

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

Virtual Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 26, 2020

- Present (Voting):** Himanshu Karvir, Chair; Gary Froeba, Vice Chair;
Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Chip Craig, John Luckett,
John McKibbon, Kathleen Mosher, James Poole
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Julie Mayfield
Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- CVB Staff:** Chris Cavanaugh, Marla Tambellini, Dianna Pierce, Pat Kappes,
Jonna Sampson, Josh Jones, Ritchie Rozzelle, Daniel Bradley
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bissette
- Online Attendees:** Glenn Cox, Jennifer Kass-Green, Kathi Petersen, Carli Adams,
Kathryn Dewey, Tina Porter, Glenn Ramey, Charlie Reed,
Dodie Stephens, Jason Tarr, Landis Taylor, Audrey Wells;
Explore Asheville Staff
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
Kelsey Ann Bassel, Lauren Jennings, Ashley Keetle, Emery
Morris; 360i
Jessica Green, Blue Star Hospitality
Jim Muth, Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Demp Bradford, Madison Davis; Asheville-Buncombe Regional
Sports Commission
John Ellis, Past BCTDA Board Member
Chris Corl, City of Asheville
Sharon Tabor, Black Mountain/Swannanoa Chamber
Jackson Tierney, Asheville Homestay Network
Rebecca Lynch, Chow Chow Asheville
Mackenzie Wicker, Asheville Citizen-Times
Daniel Walton, Mountain Xpress
Ryan Coulter, Taylor Stewart; WLOS
Sunshine Request

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

Executive Summary of Meeting Minutes

- Chairman Karvir called the virtual joint meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:00 a.m.
- Former board member Tom Ruff was remembered for his contributions to Biltmore's hospitality culture and service on the BCTDA.
- Minutes from the July 29, 2020 BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with an 8-0 vote.
- The July 2020 financial statements were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- A motion to bulk-approve all COVID-19 related penalties due through August 2020 with conditions was approved with a 9-0 vote.
- In his Interim Executive's Report, Mr. Cavanaugh reviewed recent industry metrics.
- Mr. Cavanaugh presented a strategic framework for responding to community and partner needs during the coronavirus pandemic and beyond.
- Ms. Pierce and Mr. Bradley provided an overview of the recently completed virtual hotel site visit project.
- Ms. Tambellini provided a brief advertising update and Mr. Rozzelle and Mr. Jones presented an update on the web refresh project.
- Ms. Kappes provided a public affairs departmental update.
- Vice Chairman Froeba provided an update on the CEO search.
- Brief updates from Asheville City Councilmember Julie Mayfield and Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher were provided.
- Chairman Karvir reported that there were no public comments received via email by the deadline.
- Chairman Karvir and Mr. Cavanaugh thanked and recognized outgoing board member Chip Craig for his service on the BCTDA and in the community.
- With a 9-0 vote, the meeting adjourned at 11:01 a.m.

Call of the Joint BCTDA Meeting to Order

Chairman Karvir 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. He said meeting materials were provided to the public on the AshevilleCVB.com industry website and emailed to registered attendees.

Board Member Roll Call: Board members responded as Chairman Karvir called roll verifying all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, noting Mr. Luckett was having connection issues and will rejoin the meeting when they are resolved.

Thanks and Farewell to Tom Ruff

Following last week's announcement that Mr. Tom Ruff had passed away on August 18, Chairman Karvir, Mr. Cavanaugh and Ms. Mosher expressed their gratitude for his service on the BCTDA board for a year and a half and working for Biltmore for 25 years. Mr. Ruff served as Biltmore's Attraction Division President until his retirement a few months ago. Ms. Mosher noted that Mr. Ruff's influence was significant, and he is credited with creating Biltmore's hospitality culture and will be greatly missed.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the July 29, 2020 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Craig seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote with Mr. Lockett still having connection issues, the motion carried 8-0.

Financial Reports

July 2020 Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the July 2020 financial reports and answered questions posed by board members.

Chairman Karvir noted the Room Sales report is showing an increase of 9.9% in June for vacation rentals, however, hotels were down 63 percent. He asked if there was an increase in the number of vacation or short-term rental properties filing reports. Mr. Warn said he will look into the reason for the increase and report back to the board. A brief discussion regarding the national trend in increased short-term rental usage during the pandemic took place.

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to approve the July 2020 financial statements as presented. Ms. Ashburn seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

Occupancy Tax Penalties Related to COVID-19

Mr. Cavanaugh said that at the start of the pandemic, the board approved waiving all COVID-related penalties for late occupancy tax payments and reports that were due in March and April (for February and March sales) before passing them on to the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners for final consideration. He said at last month's meeting when two penalty waiver requests were reviewed, a suggestion was made to consider possibly extending the timeframe for the automatic approvals. In response, Mr. Cavanaugh presented a change for the board to consider extending the bulk approval time frame through August 2020 with an added condition.

After Mr. Cavanaugh explained the details, Chairman Karvir called for action. Mr. Poole made a motion to automatically waive all COVID-19 related penalties incurred for late occupancy tax reports and remittances for the sales months of February through July 2020, due on the 20th day of each month in March through August 2020, provided the property has had no late payments or penalty waivers in the three-year period prior to the start of the pandemic. Ms. Ashburn 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 Request from Blue Star Hospitality

Mr. Cavanaugh said the previous action taken by the board to automatically approve all COVID-19 related penalties negates the need to review today's waiver request from Blue Star Hospitality. He said it will be included in the bulk list presented to the commissioners.

Interim Executive's Report

Mr. Cavanaugh reported on local lodging metrics, including hotel and short-term rental occupancy numbers in June and July. He also provided metrics from comparable markets and trends in weekday versus weekend visitation.

Mr. Cavanaugh congratulated Ms. Mosher on her recent promotion to Vice President of Communications for Biltmore, for which Ms. Mosher thanked him.

CVB Staff Recaps, Destination Dashboards, Quick Lists, financial statements, board meeting minutes, agendas, and research reports can be found on AshevilleCVB.com.

Coronavirus Response Strategic Plan

After serving two months in the interim executive position, he asked the Explore Asheville staff how their jobs have changed since the start of the pandemic. Mr. Cavanaugh said the answers prompted him to develop a high-level organizational strategic framework centering on what staff has been doing and will continue to do regarding the short-term recovery of the local economy. Mr. Cavanaugh described the plan like a "strategic Christmas tree," with the tactical elements of the plan being the "ornaments." He noted this is not to replace or compete with any strategic plan the incoming CEO may develop for long-term recovery.

Mr. Cavanaugh presented the framework and reviewed the BCTDA's mission, purpose, and timing to focus on what we can do, not what we can't. He outlined and explained the four strategic pillars of the framework:

1. *Safely attract overnight visitation, customers for local businesses, and jobs for residents through destination marketing and sales--in accordance with government health mandates.*
2. *Broaden outreach to leisure travelers and meeting and event audiences to attract diverse visitors.*
3. *Enhance support of local tourism businesses.*
4. *Expand engagement and collaboration with the community and local partners.*

Mr. Cavanaugh then answered all related questions. A lengthy discussion took place with board members offering ideas and suggestions related to this framework and what economic recovery will look like in the coming months.

Mr. Cavanaugh concluded his presentation by thanking all frontline and essential workers and encouraging everyone to wear a mask.

Virtual Hotel Site Tours

As a resource to assist meeting planners to book group business in Asheville as appropriate during the pandemic, Ms. Pierce provided an overview of the recently completed virtual site tours project. The virtual tours were done in partnership with Destination Virtual Tours and are a tool for hotels with larger meeting space to share when in person visits are not occurring. Ms. Pierce noted these assets will help Explore Asheville sales managers and industry partners close future business, thereby aiding in the economic recovery of our area. She shared a list of properties for which tours have been developed and turned it over to Group Sales & Services Specialist Daniel Bradley, who was the lead on the project.

Mr. Bradley provided a demonstration of the tours of the Foundry Hotel and the Holiday Inn Asheville – Biltmore West. He highlighted several features, including aerial photography, 3-D imagery of all areas of the inside of the hotels, a dollhouse view, floor plans, and a digital measuring tool for meeting space.

After the presentation, Ms. Pierce answered all related questions. Board members offered their praise on how incredibly well done and valuable this project is for accommodations partners.

Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Pierce and Mr. Bradley for their work on developing the virtual site tours and for their presentation.

Web Refresh Update

Ms. Tambellini gave a brief update on the methodologies and metrics that are being monitored that will help determine when the time is right to start paid advertising again. She added US Travel has developed a “Let’s Go There” campaign for DMOs to inspire potential travelers to take trips when they are ready. Ms. Tambellini said Explore Asheville will be a participating destination in the campaign.

Ms. Tambellini then introduced Director of Content Ritchie Rozzelle and Web Manager Josh Jones to provide an update on the [ExploreAsheville.com](https://www.exploreasheville.com) website refresh project.

Mr. Rozzelle reviewed a side-by-side comparison of changes being made to the website and explained the upgrades while Mr. Jones navigated the live demo of the site.

When the presentation ended, Ms. Tambellini commended Mr. Rozzelle and Mr. Jones for their efforts and said the goal is to launch the refreshed site after Labor Day. Board members stated they were impressed with the improved look, functionality, and mapping feature.

Chairman Karvir thanked them for the presentation and their efforts.

Public Affairs Update

Ms. Kappes provided an update of the Public Affairs department’s recent initiatives and activities. She announced four upcoming partner support webinars, shared progress and community engagement events related to the African American Heritage Trail, and reviewed partnerships in the community that are on the horizon.

Mr. Cavanaugh thanked Ms. Kappes for the update, adding he is appreciative of her outreach with partners that continues to be very valuable. Ms. Ashburn echoed Mr. Cavanaugh’s sentiment.

Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Kappes for the update.

CEO Search Committee Update

Vice Chairman Froeba provided a brief update on the CEO search process, noting the committee met virtually last week to narrow the field from 12 recommended candidates to a pool of six. He said SearchWide Global will do background checks and in person interviews have been scheduled September 14-15.

Asheville City Council Update

Councilmember Mayfield reported on city-related business, including forward movement on the Blue Horizons Project via a contract signed with the Green Built Alliance, reduced speed limits, funding for two transit buses, a \$100,000 allocation to the Asheville Buncombe Community Land Trust for affordable housing efforts, and the adoption of a tree canopy protection ordinance. She also reported on the public engagement process regarding the budget and shared the steps and timeline to appoint a new member to Asheville City Council to fill Vijay Kapoor's vacated seat.

Chairman Karvir thanked Councilmember Mayfield for her report.

Buncombe County Commission Update

Commissioner Belcher reported on county-related business, including the property revaluation process, funding for solar in 47 city and county buildings, and a new process for public comment at Commission meetings. He also thanked Councilmember Mayfield for her assistance in getting funding for playgrounds for county schools.

Chairman Karvir thanked Commissioner Belcher for the update.

Miscellaneous Business

Chairman Karvir said that due to the uncertainty in the area surrounding COVID-19, the Tourism Management and Investment Plan has been put on hold for the time being. He added TMIP will be revisited when a new CEO is hired, as that person will be responsible for the plan's implementation and oversight.

Comments from the General Public

Chairman Karvir said members of the general public were invited to submit comments via email to reply@ExploreAsheville.com through 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 25, 2020. He reported no comments were received.

Thanks to Outgoing Board Member Chip Craig

Chairman Karvir thanked outgoing board member Chip Craig for serving on the BCTDA board for seven years, including as chairman of the finance committee and the inaugural chair of the Festivals and Cultural Events Grants committee. Chairman Karvir also recognized Mr. Craig for his extensive community service.

Mr. Craig thanked Chairman Karvir and said it has been his pleasure to serve and that he looks forward to attending board meetings in the future as his schedule allows.

Mr. Cavanaugh echoed Chairman Karvir's gratitude for Mr. Craig's continued community involvement.

Adjournment

Mr. Craig moved to adjourn the meeting and Vice Chairman Froeba seconded the motion. A vote was taken and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0 and the meeting adjourned at 11:01 a.m. The BCTDA will next meet on Wednesday, September 30, 2020, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager