

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

Virtual Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 29, 2020

- Present (Voting):** Gary Froeba, Chair; Himanshu Karvir, Vice Chair;
Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Chip Craig, John Luckett,
John McKibbon, Kathleen Mosher, James Poole
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher
Asheville City Councilwoman Julie Mayfield
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- CVB Staff:** Stephanie Brown, Marla Tambellini, Dianna Pierce, Pat Kappes,
Kathi Petersen, Jonna Sampson
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bissette
- Advertising Agency:** Ashley Keetle, Angie Arner, Cindy Stein; 360i
- Online Attendees:** Glenn Cox, Jennifer Kass-Green, Daniel Bradley, Carli Adams,
Kathryn Dewey, Hannah Dosa, Connie Holliday, Sarah Kilgore,
Sarah Lowery, Tina Porter, Glenn Ramey, Charlie Reed, Ritchie
Rozzelle, Dodie Stephens, Jason Tarr; Explore Asheville Staff
Kit Cramer, Samantha Cole, Asheville Area Chamber of
Commerce
Jim Muth, Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Demp Bradford, Madison Davis, Jon Neumann;
Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports Commission
Chris Corl, Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville
Rebecca Lynch, Chow Chow
John Ellis, Past BCTDA Board Member
Jackson Tierney, Robert Michel; Asheville Homestay Network
Rick Bell, Engadine Inn and Cabins
Meghan Rogers, Asheville Downtown Association
Tina Kinsey, Asheville Regional Airport
Cathy Ball, Steph Dahl; City of Asheville
Franzi Charen; Asheville Grown Business Alliance
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas
John Boyle, Asheville Citizen-Times
Daniel Walton, Mountain Xpress
Matt Bush, Blue Ridge Public Radio
Mark Barrett, AVL Watchdog

Sunshine Request
WLOS News

Members of the public and additional tourism industry partners registered in advance and attended the online meeting.

Executive Summary of Meeting Minutes

- Chairman Froeba called the joint virtual meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:00 a.m.
- Chairman Froeba announced Tom Ruff is retiring from Biltmore and has resigned his seat on the board. He welcomed Kathleen Mosher to the BCTDA, appointed by the chamber, to complete Mr. Ruff's vacated term.
- Chairman Froeba stated all comments from the general public received via email by the deadline were provided to the board in advance of the meeting.
- A discussion centering on the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Act took place.
- Minutes from the April 2, 2020 BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- The March 2020 financial statements were reviewed and approved with a 9-0 vote.
- Ms. Brown provided a brief President's Report highlighting recent CVB initiatives and activities.
- Departmental updates were presented by Ms. Tambellini, Ms. Pierce, and Ms. Petersen.
- Ms. Brown presented the proposed BCTDA FY 21 budget.
- Ms. Kappes presented the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) annual project report.
- A motion to authorize Chairman Froeba to execute a contract with Chris Cavanaugh to serve as an interim executive was approved with a 9-0 vote.
- Updates from Asheville City Councilwoman Julie Mayfield and Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher were provided.
- Under Miscellaneous Business, Ms. Ashburn expressed her gratitude to those involved with bringing the Tourism Jobs Recovery Act to the General Assembly for consideration.
- The joint meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, adjourned at 11:22 a.m.

Call of the Joint BCTDA Meeting to Order

Chairman Froeba called the virtual joint 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 welcomed the board and members of the public attending online.

Board Appointment: Chairman Froeba said Tom Ruff is retiring from Biltmore following 25 years of service, thereby resigning his seat on the BCTDA. Chairman Froeba acknowledged Mr. Ruff's contributions to the community while at Biltmore and publicly acknowledged his service as the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce's appointee on the BCTDA board.

Chairman Froeba welcomed Kathleen Mosher, Senior Communications Director at Biltmore, who has been appointed by the chamber to complete Mr. Ruff's 3-year term, which expires July 31, 2021.

Meeting Materials: Meeting materials were provided to the public in advance on the AshevilleCVB.com industry website.

Board Member Roll Call: Board members responded as Chairman Froeba called roll verifying all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, except for Mr. Karvir, who joined shortly thereafter.

Public Comment: Chairman Froeba said members of the public were invited to provide comments in advance of the meeting via email. He stated all comments received were provided to board members yesterday shortly after the 4:00 p.m. deadline.

Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Act

Chairman Froeba took a few minutes to speak about the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Act that was announced by Senator Chuck Edwards last Friday. He noted every member of the BCTDA has a desire to help our community recover from this unprecedented crisis.

Last month, Chairman Froeba reported on an effort that was underway with Jim Muth and the Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association to support local tourism businesses significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Chairman Froeba expressed his gratitude to Senator Edwards for submitting the Tourism Jobs Recovery Act bill currently under consideration in the General Assembly. He said if the bill becomes law, the \$5 million in the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) will be used to establish the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund to award grants to non-lodging tourism businesses to help with costs associated with reopening when the time is right.

Chairman Froeba said the industry has come together in an amazing way to make a difference, adding that a press release and other information related to the bill can be found on AshevilleCVB.com. Chairman Froeba then invited questions and comments from board members.

Mr. Celwyn read a public comment email that had been received suggesting both TPDF and marketing funds be given directly to hard-hit workers in the area; a sentiment he echoed. Ms. Rockoff responded that the only reason the bill could be put forward was that it conformed to the TPDF legislative mandate to provide financial assistance to major tourism projects to increase overnight lodging stays. She noted the North Carolina Constitution requires that tax dollars collected must be used for the purpose for which they were originally received. She added the bill loosens some restrictions on how and to whom the funds may be awarded, however, otherwise conforms to the mandate. Ms. Rockoff said this scenario does not apply to marketing funds.

Commissioner Belcher said he was honored to work with Senator Edwards, the BCTDA, the Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association, and Explore Asheville to bring this proposed bill before the legislature, noting all of the local leaders and public officials he has spoken with are also very supportive.

Mr. McKibbin added it will be necessary to invest the marketing funds to bring visitors back to Asheville when the time is right to help with recovery efforts. Commissioner

Belcher noted returning visitors will also help to generate sales tax revenues for the city and county.

Councilwoman Mayfield said that speaking as an attorney, both legally and legislatively, marketing funds cannot be used for any other purpose. She said the best way to support locals is to support this bill. Councilwoman Mayfield encouraged everyone to reach out to Speaker Tim Moore and Senate Leader Phil Berger to relay the importance of the bill's passage to assist in economic recovery.

A discussion took place with board members offering additional thoughts on the bill and extending their gratitude to everyone involved with bringing it forward. It was noted that we will hear within the next few days if it passes. The conversation ended with Ms. Brown and Ms. Rockoff answering all related questions.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mr. Craig made a motion to approve the April 2, 2020 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mr. McKibbon seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor, the motion carried 9-0.

The minutes are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB).

March Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the March 2020 financial reports. Ms. Brown clarified that just over \$5 million is available in the undesignated TPDF fund for the Tourism Jobs Recovery Act, and the remaining balance has been committed to projects.

Mr. Karvir made a motion to approve the March 2020 financial statements as presented. Mr. McKibbon seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor, the motion carried 9-0.

The March financial reports are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

President's Report

Ms. Brown briefly reviewed a timeline of responsive actions taken by the Explore Asheville staff since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Destination Dashboard, Quick List & CVB Staff Recap

Ms. Brown concluded her report by encouraging everyone to review the reports that were shared in advance of the meeting.

CVB Staff Recaps, Destination Dashboards, Quick Lists, financial statements, board meeting minutes, agendas, and relevant research reports can be found on [ExploreAshevilleCVB.com](https://www.exploreashevillecvb.com).

Chairman Froeba thanked Ms. Brown for the report.

Marketing Update

Ms. Tambellini shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the marketing department's expanded COVID-19 efforts, which are focused on supporting tourism businesses and providing a place of inspiration and dreaming for when people can begin traveling again. She reviewed new research, significant updates to the Asheville Cares pages, social media strategies, and public relations initiatives.

Mr. McKibbon commended Ms. Tambellini and her team on doing an "amazing job" of creating the [Together in Spirit pages on Explore Asheville.com](#).

Ms. Keetle continued the presentation by outlining 360i's collaborative efforts during the pandemic, noting the agency is focused on maintaining a level of awareness of the Asheville area while supporting the community. She said the current "*while it's not safe to visit now, we'll be here when you're ready,*" message was incorporated into a new [Together in Spirit](#) video, which was unveiled at the meeting.

Next, Ms. Tambellini shared the phased messaging strategy that will be followed during different stages of the recovery process.

A brief discussion took place centering on tourism sentiment and states that are starting to allow businesses to reopen.

During and after the presentation, Ms. Tambellini and Ms. Keetle answered all related questions. Chairman Froeba thanked them for the report.

The PowerPoint presentation is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Public Affairs Update

Ms. Petersen said the Public Affairs team has been very busy supporting industry partners. She shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting recent virtual events and communications efforts designed to continuously provide tourism businesses with valuable resources. Ms. Petersen noted extensive COVID-19 info and a toolkit for lodging partners can be found on [AshevilleCVB.com](#). She also reviewed insights and media coverage related to the Tourism Jobs Recovery Act and ongoing discussions with local business leaders.

During and after the presentation, Ms. Petersen answered all related questions. Chairman Froeba thanked her for the update.

The PowerPoint presentation is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Group Sales Update

Ms. Pierce shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting recent Group Sales initiatives and metrics, including an April room night comparison, stats related to the leads pipeline, a direct buyer mailing, and media successes. She concluded her report by sharing insights from a recent survey by MeetingsNet indicating 73 percent of 1,000 American respondents plan to attend as many or more business meeting events than before once the pandemic ends and it is deemed safe to do so.

Chairman Froeba thanked Ms. Pierce for her report. The PowerPoint presentation is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Proposed BCTDA FY 21 Budget

Ms. Brown reviewed the process staff has followed to create the proposed BCTDA FY 21 budget being presented today. She said since today's meeting is being held virtually, a public hearing will take place at the May meeting so that the budget can be approved in June prior to the start of the next fiscal year. Ms. Brown shared a PowerPoint presentation in which she outlined the various elements of the proposed BCTDA FY 21 budget. She stated three related documents: the Master Budget, the Budget Narrative, and an updated Cash Flow Analysis, were provided to the board and public in advance of today's meeting.

Next, Ms. Brown reviewed projected revenue and fund balance figures that establish the total operating budget at \$15,504,194. She provided highlights from the Executive Office, Marketing and PR, Group Sales and Public Affairs departmental budgets, including an overview of salaries and benefits expenses.

During and after the presentation, Ms. Brown received comments from board members and answered all related questions. She ended her budget overview by stating the budget ordinance will be presented for review in May.

Chairman Froeba thanked Ms. Brown for presenting the proposed budget. The PowerPoint presentation and related budget documents are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Tourism Product Development Fund Annual Project Report

Ms. Kappes said \$43 million in TPDF funding has been awarded to 39 community projects since 2001. She shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the full list of projects that have received awards, including maps showing geographic locations.

Ms. Kappes reviewed the 19 projects currently in active contract, including seven still in development, 12 that have been completed and are in the reporting phase, and two additional commitments for which the CVB is providing collaborative resources. She shared photos of the projects, updated board members on the statuses, and answered all related questions.

Chairman Froeba thanked Ms. Kappes for the update. The PowerPoint presentation is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Appointment of an Explore Asheville Interim Executive

Chairman Froeba said it was recently announced that Ms. Brown would be resigning her position at the end of June, however, we are fortunate to have found a well-qualified, local and familiar expert who is available to lead the Explore Asheville team on an interim basis until a new CEO is found. Chairman Froeba said Chris Cavanaugh, President of Magellan Strategy Group, has agreed to serve in this executive capacity. He shared Mr. Cavanaugh's extensive background in tourism leadership roles, including serving on the BCTDA board as chair and working as VP of Marketing for Biltmore.

Chairman Froeba said he and Mr. Karvir will start the search process to find a qualified candidate soon. He asked for a motion to give him, as chair, authority to execute a contract with Mr. Cavanaugh.

Mr. McKibbin made a motion to authorize Chairman Froeba to execute a contract with Chris Cavanaugh to serve as an interim executive, with funds included within the current and proposed budgets. Ms. Ashburn seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor, the motion carried 9-0.

Asheville City Council Update

Councilwoman Mayfield reported on city-related business, including boards, commissions, and committee meetings being on hold, Asheville City Council's focus on COVID-19, FEMA funds, a pause being put on major efforts while trying to work out public engagement processes during the pandemic, and budget challenges.

Chairman Froeba thanked Councilwoman Mayfield for the update.

Buncombe County Commission Update

Commissioner Belcher commended Ms. Brown for her leadership during these challenging times. He wished her well and said Chris Cavanaugh is an excellent choice to serve in the role of interim executive.

Commissioner Belcher reported on county-related business, including the Stay Home, Stay Safe order, Enka turf field negotiations, upcoming budget work sessions and public hearings, and recognition at the county level that every job is essential.

Chairman Froeba thanked Commissioner Belcher for the report.

Miscellaneous Business

Ms. Ashburn echoed Commissioner Belcher's sentiment that every job is essential. She added that in terms of recovery, the approach of the of hotel association, BCTDA, and local and state officials has been wonderful, and she called getting the bill presented "a gargantuan effort." Ms. Ashburn said she appreciates the \$5 million in grants that will help our treasured small businesses to reopen and rehire staff. She also praised Ms. Brown, the CVB, and others involved on their relationships with legislators.

In response to Councilwoman Mayfield's suggestion to provide more details on the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund to the public, Ms. Brown said press releases and an FAQ section can be found on AshevilleCVB.com.

Comments from the General Public

Comments from the public were received via email to reply@ExploreAsheville.com and, as stated by Chairman Froeba at the beginning of the meeting, were provided to board members on April 28.

Adjournment

Chairman Froeba thanked everyone for attending. Mr. McKibbon moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Craig second the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor, the motion carried 9-0 and the meeting adjourned at 11:22 a.m. The BCTDA will next meet on Wednesday, May 27, 2020, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager