

# Explore ASHEVILLE

Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

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

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

### Virtual Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

- Present (Voting):** Himanshu Karvir, Chair; Gary Froeba, Vice Chair; Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Brenda Durden, John Luckett, John McKibbon, Kathleen Mosher, James Poole
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore  
Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- CVB Staff:** Victoria Isley, Marla Tambellini, Dianna Pierce, Pat Kappes, Jonna Sampson, Daniel Bradley
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bisette
- Agency:** Ashley Keetle, 360i
- Online Attendees:** Glenn Cox, Kathryn Dewey, Hannah Dosa, Connie Holliday, Josh Jones, Jennifer Kass-Green, Sarah Lowery, Kathi Petersen, Tina Porter, Glenn Ramey, Charlie Reed, Whitney Smith, Jason Tarr, Landis Taylor, Nicole Will; Explore Asheville Staff  
Kelsey Ann Bassel, Meghan Jackson, Emery Morris, Susan Neikirk, Nick Smart; 360i  
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce  
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association  
Bob Michel, Asheville Homestay Network  
Tina Kinsey, Asheville Regional Airport  
Chip Craig, John Ellis, Jim Muth; Past BCTDA Board Members  
Timothy Love, Buncombe County  
Rick Bell, Engadine Inn & Cabins/Asheville B&B Association  
Chris Corl, Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville  
Katie Cornell, Asheville Area Arts Council  
Leah Rainis, Asheville Brewers Alliance  
Ed Manning, Leadership Asheville  
Anthony Bennett, RedSky Strategy  
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas  
Daniel Walton, Mountain Xpress  
WLOS News  
Sunshine Request

Additional tourism industry partners and members of the public registered in advance and viewed the online meeting.

### **Executive Summary of Meeting Minutes**

- Chairman Karvir called the virtual joint regular meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:00 a.m.
- Minutes from the January 27, 2021, BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with an 8-0 vote.
- The Processes and Protocols for Public Comments document that was developed to receive live verbal comments during virtual meetings, in addition to emailed comments, was approved with a 7-0 vote.
- Chairman Karvir appointed Gary Froeba, John McKibbon, and Leah Ashburn to serve as the BCTDA's nominating committee.
- The January 2021 financial statements were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- Ms. Isley provided an update on recent penalty waiver requests.
- In her President & CEO's report, Ms. Isley reviewed recent lodging metrics and the four strategic pillars that will direct recovery efforts and initiatives. She also presented the FY 22 BCTDA meeting schedule.
- Ms. Kappes presented highlights from the annual report of the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) projects that are in active contract.
- A budget amendment, in the amount of \$9,310,000 to close out the budgets of TPDF projects that have been completed and paid in full, was approved a 9-0 vote.
- A TPDF contract amendment, extending the completion deadline for the City of Asheville's Riverfront Destination Development project, was approved with a 9-0 vote.
- A TPDF budget ordinance, in the amount of \$500,000 to establish a budget for the African American Heritage Trail, was approved with a 9-0 vote.
- Ms. Tambellini and Ashley Keetle shared presentation on Recovery Marketing and Messaging.
- Ms. Pierce shared a presentation on Preparing for Group Recovery.
- Brief updates from Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore and Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley were provided.
- Chairman Karvir reported that two public comments were received via email in advance of today's meeting, and there were no requests received from the public to make live comments.
- With a 9-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 10:33 a.m.

### **Call of the Joint BCTDA Meeting to Order**

Chairman Karvir 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 9:00 a.m. He said meeting documents are provided on the [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com) website and additional materials will be posted after the meeting.

**Board Member Roll Call:** Board members responded as Chairman Karvir called roll verifying all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, except for Mr. Poole, who joined the meeting at 9:07 a.m.

## **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the January 27, 2021, regular meeting minutes as presented. Ms. Ashburn seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0.

## **Adoption of Processes and Protocols for Public Comments**

Chairman Karvir said that at last month's meeting, he asked staff to develop a process for the board to receive verbal public comments at virtual meetings, in addition to the emailed comments that have been received throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. He added that while the BCTDA is not required to receive public comments, as a public body established to serve the community, it is desirable to do so and increases transparency.

Chairman Karvir said the proposed protocols were distributed publicly, are posted on the website, and were sent to the board in advance of today's meeting to review. He asked if there were any questions or comments, to which Mr. Celwyn responded by expressing his gratitude to the people involved in developing the new protocols for public comments.

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to adopt the Processes and Protocols for Public Comments during regular virtual monthly meetings as presented. Ms. Mosher seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 7-0, with Mr. McKibbon absent at the time due to internet issues.

The Processes and Protocols for Public Comments document is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau and is posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](http://AshevilleCVB.com).

## **Appointment of Nominating Committee**

Chairman Karvir appointed the following board members to serve as this year's BCTDA nominating committee: Gary Froeba (chair), Leah Ashburn, and John McKibbon.

## **Financial Reports**

### **January 2021 Financial Reports**

Mr. Warn reviewed the January 2021 financial reports. Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Warn and invited questions. Mr. Celwyn noted that on the History of Total Sales by Month report (page 6), the green line representing 2021 is not labeled like the other years. Mr. Warn thanked him for pointing that out and said he will make sure it's corrected.

In response to Vice Chairman Froeba's question asking about the number of vacation rentals in the area, Ms. Isley said that per AirDNA, there are over 3,500 throughout the county. She added she would be happy to present the data behind that number at a future board meeting.

Mr. Luckett made a motion to approve the January 2021 financial reports as presented. Ms. Durden seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

### **Penalty Waiver Update for Sleep Inn West**

Ms. Isley said that in the first of a two-step process, the penalty waiver request from Sleep Inn West, in the amount of \$1,816.36, was approved by the BCTDA at the December 16, 2020,

board meeting. She reported that the request was subsequently approved by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners at its February 2, 2021, meeting.

#### Penalty Waiver Update for The Lion & The Rose

Ms. Isley said a penalty waiver request, in the amount of \$157.46, was received from Mr. & Mrs. Steve Wilson, owners of The Lion & The Rose Bed and Breakfast/Carolina Dreamin' Inc. She noted the payment for December occupancy taxes was one day late due to the owners being out of town with no internet access and the Buncombe County Tax Department has verified that this was the property's first late offense.

Ms. Isley said the BCTDA previously gave authority to Explore Asheville's President & CEO to approve penalty waiver requests if the amount was \$500 or less and it was property's first late offense without bringing before the board. She noted this request met that criteria and she has approved the penalty to be passed on to the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners in the second of the two-step process. The request will be considered by the Commissioners on April 6, 2021.

#### President & CEO's Report

Ms. Isley shared a PowerPoint presentation in which she reviewed recent lodging metrics and trends. She said based on data from Destination Analysts, travel sentiment in the US is the highest it's been since the start of the pandemic, with 60% of people ready to travel. Ms. Isley said safe and responsible travel messaging will be entering the market in the spring to meet people where they are in the trip-planning process. She added Ms. Tambellini will share additional details on recovery messaging later in the meeting.

Next, Ms. Isley reviewed the four strategic pillars that will be further explored at the board's upcoming annual planning retreat:

1. Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth
2. Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel
3. Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences
4. Promote & Support Asheville's Creative Spirit

#### BCTDA Virtual Annual Planning Retreat – March 25-26, 2021

Ms. Isley encouraged board members to mark their calendars for the BCTDA's virtual annual planning retreat and March board meeting, scheduled Thursday and Friday, March 25-26, 2021.

#### FY 22 BCTDA Meeting Schedule

Ms. Isley presented the FY 22 BCTDA board meeting schedule. Meetings are held 9-11 a.m., unless otherwise noted:

Wednesday, July 28, 2021  
Wednesday, August 25, 2021  
Wednesday, September 29, 2021  
Wednesday, October 27, 2021  
Wednesday, November 17, 2021  
Wednesday, December 15, 2021  
Wednesday, January 26, 2022  
Wednesday, February 23, 2022

Thursday, March 24, 2022 – Annual Planning Retreat (full day)  
Friday, March 25, 2022 – Annual Planning Retreat & March Meeting (half day)  
Wednesday, April 27, 2022  
Wednesday, May 25, 2022  
Wednesday, June 29, 2022

Ms. Isley concluded her report by stating the CVB Staff Recap, Destination Dashboard and Quick List are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](http://AshevilleCVB.com).

## **Tourism Product Development Fund Update**

### **Annual TPDF Project Update**

Ms. Kappes shared a PowerPoint presentation in which she reviewed the status of Tourism Product Development Fund (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 throughout the term of the contract, which begins at the time of the award being granted and continues through four years after project completion. Ms. Kappes noted the full report was provided to the board in advance of today's meeting.

Highlights of the presentation included:

- \$43 million in TPDF funding has been awarded to 39 community projects since 2001.
- To date, 75% of funding has been awarded to City, County, and State-owned projects, with 25% being awarded to private and non-profit entities.
- In 2020, \$5 million was invested in the BCTDA Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund, and eight of the TPDF projects highlighted in the report today also received a grant from the Fund.
- There are currently seven projects in development or under construction and 12 completed projects still in the reporting phase.
- Ms. Kappes shared photos and updates of several recently completed projects. She reviewed ways the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted project budgets, fundraising efforts, construction timelines, and operations.

### **Budget Amendment to Close Completed TPDF Project Budgets**

Ms. Kappes said since TPDF project budgets span multiple years and are not fiscal year based, an amendment is needed to close out the budgets of TPDF projects that have recently been completed. Chairman Karvir presented the proposed budget amendment and called for action.

Ms. Mosher made a motion to approve the budget amendment in the amount of \$9,310,000 as presented, to close out the following Tourism Product Development Fund budgets for projects that have been completed and paid in full:

- Asheville Art Museum for the Museum Expansion project - \$500,000
- City of Asheville for the US Cellular Center Theatre Creation & Meeting Room Conversion project - \$1,500,000
- Diana Wortham Theatre for The Wortham Center project - \$700,000
- LEAF Community Arts for the LEAF Global Arts Center project - \$705,000
- NC Arboretum Society for the Garden Lighting and Parking Enhancements project - \$905,000
- The BCTDA Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund for COVID-related pandemic relief for local businesses - \$5,000,000

Mr. Celwyn seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

### Contract Amendment Request - City of Asheville/Riverfront Destination Development

Ms. Kappes said the City of Asheville's Riverfront Destination Development project received TPDF grants in 2014, 2015 and 2017, totaling \$7.1 million. She said the construction completion deadline required in the grant agreement is December 31, 2020 and, while most of the project elements are complete and open to the public, the city is requesting an extension to May 31, 2021. The extension would allow for the completion of any unfinished components and punch list items. Ms. Kappes noted a series of grand opening events are scheduled in April and May.

Ms. Ashburn made a motion to approve the contract amendment to extend the required completion date of the City of Asheville's Riverfront Destination Development project from December 31, 2020, to May 31, 2021, as requested. Mr. Luckett seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

### African American Heritage Trail Project Budget

The African American Heritage Trail (AAHT), as proposed by the River Front Development Group, is conceived to be a walking trail with up to 19 sites that highlight stories from historic African American communities in and around downtown Asheville. The themes of the trail may include community life, entrepreneurship, faith, entertainment, and education. The narrative content will inform the physical path of the trail.

Ms. Kappes shared a PowerPoint presentation providing background and an update on the AAHT project and highlights included:

- The project was presented to the BCTDA as part of the 2018 TPDF grant cycle by Catherine Mitchell and Veronica Gunter of the River Front Development Group.
- In lieu of awarding a grant, 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.
- The physical trail would be adopted into the Wayfinding signage program, ensuring it would be maintained on a continual and permanent basis after completion.
- Explore Asheville staff would create a digital version of the finished trail to be hosted on the ExploreAsheville.com website, which will provide broader exposure for the trail and the heritage of Asheville's African American community.

Ms. Kappes reviewed the project's four phases of development, milestones achieved to date, photos from the Phase 1 community engagement events, and elements included in Phases 2-4.

Ms. Kappes said the next step is establish a budget for the project and she presented a proposed budget ordinance, in the amount of \$500,000, for the board's consideration.

Next, Chairman Karvir invited questions and comments. In response to Mr. Celwyn's inquiry regarding how the funds would be used, Ms. Kappes said they will cover the design of the trail, the mapping out of story content, solicitation of additional stories, all community engagement workshops, locating the markers, and fabrication and installation of the markers, with the intention of utilizing mostly local vendors when possible and the BCTDA's current wayfinding system suppliers.

In response to Ms. Mosher's question about the next phase of community engagement and opportunities to plug-in, Ms. Kappes said staff will mostly repeat the extensive outreach process utilized in Phase 1 and she provided an overview of those efforts.

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to approve the budget ordinance as presented, allocating \$500,000 from the Tourism Product Development Fund Appropriated Fund Balance to establish a budget for the African American Heritage Trail project. Ms. Mosher and Mr. Poole simultaneously seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

### **Recovery Marketing & Messaging**

Ms. Tambellini and Ashley Keetle with 360i shared a PowerPoint presentation in which they provided an overview of the upcoming spring marketing plan and, building on what was presented last month, additional updates on spring media and messaging efforts. Ms. Tambellini said the initiatives being presented today are in alignment with the strategic pillars that were outlined earlier in the meeting by Ms. Isley. She reviewed the elements of the plan as they relate to engaging and inviting more diverse audiences, encouraging safe and responsible travel, and promoting and supporting Asheville's creative spirit.

Ms. Keetle reviewed the carefully phased approach being implemented to reenter the market with advertising and shared specifics about the media partners included in the spring and summer campaign. She said the plan is to start with digital in mid-March and add television and video assets in April. Chosen media partners will allow for flexible start dates based on data and trends related to the pandemic. Ms. Keetle shared the campaign's positioning statement and examples of the creative components.

Next, Ms. Tambellini shared data showing the expected timing that people plan to take trips in 2021. She stated that as dreaming and trip planning get underway and traveler sentiment improves with increased vaccine roll-out and reduced COVID-19 cases and restrictions, it's important to be in the market to keep Asheville top-of-mind.

Following the presentation, Ms. Tambellini and Ms. Keetle answered all related questions. Ms. Mosher said she is very impressed by the strategic focus of this campaign and media plan.

Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Tambellini and Ms. Keetle for the presentation.

### **Preparing for Group Recovery**

Ms. Pierce said the Group Sales & Services team is privileged to be an essential part of the recovery process to help the Asheville area rebound and thrive again. She added meetings and events are an integral part of the equation and support many small businesses in the community that provide services directly or indirectly to visiting groups. Ms. Pierce said that throughout the pandemic, the team's core responsibility has not changed: to make Asheville the place of choice for meeting planners and groups to visit when the time is right.

Ms. Pierce shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting group recovery efforts, noting Asheville is well-positioned to rebound due to it being an accessible drive location, the size and ambiance of the city, the projected size of future meetings, and the desirable style of accommodations. She reviewed the current top group markets, new needs of the industry, virtual and self-directed FAM experiences and results, a new "Welcome to Asheville!" video, Mug Moments, web content, safe meeting case studies, and virtual 3-D hotel tour view stats.

Following her presentation, Ms. Pierce answered all related questions. A brief discussion centering on group business took place. Ms. Durden thanked Ms. Pierce and her team for their efforts to help businesses in the community.

### **Asheville City Council Update**

Councilmember Kilgore commended today's presenters for the very informative reports that have been shared. She then reported on city-related business, including Asheville City Council's approval of the overlay map and incentive-based point system to be used to approve new hotels, the school board election process, approval of Asheville City Council's legislative agenda, and initiatives related to reparations.

In response to Vice Chairman Froeba's question asking how much the ¼ cent sales tax increase proposed in the legislative agenda would generate for transit, Chairman Karvir responded he had heard about \$10 million. Mr. Celwyn later confirmed that \$10 million is the estimated annual amount the tax would generate as provided publicly by Senator Julie Mayfield.

Chairman Karvir thanked Councilmember Kilgore for the update.

### **Buncombe County Commission Update**

Commissioner Pressley echoed Councilmember Kilgore's statement about the great reports that were presented today. He shared that Southern Conference will be celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary during the upcoming 5-day basketball tournament starting March 4 at Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville. He noted the county has been in communications regarding attendance and the execution of the event and he's looking forward to today's anticipated positive COVID-19 update from Governor Cooper.

Chairman Karvir thanked Commissioner Pressley for the report.

### **Miscellaneous Business**

There was no miscellaneous business discussed at this meeting.

### **Comments from the General Public**

#### **Written Public Comments**

Chairman Karvir said members of the public were invited to submit comments via email to [reply@ExploreAsheville.com](mailto:reply@ExploreAsheville.com) through 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 23, 2021. He reported two comments were received by the deadline and emailed to the board. The public comments will be kept on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

#### **Live Public Comments**

Chairman Karvir said even though the guidelines were just adopted this morning, members of the public were invited to register to verbally share live comments during today's virtual BCTDA meeting. He reported that as of yesterday's 12:00 p.m. deadline, no requests to speak had been received.

## **Adjournment**

Chairman Karvir said while the BCTDA has been in an advertising holding pattern due to COVID-19, it was encouraging to have the board get back to discussing the implementation of a media plan that focuses on safe and responsible travel. He said he appreciates the quality and amount of data that has been utilized and presented at meetings throughout the pandemic and thanked the Explore Asheville team for their efforts. Chairman Karvir then asked for a motion to adjourn.

Ms. Ashburn moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Celwyn seconded the motion. With all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0 and the virtual meeting ended at 10:33 a.m.

The full meeting PowerPoint presentation and relevant meeting documents are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau and are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

The next joint BCTDA gathering will be the board's March meeting and annual planning retreat, to be held Thursday-Friday, March 25-26, 2021, beginning at 9:00 a.m., via Zoom Webinar.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager