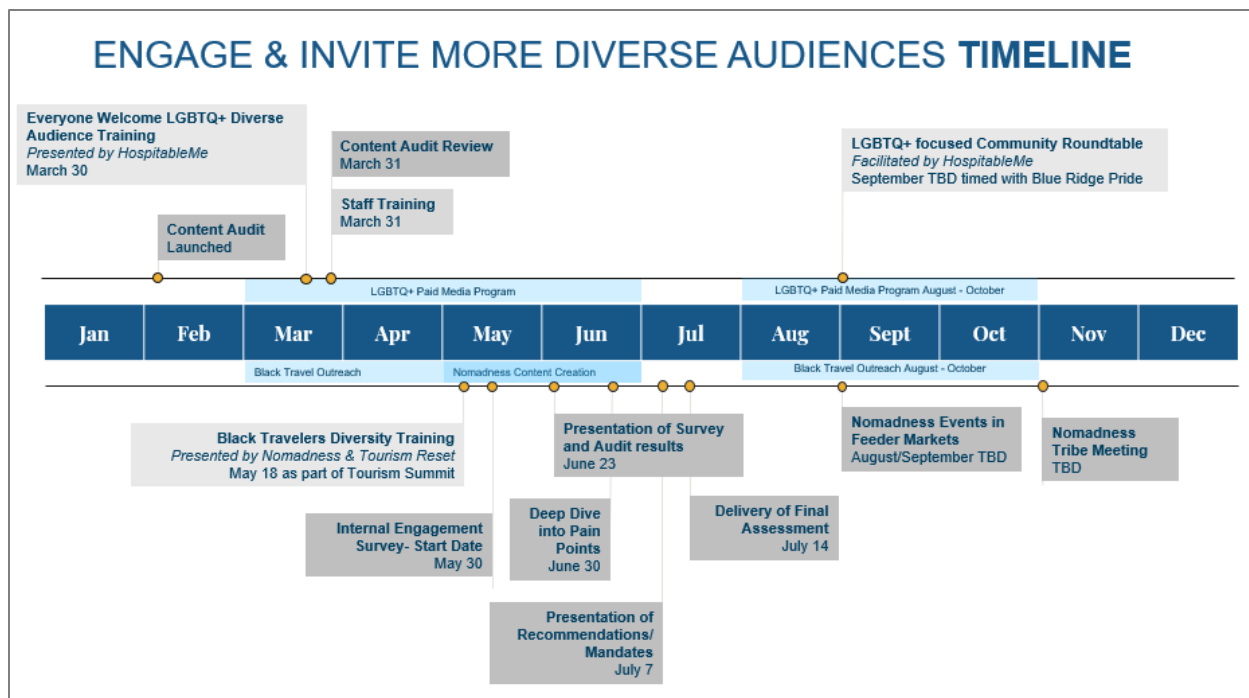
Ms. Ashburn made a motion to appoint Gary Froeba, Stephanie Moore, Jim Muth, and Scott Kerchner to serve three-year terms as new members of the TPDF Committee. Mr. Lehman seconded the motion. There was no discussion, and a roll call vote was taken. The motion carried 8-0, with Mr. Celwyn abstaining by providing a response of present.

Pillar Update: Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences

Ms. Tambellini reviewed a slide that outlined Explore Asheville's four strategic pillars that continue to drive the team's strategies and tactics. She said back in the fall, she shared the marketing department's work within the *Encourage Safe and Responsible Travel* pillar. Before the holidays, Ms. Tambellini highlighted efforts related to the *Deliver Balanced Recovery and Sustainable Growth* and *Promote and Support Asheville's Creative Spirit* strategic pillars.

Ms. Tambellini said today, she and Director of Content Whitney Smith, will share progress on key results related to the *Engage and Invite More Diverse Audiences* pillar. This pillar's objective: Extend a genuine invitation to Black travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQ+ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses, and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win. Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.

Ms. Tambellini shared ethnicity demographics and reviewed the events, media, and initiatives in the following calendar year 2022 timeline of Explore Asheville's efforts in relation to this pillar:



Next, Ms. Tambellini reviewed components of the media plan, in which a minimum of \$1 million in paid media will be invested in Black-owned media publishers and creators. She then shared efforts related to LGBTQ+ and Black media partnerships, reaching diverse audiences via podcast ads, and PR successes and articles that showcase Asheville as a welcoming destination. She commended the PR team for their involvement in AFAR Magazine’s article that circulated last night entitled, [“Why the Block is Asheville’s Must-Visit Neighborhood.”](#)

Ms. Smith shared efforts the content team has been working throughout the year to build up and diversify Explore Asheville’s assets that include photography and videography, while creating multi-layer content campaigns that spotlight the people, places, and experiences that build up Asheville’s unique culture.

Ms. Smith reviewed the content campaign for Black History Month that featured Matthew Bacoate, Andrea Clark, Dr. Oralene Simmons, and Black Wall Street AVL. She then highlighted efforts related to the James Vester Miller Trail, and the creation of a landing page on ExploreAsheville.com that will feature Asheville’s Black culture, to be launched soon. Ms. Smith noted how some of these new stories, videos, and other assets will be interwoven into the African American Heritage Trail project that Ms. Kappes spoke about earlier in the meeting.

Ms. Ashburn complimented the team for their efforts to reach a more diverse audience for Asheville. She added a personal anecdote that her family moved here from Charlotte to start their business after first coming as visitors. Ms. Ashburn said bringing in more diverse visitors will result in the Asheville area having more diverse residents and businesses.

In response to Vice Chairwoman Durden’s question asking if the diversity training will be available to tourism partners, Ms. Tambellini said the trainings include events for partners. Ms. Isley said the process is a journey and Explore Asheville is dedicated to equipping our internal team, and also our stakeholders and partners.

Asheville City Council Update

Councilmember Kilgore exited the meeting at 10:03 a.m., therefore, an Asheville City Council update was not provided.

Buncombe County Commission Update

Commissioner Pressley reported on county-related business, including the planned allocation of \$25 million in ARPA funding, enhancements to early childcare programs, the upcoming Southern Conference basketball tournament, the Billie Jean King Cup tennis tournament scheduled in April, and the recent lifting of the mask mandate in Buncombe County. He also noted that Pratt & Whitney is on track for a November 2022 opening, with the bridge scheduled to open next month. Commissioner Pressley expressed his gratitude to Tim Love, Eric Hardy, and the BCTDA for their collaboration and support of Buncombe County's TPDF projects.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked Commissioner Pressley for his report.

Miscellaneous Business

There was no miscellaneous business discussed at this meeting.

Comments from the General Public

Live Public Comments

Chairwoman Mosher said members of the public were invited to sign-up to verbally share live comments during today's virtual BCTDA meeting. She reported that as of yesterday's 12:00 p.m. registration deadline, no requests to speak had been received.

Written Public Comments

Chairwoman Mosher said members of the public were invited to submit comments via email to Reply@ExploreAsheville.com through 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 22, 2022. She reported there were no written public comments received by the deadline.

Adjournment

Chairwoman Mosher said it has been a very full meeting and she thanked everyone for their time. She requested a motion to adjourn.

Vice Chairwoman Durden moved to adjourn the meeting and Ms. Ashburn seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0 and the meeting ended at 10:52 a.m.

The PowerPoint presentation and relevant documents are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau and are posted on AshevilleCVB.com.

The next joint BCTDA meeting will be held virtually on Thursday, March 24, 2022, beginning at 9:00 a.m.

The BCTDA's Annual Planning Session will be held in-person on Friday, March 25, 2022, beginning at 8:30 a.m., at The Inn on Biltmore.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager