

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, October 27, 2021

- Present (Voting):** Kathleen Mosher, Chair; Brenda Durden, Vice Chair; Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Larry Crosby, Matthew Lehman, Michael Lusick, HP Patel, Scott Patel
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore
Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- CVB Staff:** Vic Isley, Marla Tambellini, Marshall Hilliard, Pat Kappes, Jonna Sampson, Julia Simpson
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bisette
- Online Attendees:** Sybil Tate, Nathan Pennington; Buncombe County
Tracy Swartout, Blue Ridge Parkway
Carli Adams, Glenn Cox, Hannah Dosa, Connie Holliday, Jennifer Kass-Green, Khal Khoury, Sarah Lowery, Holly Oakley, Kathi Petersen, Michael Poandl, Charlie Reed, Dodie Stephens; Explore Asheville Staff
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Sharon Tabor, Black Mountain-Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce
Madison Davis, Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission
Lew Bleiweis, Greater Asheville Regional Airport Authority
Timothy Love, Buncombe County
Meghan Rogers, Asheville Downtown Association
Chip Craig, Greybeard Rentals
Jim Muth, John Ellis; Past BCTDA Board Members
Robert Michel, Asheville Homestay Network
Ruth Summers, Grove Arcade Public Market Foundation
Peter Pollay, Mandara Hospitality
Mark Barrett, Freelance Reporter
Joel Burgess, Asheville Citizen-Times
Brooke Randle, Mountain Xpress
Derek Bryant, Lauren Brigman, WLOS News 13
Sunshine Request

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

Executive Summary of Meeting Minutes

- Chairwoman Mosher called the virtual joint regular meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:01 a.m.
- HP Patel and Sagar “Scott” Patel were welcomed as new board members.
- Minutes from the September 29, 2021, BCTDA meeting were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- The September 2021 financial statements were reviewed and approved with a 9-0 vote.
- With a 9-0 vote, the board approved the Festivals and Cultural Events review committee’s recommendation to provide funding support for 26 events in 2022, totaling \$110,000.
- Ms. Isley shared her President & CEO’s report.
- Sybil Tate and Nathan Pennington shared an overview, timeline, and process to develop Buncombe County’s Comprehensive Plan.
- Blue Ridge Parkway Superintendent Tracy Swartout shared a parkway update.
- Ms. Tambellini and Ms. Kappes shared an Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel update.
- Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley provide a county-related update.
- There were no emailed public comments, nor requests to speak, received for this meeting.
- With a 9-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 10:46 a.m.

Call of the Joint BCTDA Meeting to Order

Chairwoman Mosher 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. She 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 eleven BCTDA members were virtually in attendance.

Welcome New BCTDA Board Members

Ms. Isley welcomed and introduced two new BCTDA board members that were appointed by the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners earlier this month:

HP Patel, BCA Hotels

Mr. HP Patel was appointed to a three-year term, expiring August 31, 2024, and would subsequently be eligible for reappointment to a second full term. Mr. Patel is the president of BCA Hotels, which owns and operates four hotels in the area, and he is representing a lodging property with 101 or more rooms.

Mr. Patel thanked Ms. Isley and briefly shared his background. He added he is happy to have the opportunity to serve on the board and looks forward to working with everyone.

Sagar “Scott” Patel, Pure Hospitality

Mr. Sagar Patel, who goes by “Scott,” was appointed to a three-year term, expiring August 31, 2024, and would also be eligible for reappointment to a second full term. Mr. Patel is the president of BCA Hotels, operating one hotel in the area, and he is representing a lodging property with 100 rooms or less.

Mr. Patel thanked Ms. Isley and said he is excited to be part of the BCTDA. He shared information about his background and family business.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Vice Chairwoman Durden made a motion to approve the September 29, 2021, 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.

September 2021 Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the September 2021 financial reports. There were no questions.

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the September 2021 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.

Mr. Warn said the FY 2020-21 audit is wrapping up and will be presented at the November BCTDA meeting.

Festivals & Cultural Events Funding Recommendations

Ms. Kappes said a grant cycle was just completed for the Festivals & Cultural Events Fund and she presented the review committee's funding recommendations to the board for consideration. She briefly reviewed background information, the process, and the evaluation criteria that was followed leading up to today's recommendations. Highlights included:

- Funding for the program comes from unrestricted, earned revenue collected through advertising sales and lodging reservations booked on ExploreAsheville.com. These funds are not subject to the state-level mandates that apply to occupancy tax.
- The budget allocated to the FY22 Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund was \$110,000.
- Earned Revenue is also used for a program to provide Sponsorship funding at the discretion of the CEO and that FY22 budget totals \$50,000.
- The Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund grant program launched in 2016 and was designed to provide financial support for events that serve both the residents of Buncombe County and visitors who travel to the Asheville area. The Fund's primary purposes:
 - To support and preserve the cultural identity within Buncombe County.
 - To stimulate the creation of new, or expansion of existing, festivals and cultural events.
 - To contribute to the financial viability and long-term sustainability of the area's festivals and cultural events.
- Since the inception of the fund, 70+ events have received support totaling over \$580,000.
- Grants range from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and are disbursed following each event.
- Applications were reviewed by a committee and, in addition to meeting eligibility requirements, were assessed using criteria developed to determine the extent of alignment with the BCTDA's strategic pillars. Ms. Kappes shared examples of alignment.
- In the 2021 grant cycle for events taking place in 2022, 33 applications totaling \$161,600 were received, with available funding totaling just \$110,000, making for a competitive cycle.
- Ms. Kappes expressed her gratitude to the members of the review committee, including:
 - Leah Ashburn, BCTDA Board Member/Treasurer of the Nonprofit and Highland Brewing Company, President & CEO/Family Owner
 - Jon Fillman, City of Asheville, Community Event Manager
 - Vic Isley, Explore Asheville, President & CEO
 - Rasheeda McDaniels, Buncombe County, Community Engagement Team
 - Peyton O'Conner, Buncombe County, Parks and Recreation Director

Ms. Kappes presented the committee's recommendations, which included 26 of the 33 submissions that met eligibility requirements and were most closely aligned with the strategic pillars:

	Organization	Event	Amount Requested	Recommended Grant Amount
1	Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP)	ASAP Farm Tour	\$5,000	\$5,000
2	Asheville Brewers Alliance	AVL Beer Week	\$5,000	\$5,000
3	Asheville Celtic Group	Asheville Celtic Fest	\$5,000	\$5,000
4	Asheville Downtown Association	Downtown After 5	\$5,000	\$5,000
5	Asheville Downtown Association	Asheville Holiday Parade	\$5,000	\$5,000
6	Asheville Fringe Society	The Asheville Fringe Arts Festival	\$5,000	\$5,000
7	Asheville Makers	Asheville Makers Faire	\$2,000	\$2,000
8	Asheville Mardi Gras	Asheville Mardi Gras Parade and Queen's Ball	\$4,000	\$4,000
9	Asheville Quilt Guild	Asheville Quilt Show	\$5,000	\$3,700
10	Asheville Symphony Orchestra	ALT ASO	\$5,000	\$5,000
11	Black Mountain College Museum + Arts Center	{Re}HAPPENING 10	\$3,000	\$3,000
12	Black Mountain Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce	Sourwood Festival	\$5,000	\$5,000
13	Black Wall Street AVL	GRINDfest 2022	\$5,000	\$5,000
14	Blue Ridge Pride Center, Inc.	The Blue Ridge Pride Festival	\$5,000	\$5,000
15	Buncombe County Recreation Services	Lake Julian Festival of Lights	\$5,000	\$5,000
16	Congregation Beth HaTephila	HardLox Jewish Food and Heritage Festival	\$3,600	\$3,600
17	Connect Beyond Festival	Connect Beyond Festival	\$10,000	\$5,000
18	Folk Heritage Committee	(1) Shindig on the Green (2) Mountain Dance and Folk Festival	\$5,000	\$5,000
19	Hola Carolina	Hola Asheville	\$5,000	\$5,000
20	LEAF Global Arts	LEAF Downtown AVL	\$5,000	\$5,000
21	Leicester Artists	Come to Leicester Artists Studio Tour	\$1,000	\$1,000
22	Moog Foundation	Moogmentum: The 15th Anniversary Celebration	\$5,000	\$3,700
23	North Carolina Arboretum	Winter Lights at the North Carolina Arboretum	\$10,000	\$5,000
24	PubCorps	Flacktoberfest 2022	\$5,000	\$1,000
25	Southern Highland Craft Guild	74th Annual Craft Fair of the Southern Highlands	\$5,000	\$5,000
26	Green Built Alliance	CiderFest NC	\$5,000	\$3,000
		TOTAL	\$128,600	\$110,000

Mr. Celwyn thanked Ms. Kappes and the members of the committee for their work in arriving at these recommendations. He then asked that in future cycles, if applicants meet eligibility and pillar alignment requirements, that consideration could also be given to events from organizations with smaller budgets where the BCTDA's investment could make or break having the event, over those from organizations with more financial means and larger budgets. Ms. Ashburn said that is a fair question and she would welcome further conversations about this for future cycles.

Chairwoman Mosher expressed her gratitude to the committee and said these events represent a lot of good things happening in our community.

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the Festivals & Cultural Events committee's recommendation to fund 26 events in 2022 utilizing Earned Revenue for a total of \$110,000 as presented. 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.

The Explore Asheville team will inform the recipients of the BCTDA's approval and payment will be made upon the successful completion of each event.

President & CEO Report

Industry Metrics

Ms. Isley said the major themes of today's meeting will focus on our strategic imperatives, particularly the second pillar: Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel. In her President & CEO's report, Ms. Isley reviewed recent lodging metrics and provided an overview of the Tourism Product Development Fund's (TPDF) Tourism Management and Investment Plan's (TMIP) process and timeline that was interrupted by the global pandemic. She said staff is currently working with city and county leaders to understand how the influx of Covid relief funds have impacted the priorities identified in the TMIP process and develop a strategic and thoughtful proposal to guide the future of the TPDF, which will be presented to the board before the end of the calendar year.

Other Updates

Ms. Isley concluded her report by noting the CVB Staff Recap, Destination Dashboard, and Quick List are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan

Ms. Isley said people have been attracted to this area for generations. She added that given the growth trajectory, Buncombe County has embarked on a [process to develop a comprehensive plan](#) for the future. She introduced Assistant County Manager Sybil Tate and Planning and Development Director Nathan Pennington to share information about the plan and process.

Ms. Tate said developing a comprehensive plan is going to help shape what Buncombe County will look like for our children and grandchildren in the next 10 to 20+ years, noting a youth postcard project is a key component being utilized to help direct the outcome.

Mr. Pennington shared a PowerPoint presentation in which he reviewed some historical information about how Asheville became a national gateway to the mountains and tourism's long history in Buncombe County. He said that with popularity comes challenges, and he highlighted some of those challenges that affect our county related to development, legislation,

infrastructure, a development boom, steep slopes, and, more recently, the influx of Covid refugees.

Mr. Pennington said it's critical to plan for the future, noting that the county is working off a plan from 1998 that was updated in 2013. He noted it's also important to get various strategic plans throughout the community to align and connect with one another. Mr. Pennington concluded his presentation by reviewing the timeline and details related to the planning process, which will include significant public input and should ultimately result in the adoption of the Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan in the spring of 2023.

Ms. Isley thanked Ms. Tate and Mr. Pennington for sharing the process and timeline, adding it's important to have a roadmap such as this for future growth. She looks forward to the BCTDA being involved in planning for these broader community goals and receiving updates throughout the process.

Blue Ridge Parkway Update

Ms. Isley introduced Tracy Swartout, superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and shared information about her background. She noted that while the parkway is a regional asset that is enjoyed and promoted, it is also something to protect and support.

Ms. Swartout said the Blue Ridge Parkway is one of over 400 units in the National Park Service and is a 469-mile road through Virginia and North Carolina that connects the Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains national parks. She said running a park is like running a municipality or a business and provided a verbal overview of the Blue Ridge Parkway's operations and assets. Ms. Swartout said the BRP goes through 29 counties, has 26 tunnels, 180 bridges, 360+ miles of trails, 10 campgrounds, over 14,000 signs, 380 overlooks, 20 cultural landscapes, 900 designated vistas, and 500+ buildings, all mostly oriented around 15 developed areas.

Ms. Swartout said the BRP is always the most- or second-most visited park unit each year, and she shared maintenance costs, visitation numbers, and the economic impact to communities along the corridor. She emphasized the importance of protecting the parkway and surrounding views, recognizing the full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees, 1,300 volunteers, and regional partnerships that help keep it operational. Ms. Swartout then shared challenges and the need to inspire better stewardship and provide more education on how people can recreate responsibly. She expressed gratitude for support from the BCTDA and surrounding counties and shared ways to invest in the Blue Ridge Parkway to enhance everyone's experiences, on and off the road, and to preserve it for years to come.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked Ms. Swartout for providing an overview of the Blue Ridge Parkway's operations, including its challenges and opportunities, and said she looks forward to the BCTDA's and BRP's continued partnership.

Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel Update

Ms. Tambellini shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting Explore Asheville's efforts as they relate to the Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel strategic pillar. She spoke about the Park2Park Venturing Out series partnership with Outside TV, and a collaboration with Matador to develop custom content sharing outdoor photography tips while leaving only footprints.

Ms. Tambellini spoke about messaging, targeting audiences with responsible traveler characteristics, and a collaborative partnership with Visit NC, Leave No Trace, and the EDPNC.

She shared examples of the Leave No Trace assets on ExploreAsheville.com encouraging responsible principles, social media examples, and the Leave No Trace partner toolkit.

Ms. Tambellini said Asheville is the only East Coast destination that is part of Pledge for the Wild, an initiative of mountain towns that are committed to protecting sacred and wild places, with a philanthropic component. Asheville is directing donations from its efforts to the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation.

Ms. Tambellini said Explore Asheville is an official sponsor of the upcoming Asheville Championship basketball tournament, and part of the agreement includes giveaways of kayaks made by local manufacturer, Liquidlogic, that will integrate with Pledge for the Wild. She noted this plan will help raise additional donations for the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation.

Next, Ms. Kappes said that as part of Explore Asheville's partner engagement strategy, events are planned throughout the year to connect partners with resources and networking opportunities that tie into the strategic pillars. She shared examples of two events that focused on the responsible travel pillar, to include a webinar with the keynote speaker from Tourism Cares along with a local partner panel discussion, and a Summer Social event that featured a resource fair highlighting local nonprofit organizations that focus on sustainability.

Ms. Kappes said Explore Asheville has become members of two international organizations focused on sustainability, which helps the team connect with best practices from a destination management perspective. These organizations are Tourism Cares and the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked Ms. Tambellini and Ms. Kappes for the presentation, noting she appreciates having an increased understanding of how Explore Asheville is activating the pillars into its program of work.

Asheville City Council Update

Councilmember Kilgore needed to leave the meeting at 10:20 a.m., therefore, an Asheville City Council update was not provided.

Buncombe County Commission Update

Commissioner Pressley welcomed HP Patel and Scott Patel to the BCTDA. He provided an update on county-related business, including the upcoming Asheville Championship basketball tournament, the Buncombe County Sports Park RFP process, community listening sessions, the American Rescue Plan, and the Buncombe County Comprehensive Plan.

Chairwoman Mosher thanked Commissioner Pressley for his report.

Miscellaneous Business

There was no miscellaneous business discussed at this meeting.

Comments from the General Public

Live Public Comments

Chairwoman Mosher said members of the public were invited to sign-up to verbally share live comments during today's virtual BCTDA meeting. 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, October 26, 2021. She reported there were no written public comments received by the deadline.

Adjournment

Vice Chairwoman Durden moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Lehman 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 10:46 a.m. (Ms. Ashburn had exited the meeting at 9:29 a.m. and was not present for the vote.)

The full meeting PowerPoint presentation and relevant documents are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau and are posted on AshevilleCVB.com.

The next joint BCTDA meeting will be held virtually on Wednesday, November 17, 2021, beginning at 9:00 a.m., via Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager