

# 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, April 28, 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
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley
- CVB Staff:** Victoria Isley, Marla Tambellini, Pat Kappes, Jonna Sampson, Daniel Bradley
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bisette
- Online Attendees:** Carli Adams, Glenn Cox, Kathryn Dewey, Hannah Dosa, Marshall Hilliard, Jennifer Kass-Green, Sarah Lowery, Kathi Petersen, Tina Porter, Glenn Ramey, Charlie Reed, Dodie Stephens, Jason Tarr; Explore Asheville Staff  
Robert Foster, Virtelle Hospitality & TPDF Committee Chair  
Kelsey Ann Bassell, Ashley Keetle, 360i  
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce  
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association  
Madison Davis, Andrew Lawrence; Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports Commission  
Robert Michel, Asheville Homestay Network  
Tina Kinsey, Asheville Regional Airport  
Sharon Tabor, Black Mountain-Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce  
Chris Corl, Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville  
Rae Geoffrey, Wortham Center for the Performing Arts  
Pam Myers, Asheville Art Museum  
John Ellis, Jim Muth; Past BCTDA Board Members  
Rick Bell, Engadine Inn & Cabins/Asheville B&B Association  
Timothy Love, Buncombe County  
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas  
WLOS TV  
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 March 25, 2021, BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- Minutes from the March 25-26, 2021, BCTDA annual planning retreat were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- The March 2021 financial statements were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- An \$8,500 Skyview Golf Tournament sponsorship from Earned Revenue was approved with a 9-0 vote.
- In her President & CEO report, Ms. Isley welcomed new VP of Sales Marshall Hilliard, reviewed recent lodging metrics, shared an overview of the strategic pillars, and invited everyone to attend the upcoming Tourism Summit DEEP community webinars.
- With a 9-0 vote, The Wortham Center for the Performing Arts was awarded a \$45,000 TPDF grant for an air ionization system. An ordinance establishing the project budget was also approved with a 9-0 vote.
- Ms. Tambellini shared a marketing and advertising update.
- A brief report from Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore was provided.
- With a 9-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 10:12 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](http://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 Commissioner Pressley, who was absent.

## **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

### **March 25, 2021 BCTDA Meeting Minutes**

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to approve the March 25, 2021, regular meeting minutes as presented. Ms. Durden seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

### **March 25-26, 2021 BCTDA Annual Planning Retreat Minutes**

Mr. Poole made a motion to approve the March 25-26, 2021, annual planning retreat minutes as presented. Mr. Luckett seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

## **Financial Reports**

### **March 2021 Financial Reports**

Mr. Warn reviewed the March 2021 financial reports.

Mr. McKibbon noted that for the first time ever, sales from vacation rentals exceeded hotel/motel sales in February and noted that this trend directly benefits residents in the local community who own vacation rental properties.

In response to Mr. McKibbon's suggestion to change the term, "room sales," to something that better represents all of the different types of properties included in monthly lodging totals, Ms. Isley said she will work with Mr. Warn towards making such a change.

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

### **Lion & the Rose B&B Penalty Waiver Update**

Mr. Warn reported that the penalty waiver request previously approved by Ms. Isley for The Lion & The Rose Bed and Breakfast, in the amount of \$157.46, was approved by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners on April 6, 2021.

### **Earned Revenue Funding Request/Skyview Golf Tournament**

Ms. Isley presented a sponsorship request for Skyview Golf Tournament. She said the amount would come from Earned Revenue, which are funds collected from advertising on ExploreAsheville.com and not subject to occupancy tax mandates. Earned Revenue is primarily used to support local events and community initiatives.

Ms. Isley shared information on the Skyview Golf Tournament, scheduled July 13-15, 2021, and said the annual event began in 1960 to promote golf competition among African American golfers. It serves as a steppingstone for superior golfers to join the PGA. Ms. Isley noted this tournament is in alignment with the *Engage and Invite More Diverse Audiences* strategic pillar.

Ms. Isley asked the board to consider approving the sponsorship in the amount of \$8,500 and then answered all related questions.

Mr. Poole made a motion to approve support the 2021 Skyview Golf Tournament with a sponsorship, in the amount of \$8,500, from Earned Revenue. Mr. McKibbon seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

## **President & CEO's Report**

Ms. Isley shared a PowerPoint presentation for her President & CEO's report and highlights included:

- Ms. Isley welcomed Asheville native Marshall Hilliard as Explore Asheville's new Vice President of Sales, filling the position formerly held by Dianna Pierce.
- Hotel occupancy is up 51% over March 2020, which was the first month of major impact related to the COVID pandemic. She noted occupancy, however, is down 23% when

compared to the benchmark year of 2019. Vacation rentals are up 35% over March 2020, and up 12% over 2019.

- Ms. Isley clarified that vacation rental data is received from AirDNA, which defines vacation rentals as either single rooms or apartments within a home, or individual properties, that are rented out in the city or county by local residents.
- In response to Vice Chairman's question regarding the number of vacation rentals in the area, Ms. Isley said AirDNA shows about 3,600 entire place rentals, and roughly 430 hotel-equivalent units within the city and county. Ms. Isley said she will provide additional information related to length of stay and average daily rate for vacation rentals at the May board meeting.
- Ms. Isley reviewed the four Strategic Pillars, which will guide planning and recovery efforts for the travel community in Asheville and Buncombe County, aligning with other community municipalities and organizations. She outlined next steps and an implementation timeline.
  - Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth
  - Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel
  - Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences
  - Promote & Support Asheville's Creative Spirit
- Ms. Isley encouraged everyone to attend the four upcoming virtual [Tourism Summit DEEP Community Conversation sessions](#), which will each focus on one of the Strategic Pillars and include panel discussions with local leaders and stakeholders.

Ms. Isley concluded her report by stating the CVB Staff Recap, Destination Dashboard and Quick List are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](#). Chairman Karvir thanked her for the report.

### **Tourism Product Development Fund Funding Recommendation**

Ms. Kappes said at last month's meeting, she reported that two Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) capital funding requests had been received from organizations that had previously received grants. She added that since the enabling legislation mandates all requests must be reviewed by a committee, the board approved reconvening the previously inactive TPDF committee to assess the funding requests and make a recommendation to the board. Ms. Kappes said the Asheville Downtown Association withdrew its request for funding, therefore, the committee only needed to review the request from The Wortham Center.

TPDF Committee Chair Robert Foster said the committee reviewed the funding request from The Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, in the amount of \$60,000, which included a camera system for virtual engagements and an air ionization system for increased air exchange rates. Mr. Foster shared a PowerPoint presentation in which he outlined the steps that were followed during the review process. He noted the performing arts sector has been especially hard hit due to COVID-related business restrictions and will be among the last to recover once state-mandated occupancy limits are lifted. Mr. Foster also spoke about the larger community impact of this project, in which The Wortham Center is in the unique position to enable multiple, local event organizers and performing arts organizations in the community to utilize the facility for events throughout the recovery process.

Mr. Foster said that based on criteria outlined for TPDF projects, the committee recommends partial support of the request, in the amount of \$45,000, for the air ionization system. Funding for the camera system was not included in the recommendation. Ms. Kappes noted the \$45,000 cost includes the equipment, installation, and staff training.

Next, Mr. Foster, Ms. Isley, and Ms. Kappes answered questions related to the project. A discussion centering on the air ionization system specs, industry standards, vendor selection process, and use of the venue by the others in the performing arts sector took place.

In response to Ms. Mosher's question asking how the TPDF and TMIP process will move forward, Ms. Isley said she has been communicating with city and county leaders to further understand post-COVID organizational priorities. She said the city and county have stated that their priorities remain the same, however, the pandemic and unprecedented Recovery Act funding may shift how they are funded and implemented. Ms. Isley said work is continuing to align the organizational goals with the strategic pillars, and a recommendation on how TPDF grants and Earned Revenue sponsorships will be presented to the board at an upcoming meeting as part of the FY 22 planning process.

Mr. Celwyn said that instead of approving one-time requests, he would like to see staff and board members focus on opening the grant application cycle process again. Chairman Karvir agreed and said now that we are coming out of the pandemic, it is time to reactivate the Tourism Product Development Fund process.

When the discussion ended, Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to award a Tourism Product Development Fund grant, in the amount of \$45,000, to The Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, for an air ionization system. Mr. Poole seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Foster and the TPDF committee for convening on short notice and for bringing this recommendation to the BCTDA. He then asked for a motion to approve the budget ordinance to establish a budget for the project.

Mr. Poole made a motion to approve the budget ordinance as presented, allocating \$45,000 from Tourism Product Development Fund occupancy taxes to establish a budget for the 2021 Wortham Center for the Performing Arts - Air Ionization System project. Ms. Durden seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

### **Marketing Update**

Ms. Tambellini shared a PowerPoint presentation in which she provided a marketing update to the board. She reviewed the spring media flow chart, advertising target markets and platforms, and provided a key audience overview. Ms. Tambellini said a new campaign was developed and has nearly 70 creative elements. She shared a representative sampling of the campaign, including a :30 video spot and complementary digital ads. She said the creatives incorporates suggested itineraries to help increase length of stay for travelers and includes a #TravelResponsibly hashtag. Ms. Tambellini also reviewed upcoming content partnerships with influencers. She highlighted how all of the strategies behind the campaign and media plan align with the strategic pillars that were outlined earlier by Ms. Isley.

Ms. Tambellini concluded her presentation by stating Explore Asheville and 360i are amicably parting ways. She noted both organizations have undergone significant changes in the past year, structurally and with their business imperatives. Ms. Tambellini said an agency search will begin immediately with Chris Cavanaugh of Magellan Strategy Group coordinating the process. She added 360i will work with Explore Asheville on the transition through the end of July.

Chairman Karvir and other board members thanked and commended Ms. Tambellini for the presentation.

## **Asheville City Council Update**

Councilwoman Kilgore reported on recent city-related business, including Asheville City Council's adoption of a non-discrimination ordinance policy, a partnership with the Asheville-Buncombe County United Youth Network, and funding approval for low barrier and non-congregant homeless shelters.

Chairman Karvir thanked Councilwoman Kilgore for the update.

## **Buncombe County Commission Update**

Commissioner Pressley was absent, therefore, a Buncombe County Commission update was not provided.

## **Miscellaneous Business**

Chairman Karvir welcomed Marshall Hilliard to the Explore Asheville team and said he looks forward to working with him.

## **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 Wednesday, April 27, 2021. He reported there were no comments received.

### *Live Public Comments*

Chairman Karvir said members of the public were invited to sign-up to verbally share live comments during today's virtual BCTDA meeting. He reported that as of yesterday's 12:00 p.m. deadline, one request to speak had been received. When Chairman Karvir invited Veronica Coit to make comments, Ms. Sampson informed him that the speaker was absent from the meeting.

## **Adjournment**

Ms. Ashburn moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. McKibbin seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0 and the virtual meeting ended at 10:12 a.m.

Chairman Karvir encouraged everyone to attend the four DEEP Community Conversation Tourism Summit webinars in May.

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

The next joint BCTDA meeting will be on Wednesday, May 26, 2021, beginning at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager