

# Explore ASHEVILLE

Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority

## Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority A Joint Meeting of the Public Authority and Nonprofit Corporation

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Via Zoom Webinar due to the COVID-19 Pandemic/State of Emergency

### Virtual Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 28, 2020

- Present (Voting):** Himanshu Karvir, Chair; Gary Froeba, Vice Chair; Andrew Celwyn, Brenda Durden, John Lockett, John McKibbon, Kathleen Mosher
- Absent (Voting):** Leah Ashburn, James Poole
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Julie Mayfield  
Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- CVB Staff:** Chris Cavanaugh, Marla Tambellini, Pat Kappes, Jonna Sampson, Daniel Bradley
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bissette
- Online Attendees:** Dianna Pierce, Carli Adams, Glenn Cox, Hannah Dosa, Connie Holliday, Sarah Kilgore, Sarah Lowery, Kathi Petersen, Tina Porter, Glenn Ramey, Charlie Reed, Dodie Stephens, Jason Tarr, Landis Taylor, Nicole Will; Explore Asheville Staff  
Victoria Isley, Incoming Explore Asheville CEO  
Tina Kinsey, Asheville Regional Airport  
Eric Hardy, Peyton O'Conner, Karla Furnari, Garrett Artz; Woodfin Blueway & Greenway Project  
Demp Bradford, Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports Commission  
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce  
Angela Arner-Meyerhoff, Kelsey Ann Bassel, Meghan Jackson, Lauren Jennings, Ashley Keetle, Emery Morris, Nick Smart; 360i  
Jim Muth, Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association  
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association  
John Ellis, Chip Craig; Past BCTDA Board Members  
Jackson Tierney, Asheville Homestay Network  
John Boyle, Asheville Citizen-Times  
Sunshine Request

Additional tourism industry partners and members of the public registered in advance and viewed 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 9:01 a.m.
- Mr. Cavanaugh paid tribute to George Cecil and John Cram, community and tourism leaders who recently passed away.
- Minutes from the September 30, 2020 BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with a 7-0 vote.
- Minutes from the October 15, 2020 BCTDA special meeting were approved with a 7-0 vote.
- The September 2020 financial statements were approved with a 7-0 vote.
- A motion to authorize Explore Asheville's President & CEO and the BCTDA's board chair to approve earned revenue expenditures was approved with a 7-0 vote.
- Tina Kinsey provided an Asheville Regional Airport update.
- A Woodfin Greenway & Blueway project update was provided. A motion to approve a contract amendment changing the payment disbursement schedule and extending the project completion deadline was approved with a 7-0 vote.
- In his Interim Executive's report, Mr. Cavanaugh reviewed recent lodging metrics.
- Mr. Cavanaugh presented a Strategic Marketing Overview of the tourism industry for the next 6-24 months.
- Ms. Kappes shared a presentation highlighting new visitor safety initiatives.
- Ms. Tambellini provided an advertising update.
- Brief updates from Asheville City Councilmember Julie Mayfield and Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher were provided.
- Under Miscellaneous Business, Mr. Celwyn offered a suggestion to help support local businesses.
- Chairman Karvir reported that no public comments were received in advance of today's meeting.
- With a 6-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 11:07 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 9:01 a.m. He welcomed board members and online attendees and said meeting materials are provided on the [AshevilleCVB.com](http://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 Leah Ashburn and James Poole, who were absent from the meeting.

## **In Remembrance of George Cecil and John Cram**

Mr. Cavanaugh paid tribute to George Cecil and John Cram, whom he described as "two titans in the tourism sector," who passed away recently. Mr. Cavanaugh reviewed their significant contributions to the community and tourism industry, noting they will both be greatly missed.

## **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

### **09.30.20 Regular Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the September 30, 2020 regular meeting minutes as presented. Ms. Mosher seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 7-0.

### **10.15.20 Special Meeting Minutes**

Mr. McKibbin made a motion to approve the October 15, 2020 special meeting minutes as presented. Vice Chairman Froeba seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 7-0.

## **Financial Reports**

### **September 2020 Financial Reports**

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

Mr. Luckett made a motion to approve the September 2020 financial reports as presented. Mr. Celwyn seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 7-0.

### **Earned Revenue Resolution**

Mr. Cavanaugh said at last month's meeting, an amendment was approved to establish an Earned Revenue budget for FY 21. He noted funds in this account are generated via advertising and online reservations on ExploreAsheville.com and are not subject to occupancy tax mandates and restrictions. Mr. Cavanaugh noted this fund has been primarily used for festival and event grants via an annual funding cycle in the past.

Mr. Cavanaugh requested board consideration to reaffirm authorization for Explore Asheville's President and CEO to approve expenditures from the fund of up to \$5,000 per recipient during FY 21, and for the BCTDA's board chair to approve amounts exceeding that amount.

Ms. Mosher made a motion to enable Explore Asheville's President and CEO and/or Interim Executive to authorize expenditures from the Earned Revenue account of no more than \$5,000 per recipient during the 2020-2021 fiscal year, and amounts exceeding \$5,000 per recipient during the same fiscal year will require the authorization of the BCTDA board chair. Ms. Durden seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 7-0.

## **Asheville Regional Airport Report**

Tina Kinsey, Director of Marketing, PR & Air Service Development with Asheville Regional Airport, shared a PowerPoint presentation focusing on recent airport activities and challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She reviewed the loss of routes since March 2020, pre-pandemic record performance by the airport, and current metrics, safety measures, and visitor sentiments related to traveling by air. Ms. Kinsey concluded her report by reviewing the airport's strategic focus and expansion plans. She noted that

while recovery will take time, AVL is poised to bounce back sooner than the national average due to the presence of a strong leisure market, traveler base, and airline profitability at Asheville Regional Airport. She then answered all related questions.

Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Kinsey for the update and said he appreciates everything the staff at Asheville Regional Airport does for the community.

### **Tourism Product Development Fund Project Update**

#### **Woodfin Greenway & Blueway Project Update**

Ms. Kappes introduced Eric Hardy, Administrator for the Town of Woodfin, and Peyton O’Conner, Parks and Recreation Director for Buncombe County, to provide an update and contract amendment request on the Woodfin Greenway & Blueway project. Ms. Kappes noted the project was awarded a \$2.25 million Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) grant in 2018 and that Karla Furnari with Buncombe County and Garrett Artz with Riverlink were also virtually present for the presentation.

Mr. Hardy and Mr. O’Conner shared a PowerPoint presentation in which they provided an overview of each component of the project. They reviewed complications that have arisen resulting in delays, a timeline of project milestones, funding challenges, and status updates on Silverline Park, the Riverside Park Expansion, and the Whitewater Wave.

Mr. Hardy concluded the presentation by reviewing the six phases of the project and revised anticipated completion dates and cost projections. He said today’s request is not to ask for additional funding, but to amend the contract to change the disbursement schedule from three payments to a six-payment disbursement plan to align with the project elements, and to extend the completion deadline. Mr. Hardy also shared ongoing fundraising efforts and successes and said a grant writer has been hired to seek out and apply for additional funding. He then answered all related questions.

#### **Woodfin Greenway & Blueway Contract Amendment Request**

Ms. Kappes reiterated that the request before the board is to consider extending the project’s contract completion date to December 31, 2023, and to adjust the payment disbursement schedule to align with the six individual project elements as follows:

<b>Project Element</b>	<b>TPDF Funding</b>
French Broad River Greenway 1	\$465,773
Silverline Park	\$650,000
French Broad River Greenway 2	\$380,000
Riverside Park Expansion	\$140,000
Whitewater Wave	\$600,000
Beaverdam Creek	\$14,227

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to extend the Woodfin Blueway & Greenway project completion date from December 31, 2020, to December 31, 2023, and restructure the disbursement schedule from the standard three payments to six disbursements paid upon completion of the six individual projects included in the scope as presented. Vice Chairman Froeba seconded the motion. Discussion included Chairman Karvir asking if engineering studies are still being completed prior to disbursements, to which Ms.

Kappes responded affirmatively. A vote was taken and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 7-0.

### **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 data highlighting the increased popularity of short-term rental lodging units in recent months during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Cavanaugh concluded his report by stating CVB Staff Recaps, Destination Dashboards, Quick Lists, and other reports were provided in advance of the meeting and can be found on [AshevilleCVB.com](http://AshevilleCVB.com).

### **Strategic Marketing Overview**

Mr. Cavanaugh shared a PowerPoint presentation in which he presented a strategic marketing overview of the tourism industry for the next 6-24 months. He reviewed how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted tourism, followed by the rates at which recovery is currently occurring in various sectors of the travel economy. Mr. Cavanaugh reviewed traveler perceptions and sentiments related to travel, meeting and event impacts, and estimated time frames for long-term recovery.

Mr. Cavanaugh concluded his report by sharing the following key takeaways and strategic responses:

- Caution against any autumnal "irrational exuberance."
- Roughly half of American travelers are open to travel.
- Tourism sector recovery will be fragile and very uneven for months to come.
- The availability of a vaccine will help but is no guarantee of a quick return to pre-pandemic levels of activity.
- Buncombe County is well-positioned for recovery but will also face significant competition for time and dollars.
- The next few months will still be challenging.

#### *Focus upon:*

- Safety, pre- and during the visit
- Regional markets
- Audiences most likely to travel and travel responsibly
- Inspirational, aspirational, yet practical messaging
- "Lowest hanging fruit" in groups and events
- Building future demand for the destination
- Flexibility

Mr. Cavanaugh invited questions and a brief discussion took place centering on drivers of visitation during the holidays, rising coronavirus case numbers in North Carolina, messaging during a pandemic, mask compliance, and the increased challenges businesses will face in the upcoming winter months.

Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Cavanaugh for his presentation.

## **New Visitor Safety Initiatives**

Ms. Kappes shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting a collaborative effort that arose out of discussions amongst staff members to develop ways to convey the message that our community prioritizes safety, in light of current COVID-19 related issues. She said staff also wanted to support Buncombe County's efforts to reinforce health and safety messaging to encourage people to wear masks and adhere to the 3 Ws.

Ms. Kappes presented a graphic of a bear wearing a mask with the message to "Wear Mask, Wait 6 Feet, and Wash Hands" prominently displayed on the sign. She noted local artist Will Hornaday designed the graphic, which has been incorporated into flyers, posters, sidewalk decals, window clings, barricade banners, pole banners and wayfinding kiosks that have been distributed throughout the Asheville area. Ms. Kappes said Explore Asheville partnered with Buncombe County, the City of Asheville, the Asheville Area Arts Council, and the Asheville Art Museum on this initiative, and funding was provided via a grant from the CARES Act.

Vice Chairman Froeba was appreciative of the signage and suggested adding verbiage that masks should also be worn outdoors when social distancing is not possible.

Ms. Kappes concluded her report by providing an overview of a currently running geofencing campaign that will deliver COVID-19 related safety messages, in the form of digital ads, to people who enter heavily trafficked areas in Buncombe County. She said the campaign is scheduled to run through December.

Councilmember Mayfield and Chairman Karvir thanked and commended Ms. Kappes for spearheading the 3 Ws sign initiative in collaboration with the city and county.

## **Advertising Update**

Ms. Tambellini provided an advertising update and reviewed the status of methodologies being continuously tracked that will help determine when it's appropriate to resume paid advertising. She said Asheville is currently benefiting from high brand awareness and, while staff isn't moving forward with executing a full media plan at this time, some recent partnerships are helping to keep Asheville top-of-mind for travelers. Ms. Tambellini shared Asheville's fall and holiday videos that were developed in partnership with US Travel as part of the organization's "*Let's Go There*" campaign, being funded through credits extended during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Next, Ms. Tambellini outlined details of the Maui Invitational advertising sponsorship that will feature Asheville during the 12-game basketball tournament taking place at Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville, November 30 through December 2. She shared the video, social, commercial and website components of the sponsorship.

Ms. Tambellini concluded her report by reviewing a new Google Beta search ad program, public relations successes and impacts, and recent significant fall and holiday media placements.

Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Tambellini for the presentation.

### **Asheville City Council Update**

Councilmember Mayfield reported on city-related business, including \$1.5 million in CARES Act funds being directed to rental/housing assistance and homelessness prevention, progress on design work for the 68 Haywood Street lot, and hotel moratorium work sessions. She encouraged BCTDA members to engage with city staff related to the proposed hotel development regulations that will be finalized early next year.

Chairman Karvir thanked Councilmember Mayfield for the report.

### **Buncombe County Commission Update**

Commissioner Belcher reported on county-related business, including affordable housing initiatives, rental assistance, absentee voting, and the recent Pratt and Whitney project announcement.

Chairman Karvir thanked Commissioner Belcher for the update.

### **Miscellaneous Business**

Mr. Celwyn said that in the spring, it was wonderful to direct \$5 million in TPDF funds to support local businesses for COVID relief. Referencing the predicted harsh winter ahead for many local businesses, he asked if another legislative change could be proposed to allow for this type of funding to happen again. Councilmember Mayfield and Chairman Karvir responded that this was a good idea, with Councilmember Mayfield stating that the legislature doesn't meet again until mid-January. She later noted that, instead of submitting one-off bills, her preference would be to see the BCTDA's legislation changed in the manner that was being discussed prior to the start of the pandemic, which would create the opportunity for the board to approve the use of TPDF funds with less restrictions.

In response to Chairman Karvir's question regarding the current Earned Revenue account balance, Mr. Cavanaugh said approximately \$46,000 has been earned since the account was depleted in the spring when \$50,000 was contributed to help establish the One Buncombe relief fund.

Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Celwyn and Councilmember Mayfield for their input.

### **Comments from the General Public**

Chairman Karvir said members of the general public were invited to submit comments via email to [reply@ExploreAsheville.com](mailto:reply@ExploreAsheville.com) through 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, September 29, 2020. He reported no comments were received.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Luckett moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Celwyn seconded the motion. A vote was taken and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0, as Mr. McKibbon had exited the meeting at 10:40 a.m. The virtual meeting adjourned at 11:07 a.m.

The next BCTDA meeting will be on Wednesday, November 18, 2020, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager