

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, August 25, 2021

- Present (Voting):** Kathleen Mosher, Chair; Brenda Durden, Vice Chair; Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Gary Froeba, Himanshu Karvir, John Luckett, John McKibbon
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore
- CVB Staff:** Vic Isley, Marla Tambellini, Marshall Hilliard, Pat Kappes, Jonna Sampson, Kathi Petersen, Daniel Bradley
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bisette
- Online Attendees:** Noah Wilson, Mountain BizWorks
Cristina Hall Ackley, Ginger's Revenge
Rich Cundiff, Rocky's Hot Chicken Shack
Tim Green, Sole82
Torin Kexel, The Flying Bike
Carli Adams, Glenn Cox, Kathryn Dewey, Hannah Dosa, Connie Holliday, Jennifer Kass-Green, Holly Oakley, Charlie Reed, Whitney Smith, Dodie Stephens; Explore Asheville Staff
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
Sharon Tabor, Black Mountain-Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce
Madison Davis, Andrew Lawrence; Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission
Jim Muth, Past BCTDA Board Member
Robert Michel, Asheville Homestay Network
Rick Bell, Engadine Inn and Cabins
Jason Sandford, Asheville Hot Sheet
John Boyle, Asheville Citizen-Times
Brooke Randle, Mountain Xpress
Bryan Overstreet, WLOS
Sunshine Request

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

Executive Summary of Meeting Minutes

- Chairwoman Mosher called the in-person joint regular meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:01 a.m.
- Minutes from the July 28, 2021, BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with an 8-0 vote.
- The July 2021 financial statements were approved with an 8-0 vote.
- An update from Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley was heard.
- Ms. Isley provided her President & CEO's report.
- Noah Wilson with Mountain BizWorks presented the BCTDA Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund's 12-month report, and four grant recipients shared testimonies centering on the impact the Fund had on their businesses.
- One item was discussed under Miscellaneous Business.
- Under Comments from the General Public, no public comments were shared verbally or received via email.
- Ms. Isley thanked and recognized five outgoing BCTDA board members: Gary Froeba, Himanshu Karvir, John McKibbon, John Lockett, and James Poole.
- With an 8-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 10:14 a.m.

Call of the Joint BCTDA Meeting to Order

Chairwoman Mosher welcomed everyone to the online meeting and said that since an indoor mask mandate was recently reinstated in Buncombe County, the decision to have this month's meeting via virtual format was made in order to allow for a better viewing experience for our online audience, since masks muffle voices. She 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.

Chairwoman Mosher 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 all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, except for Councilmember Kilgore, who was absent.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the July 28, 2021, regular meeting minutes as presented. Vice Chairwoman Durden seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0.

July 2021 Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the July 2021 financial reports.

In response to Mr. Celwyn's question asking if the significant increase in revenue for the month could be related to late occupancy tax payments coming in, Mr. Warn said it's possible and he will do some research and report back to the board.

Mr. Karvir made a motion to approve the July 2021 financial reports as presented. Mr. Froeba seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0.

Buncombe County Commission Update

Chairwoman Mosher said to accommodate Commissioner Pressley's schedule, we are moving his update up on today's agenda.

Commissioner Pressley provided an update on county-related business, including Governor Cooper's visit to Candler related to flooding, the Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports Commission's announcement of the Asheville Championship coming to Asheville, and the emergency number (828.844.5455) residents can call for assistance related to flood damage from Tropical Storm Fred.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked Commissioner Pressley for his report.

President & CEO Report

Ms. Isley shared her President & CEO's report, in which she provided recent lodging metrics and Explore Asheville's 3Ws Bear campaign redistribution efforts following the reinstated county-wide mask mandate.

Board Member Appointment Status

Ms. Isley reviewed the process and timeline the Buncombe County Commissioners and Asheville City Councilmembers plan to follow to appoint new board members to fill five upcoming vacancies on the BCTDA. She said it is anticipated that the new members will be appointed before the September board meeting.

Legislative Update

Ms. Isley reported on the legislative process related to the proposed change in the occupancy tax split from the current 75% to operating and 25% to the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF), to a 67% operating/33% TPDF split, which is being advocated by area hotel leadership. She also provided an update on allocations for travel and tourism in state and federal budgets and American Rescue Plan (ARPA) grant funding. Ms. Isley said Explore Asheville will work collaboratively with local and regional partners to assist in securing additional funding for our community, where appropriate.

Upcoming Events – BCTDA Annual Meeting

Ms. Isley shared information on upcoming events with details and registration links on AshevilleCVB.com:

- A Festivals and Cultural events grant program information session is scheduled for September 1. (*Editor's note: the date was subsequently changed to September 8.*)
- Community Input Sessions related to the African American Heritage Trail will take place throughout the month of September, beginning with the Gombay Festival on September 4-5.
- The BCTDA Annual Meeting will be held on September 15 in the Thomas Wolfe Auditorium, and the venue's COVID safety protocols will be followed. The theme of the meeting is *The Heart of Hospitality*, with a focus on recognizing and celebrating the heart of the tourism community; especially significant following a very challenging year.

Other Updates

Ms. Isley said the CVB Staff Recap, Destination Dashboard, and Quick List are posted on AshevilleCVB.com.

BCTDA Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund Update

Ms. Isley said a lot of heavy lifting was done for the BCTDA's Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund (TJRF) to be legislatively approved and implemented in 2020. The TJRF provided grants to local businesses early in the COVID-19 global pandemic to help reopen safely after being shut down and bring employees back to work. She noted the grant agreements required that reports would be submitted by business owners at the 6-month and 12-month intervals, and Noah Wilson with Mountain BizWorks is on hand to provide the 12-month update to the board.

Ms. Isley said the local impact of the Fund was recognized nationally by the U.S. Travel Association with a Destiny Award in the category of Community Building at this year's ESTO conference in Los Angeles. She reviewed the significance of the award and shared some of the judges' comments and then invited Mr. Wilson to share his report.

12-Month Progress Report

Mr. Wilson thanked Ms. Isley and started his presentation by providing background information on the BCTDA's Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund, which was established by Senate Bill 704 and allowed the board to create a one-time \$5 million fund to provide emergency COVID-relief grants to businesses that provide a direct visitor experience. Funding was provided from the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF). Mr. Wilson reviewed the process and timeline, noting from the day the bill was signed into law at the state level authorizing the usage of TPDF funds for this purpose, to the time the applications were created, communicated, received, reviewed, scored, approved, executed, and funded, was just under two months.

Mr. Wilson said the \$5 million in funding was distributed to 394 local tourism-related small businesses, in amounts between \$2,000 and \$30,000 per entity via micro and full grants, with 18% being awarded to minority-led businesses and 55% going to women-led businesses.

Mr. Wilson said so far, 319 of the 394 businesses, representing 81% of grant recipients, have submitted their 12-month reports, therefore, about 1/5 of businesses are not included in the metrics in his report. Mr. Wilson's said 97% of respondents were open as of 6/30/21, and he shared stats related to jobs lost and recovered, revenue, and the financial status of businesses over time. He then reviewed information related to the local business community's commitment to the environment, sustainability efforts, equity and inclusion, and social issues.

Impact on Individual Local Businesses

Next, Mr. Wilson invited four business owners who received grants from the TJRF to share how the Fund helped them. The business owners included Torin Kexel with the Flying Bike (\$8,625 grant), Christina Hall Ackley with Ginger's Revenge (\$19,780 grant), Tim Green with Sole82 (\$5,000 micro-grant), and Rich Cundiff with Rocky's Hot Chicken Shack (\$22,500 grant). Each of the business owners shared inspiring testimonies of steps followed to make it through the pandemic, how the grant funds were utilized, and how their businesses are doing now.

Mr. Wilson thanked the business owners and then they graciously answered all related questions. Members of the board and Ms. Isley congratulated and praised Mr. Kexel, Ms. Hall, Mr. Green, and Mr. Cundiff, for their inspiring, persistent, and resourceful efforts to sustain, and even grow, their businesses during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Wilson said the TJRF had a huge impact on local businesses, as witnessed by these four stories out of the 394 businesses that received grants. He wrapped up his report by reviewing reported challenges, shared opportunities, next steps, and core facts and findings.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked Mr. Wilson for providing this report and the business owners for sharing their inspiring testimonies. The recording of the TJRF presentation can be viewed [here](#).

Asheville City Council Update

Councilmember Kilgore was absent from the meeting; therefore, an Asheville City Council update was not provided.

Miscellaneous Business

In response to Mr. McKibbon's question asking if the recent floods damaged the fields at the John B. Lewis Soccer Complex, Ms. Isley said that they were literally under water and one soccer tournament had to be canceled. Ms. Mosher added ABYSA now has an aggressive recovery system in place and clean-up efforts are currently underway.

Comments from the General Public

Live Public Comments

Chairwoman Mosher said members of the public are invited to sign-up to verbally share live comments during monthly virtual BCTDA meetings. She reported that as of yesterday's 12:00 p.m. registration deadline, no requests to speak at today's meeting 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, August 24, 2021. She reported there were no public comments received by the deadline.

Thanks to Outgoing BCTDA Board Members Gary Froeba, Himanshu Karvir, John Luckett, John McKibbon, and James Poole

Ms. Isley thanked and recognized five outgoing board members for serving on the BCTDA board.

James Poole

Mr. Poole served on the BCTDA from September 2019 to July 2021 and resigned due to a change in career path. Ms. Isley wished him well in his new business endeavors.

John Lockett

Mr. Lockett served on the board from October 2015 through August 2021. Ms. Isley said she was grateful to work have him serve as chair of the finance committee this past year, and he also served on the TPDF committee. Mr. Lockett thanked Ms. Isley and BCTDA board members – both past and present – for being such a passionate and collaborative group.

John McKibbon

Mr. McKibbon served on the BCTDA from September 2013 through August 2021. Ms. Isley thanked him for his long tenure, open-mindedness, thoughtful questions, and often-unnoticed contributions to the community. Mr. McKibbon responded that he's enjoyed serving on the board and has seen a lot of changes over the years. He noted he is glad to have Ms. Isley in the role of President & CEO.

Himanshu Karvir

Mr. Karvir has been a member of the BCTDA from October 2015 through August 2021 and has served as chair (2020-2021) and vice chair (2019-2020). Ms. Isley said she had the great fortune to work with him as board chair since she started in her role in December and thanked him for the way he and his family support the community. Mr. Karvir also served on the TPDF committee and fiduciary task force. Mr. Karvir thanked Ms. Isley and echoed Mr. McKibbon's sentiment that he is excited to see where the BCTDA will go under her leadership. He added he plans to stay involved and will continue attending monthly meetings.

Gary Froeba

Mr. Froeba has been a member of the BCTDA from November 2015 through August 2021 and served as chair (2019-2020) and vice chair (2017-2019 and 2020-2021). Ms. Isley thanked him for serving in this capacity, and for chairing the search committee. Mr. Froeba also served on the fiduciary task force and TPDF committee.

Mr. Froeba said his year as chair was challenging as it included the first few months of the COVID pandemic, and he is glad his time as chair of the CEO search committee resulted in the hiring of Ms. Isley. He added he looks forward to the future and will be joining Mr. Karvir and other former board members at monthly meetings, as well.

Ms. Isley said the outgoing board members will be recognized at the upcoming BCTDA Annual Meeting on September 15, where we will also celebrate the hearts of the people who work in the hospitality community that make this area such a wonderful place to live and visit.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked the outgoing board members for their service and said they are all leaving very big shoes to fill.

Adjournment

Mr. McKibbon moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Froeba and Mr. Karvir simultaneously seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0 and the meeting ended at 10:14 a.m.

The full meeting PowerPoint presentation and relevant 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 meeting will be held virtually on Wednesday, September 29, 2021, beginning at 9:00 a.m., via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager