

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, September 30, 2020

- Present (Voting):** Himanshu Karvir, Chair; Gary Froeba, Vice Chair;
Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Brenda Durden, John Lockett,
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, Jonna
Sampson, Daniel Bradley, Carli Adams, Kathryn Dewey,
Connie Holliday, Beth McKinney, Tina Porter
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bissette
- Online Attendees:** Glenn Cox, Josh Jones, Pat Kappes, Sarah Lowery,
Kathi Petersen, Glenn Ramey, Charlie Reed, Dodie Stephens;
Explore Asheville Staff
Demp Bradford, Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports
Commission
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
Angie Arner, Kelsey Ann Bassel, Meghan Jackson,
Lauren Jennings, Ashley Keetle, Nick Smart; 360i
Jim Muth, Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
John Ellis, Past BCTDA Board Member
Tina Kinsey, Asheville Regional Airport
Jackson Tierney, Bob Michel; Asheville Homestay Network
Mackenzie Wicker, Asheville Citizen-Times
Daniel Walton, Mountain Xpress
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas
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 regular meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:00 a.m.
- Minutes from the August 26, 2020 BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- The August 2020 financial statements were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- A motion to bulk-approve all COVID-19 related penalties due and yet to be assessed through September 2020 was approved with a 5-0 vote, with four members having been recused.
- An earned revenue budget amendment, in the amount of \$100,000, was approved with a 9-0 vote.
- Demp Bradford provided an Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports Commission update.
- In his Interim Executive's report, Mr. Cavanaugh reviewed recent lodging metrics.
- Ms. Tambellini provided a research and advertising update.
- Ms. Pierce and members of the group sales and services team provided a Group Sales Outlook presentation.
- Brief updates from Asheville City Councilmember Julie Mayfield and Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher were provided.
- Under Miscellaneous Business, Demp Bradford shared clarifying comments related to his earlier presentation.
- Under Comments from the General Public, Chairman Karvir reported one email was received and a brief discussion on the topic took place.
- Vice Chairman Froeba provided an update on the CEO search, which was followed by a closed session related to next steps in the search process.
- With an 8-0 vote, the closed session and BCTDA meeting adjourned at 11:28 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 welcomed the board members and online attendees and said meeting materials for the public are provided on the AshevilleCVB.com industry website.

Board Member Roll Call: Board members responded as Chairman Karvir called roll verifying all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, except for Commissioner Belcher, who joined the meeting at 9:06 a.m.

Welcome New BCTDA Member Brenda Durden

Chairman Karvir welcomed Brenda Durden as a new member of the BCTDA, having been recently appointed by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners to a three-year term.

Chairman Karvir also announced Andrew Celwyn was reappointed by Asheville City Council to a second three-year term and thanked him for his willingness to serve.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the August 26, 2020 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 9-0.

Financial Reports

August 2020 Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the August 2020 financial reports and answered all related questions.

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to approve the August 2020 financial reports 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.

Penalties During COVID-19 Revision

Chairman Karvir recused himself from the COVID-19 penalties discussion as his company has properties that would be affected by the board's upcoming action. He asked Mr. Cavanaugh to present the recommendation.

Mr. Cavanaugh said that at last month's meeting, the board approved the automatic waiver of all COVID-19 related occupancy tax penalties for the sales months of February through July 2020, with reports and payments due in March through August, provided the property had no late payments or waivers recorded in the three years prior to the pandemic. Mr. Cavanaugh said that after consulting with Mr. Warn and the Buncombe County Tax Office, Explore Asheville staff learned that there is a significant number of properties that have incurred penalties, have not submitted, and/or have had late payments in the past that have not officially requested waivers from the BCTDA. He presented the following recommendation for the board's consideration:

- Extend the waiver to include late occupancy tax reports and remittances for one additional month. This would now include the sales months of February through August 2020, due on the 20th day of each month in March through September 2020.
- Include all penalties incurred AND those still to be assessed when late reports are filed.
- Remove the requirement that the property has had no late payments or penalty waivers in the three-year period prior to the start of the pandemic.

Mr. Cavanaugh said Buncombe County and Explore Asheville will communicate this action to all properties to encourage the submission of late reports and payments and inform them of the waiver timeline.

Prior to voting on this recommendation, Vice Chairman Froeba asked for a motion to recuse four board members from the upcoming vote due to conflicts of interest.

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to recuse Himanshu Karvir, Brenda Durden, John Lockett, and James Poole from the upcoming vote regarding the bulk pre-approval of occupancy tax penalties related to COVID-19. Ms. Ashburn seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with Ms. Ashburn, Mr. Celwyn, Mr. McKibbon, Ms. Mosher, and Vice Chairman Froeba all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 5-0.

Mr. Cavanaugh said the recommendation before the board is to take action to approve all COVID-19 related penalties in bulk due through September 2020, which will then be presented to the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners for further and final consideration. He reiterated this action and timeline will be communicated to properties and noted it will alleviate the need to review individual requests.

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to revise the board's previous action to automatically waive all COVID-19 related penalties incurred, or to be assessed, for late occupancy tax reports and remittances for the sales months of February through August 2020, due on the 20th day of each month in March through September 2020. Mr. McKibbon seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with Ms. Ashburn, Mr. Celwyn, Mr. McKibbon, Ms. Mosher, and Vice Chairman Froeba all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 5-0.

Earned Revenue Fund Budget Amendment

Mr. Cavanaugh presented a budget amendment to the board, requesting to transfer \$100,000 in earned revenue funds currently being collected from advertising and reservations on the ExploreAsheville.com website into the FY 21 operating budget. He noted that due to COVID-related financial uncertainties when the budget was approved, no money was budgeted in the earned revenue category. Mr. Cavanaugh said revenue is being received and cannot be spent without an amendment approved by the board.

Mr. Cavanaugh said that normally, earned revenue funds were used to fund event and festival grants to partners via a funding cycle, however, due to the pandemic, there will not be a grant funding cycle this year. He said a plan to spend the funds is in development and requested the board approve the amendment so that the funds being collected will be accessible.

Councilwoman Mayfield said she hopes this money can help in unexpected recovery costs for local businesses. Mr. Cavanaugh responded that it was this from this earned revenue account that the BCTDA contributed \$50,000 to the One Buncombe Fund. He added staff agrees that this Fund should be used to reduce pandemic-related impacts.

Ms. Ashburn made a motion to approve the Earned Revenue budget amendment to transfer \$100,000 from the Earned Revenue Fund Balance into the FY 21 Earned Revenue operating budget, in the Local Support spend category, 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.

Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission Update

Demp Bradford, president and executive director of the Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports Commission (ABRSC), thanked the BCTDA for its support of the sports commission for the past 10 years. He shared a PowerPoint presentation and reported on program-related challenges, initiatives, and canceled sporting events due to COVID-19. Mr. Bradford also shared a significant gain: the announcement that the [Maui Jim Maui Invitational](#) will be relocating to Asheville from Hawaii, scheduled November 30 through December 2, 2020, due to the pandemic. Mr. Bradford stated 12 tournament basketball games will be televised from Asheville on the ESPN platform and it will be the first time the Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville staff will be back to work since the start of the pandemic. He shared [a video](#) that has been created announcing the tournament's move

to Asheville and thanked Explore Asheville's marketing and sales teams for working with the sports commission on this event.

Next, Mr. Bradford reviewed obstacles the ABRSC faces in bringing sporting events to Asheville. He explained the Bubble Concept, which will be executed for the Maui Invitational and other basketball groups, to include guidelines related to housing, meals, testing, restricted contact, and travel specific to each event. Mr. Bradford said securing the Maui Invitational has raised the level of awareness for Asheville as a location for other sporting events, and that a comprehensive safety plan, developed in coordination with Buncombe County Health and Human Services officials, will be in place for each event prior to contract execution.

Mr. Bradford concluded his report by thanking Councilmember Mayfield, Commissioner Belcher, the BCTDA, Mr. Cavanaugh and the Explore Asheville staff for their support.

Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Bradford for his report and the hard work of the ABRSC.

Interim Executive's Report

In his Interim Executive's report, Mr. Cavanaugh provided an overview of recent lodging metrics and comparisons to peer destinations. He also reviewed the increased popularity of short-term rental lodging units during the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, Mr. Cavanaugh shared a brief organizational update and concluded his report by encouraging everyone to attend both parts of the BCTDA's upcoming virtual annual meeting.

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

Advertising & Research Update

Ms. Tambellini shared a PowerPoint presentation providing an overview of current traveler sentiment during the pandemic and a review of case trends that are part of the ongoing methodology that help guide advertising decisions. She reviewed US Travel's "Let's Go There" campaign partnership, noting new research shows that even the act of planning a trip can boost happiness. Ms. Tambellini also reviewed Visit NC's Credit Program, stating a grant was awarded to Explore Asheville and will help underwrite a collaborative safety initiative spearheaded by Ms. Kappes and the Asheville Arts Council, as well as reminder ads served to people on the ground in key visitor locations.

Following Ms. Tambellini's presentation, a lengthy discussion centering on advertising, visitation during the pandemic, concerns related to winter, weekday occupancy, day trip visitation, and safety perceptions and messaging took place.

When the discussion ended, Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Tambellini for her presentation and the board members for their comments.

Group Sales Outlook

Ms. Pierce and five members of the Group Sales and Services department shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting ways the team has strategically responded to the pandemic by shifting gears and implementing initiatives to virtually showcase Asheville to secure future group business.

Ms. Pierce reviewed the recent increase in sales activity and said that as of September 10, 70 percent of local sales positions have been reinstated to pre-COVID-19 staffing levels.

Next, Explore Asheville's Senior Sales Managers Connie Holliday and Tina Porter, Sales Managers Kathryn Dewey and Beth McKinney, and Group Communications & Services Manager Carli Adams, each shared COVID-related strategies that were specific to their areas of focus and expertise.

Ms. Pierce commended Group Sales & Services Specialists Daniel Bradley and Glenn Ramey for supporting the sales managers day in and day out.

Ms. Pierce concluded her presentation by sharing the following key points:

1. Asheville is positioned better than most destinations for the return of meetings and events.
2. Asheville has a strong virtual presence and is addressing planners' new needs.
3. Explore Asheville has taken additional steps to provide support for industry partners to secure future business.
4. Explore Asheville has a strong and passionate staff dedicated to bringing meetings and events to the community and to our partners.

Following the presentation, Ms. Pierce and Ms. McKinney responded to questions related to the motorcoach market.

Chairman Karvir commended the entire sales team for their efforts and the presentation.

Asheville City Council Update

Councilmember Mayfield reported on city-related business, clarifying that Asheville City Council did not actually "defund" the Asheville Police Department, but is working on a long-range plan to "reimagine" the department to allow officers to focus on what they do best. She also reported on the status of the city's budget, the Vance Monument review process, and the appointment of a new councilmember.

Chairman Karvir thanked Councilmember Mayfield for her report.

Buncombe County Commission Update

Commissioner Belcher reported on county-related business, including budget implementation, the approval of funding to install solar on several county buildings and schools, a resolution adopting LEED certification standards for the county, capital projects, and the county's positive financial standing.

Chairman Karvir thanked Commissioner Belcher for the update.

Miscellaneous Business

Mr. Bradford said that earlier in his presentation, when describing the Skyview Golf Tournament, he referred to it as “the oldest consecutively running Negro golf tournament.” He said he wanted to come back on to clarify that this description was what was shared with him as the way to promote the tournament by the event organizer and he apologized for any misunderstanding.

Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Bradford for providing the clarification.

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, September 29, 2020. He reported one comment was received and it was previously sent to the board.

Mr. Celwyn asked if there were any comments regarding the email received from the Homestay Network requesting a seat on the BCTDA. Chairman Karvir responded that prior to the pandemic, the Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association was working with city and county elected officials to propose a change to the legislation that would include an expansion of the board, which would include a seat for a short-term rentals representative. He said he fully anticipates that will be revisited at the appropriate time. Councilmember Mayfield echoed Chairman Karvir’s response and said those involved are committed to keeping that seat in as part of future discussions.

CEO Search Committee Update

Vice Chairman Froeba provided a brief update on the CEO search process, noting that in September, the committee interviewed six candidates in person. He said from that pool, three finalists were selected to come back for a second round of interviews, and the search committee has selected a person to recommend to the board to become the next CEO. Vice Chairman Froeba said the committee needs permission from the board to take the next step in the process, which will require meeting in closed session.

Closed Session

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to go into closed session for the following reasons: (1) Pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 142-318.11(a)(1), to prevent disclosure of information that is confidential pursuant to the laws of North Carolina, or not considered a public record within the meaning of Chapter 132 of the General Statutes; (2) Pursuant to North Carolina General Statutes 154-318.11(a)(6) and 142-318.11(a)(1) to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, and conditions appointment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee, and (3) Pursuant to North Carolina General Statute 143-318.11(a)(3) to consult with an attorney retained by the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority about matters with respect to which the attorney-client privilege between the BCTDA and its attorney must be preserved.

Mr. McKibbon seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote with Ms. Ashburn now absent from the meeting, the motion carried 8-0. All staff members, partners, and members of the public exited the meeting, leaving the board and Ms. Rockoff in attendance for the closed session, which began at 11:10 a.m.

Adjournment of the Closed Session and BCTDA Meeting

Ms. Rockoff reported to Ms. Sampson that Mr. Poole made the motion to end the closed session and adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Mr. Celwyn. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0 and the closed session and BCTDA meeting simultaneously ended at 11:28 a.m.

The BCTDA will next meet on Wednesday, October 28, 2020, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager