

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, December 16, 2020

- Present (Voting):** Himanshu Karvir, Chair; Gary Froeba, Vice Chair;
Andrew Celwyn, John Luckett, John McKibbon,
Kathleen Mosher
- Absent (Voting):** Leah Ashburn, Brenda Durden, James Poole
- Present (Ex-Officio):** None
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore
- CVB Staff:** Victoria Isley, Marla Tambellini, 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, Kathryn Dewey,
Connie Holliday, Josh Jones, Pat Kappes, Sarah Kilgore,
Sarah Lowery, Kathi Petersen, Tina Porter, Glenn Ramey,
Charlie Reed, Whitney Smith, Jason Tarr, Nicole Will;
Explore Asheville Staff
Chris Kessler, CliftonLarsonAllen LLP
Krutika Patel, Sleep Inn West
Demp Bradford, Madison Davis; Asheville-Buncombe Regional
Sports Commission
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
Angie Arner, Kelsey Ann Bassel, Ashley Keetle, Emery Morris,
Susan Neikirk; 360i
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Jackson Tierney, Bob Michel; Asheville Homestay Network
Lew Bleiweis, Tina Kinsey; Asheville Regional Airport
John Ellis, Jim Muth; Past BCTDA Board Members
Rick Bell, Engadine Inn & Cabins
Chris Corl, Harrah's Cherokee Center – Asheville
Kevin Beattie, WLOS News 13
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas
Daniel Walton, Mountain Xpress
Derek Lacey, 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 9:00 a.m.
- Chairman Karvir welcomed Victoria Isley to her first BCTDA meeting as Explore Asheville's new President & CEO.
- Minutes from the November 18, 2020 BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with a 6-0 vote.
- In the first of a two-step process, the BCTDA approved a penalty waiver request for Sleep Inn West with a 6-0 vote.
- The October 2020 financial statements were approved with a 6-0 vote.
- In conjunction with the FY 20 audit, Mr. Warn presented the final June 2020 financial statements, which were approved with a 6-0 vote.
- Chris Kessler, with CliftonLarsonAllen LLP, presented the BCTDA's FY 2019-20 audit in which a 'clean and unmodified opinion' was rendered. With a 6-0 vote, the audit was accepted and placed on file.
- A Maui Invitational basketball tournament update was provided by Demp Bradford and Ms. Tambellini.
- In her President & CEO's report, Ms. Isley reviewed recent lodging metrics.
- Ms. Tambellini shared a marketing update focusing on holiday messaging and the Holiday Gift Guide.
- Under Miscellaneous Business, a discussion took place centering on Mr. Celwyn's suggestion to use TPDF funds to help support recovery efforts.
- 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 10:20 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 board members and online attendees and said meeting materials 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 Leah Ashburn, Brenda Durden, and James Poole, who were absent from the meeting. Mr. McKibbin said Mr. Poole is having connectivity issues.

Chairman Karvir said Councilmember Kilgore was appointed as Asheville City Council's ex-officio member of the BCTDA, however, she had a conflict and is unable to attend today's meeting. He noted the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners will appoint a replacement to fill Commissioner Joe Belcher's vacated seat in January.

Welcome Victoria Isley, Explore Asheville's New President & CEO

Chairman Karvir welcomed Victoria "Vic" Isley to her first BCTDA board meeting as President and CEO of Explore Asheville and reviewed her education, credentials, and work history as a long-time veteran in tourism.

Ms. Isley thanked Chairman Karvir for the warm welcome and said she is very glad to be here and happy to join such a great community.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the November 18, 2020 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Lockett seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0.

Financial Reports

Sleep Inn West Penalty Waiver Request

Chairman Karvir introduced Ms. Krutika Patel, who is attending the meeting to present a penalty waiver request for Sleep Inn West. Chairman Karvir said that today's action will be the first in a two-step process, noting that if the BCTDA approves Ms. Patel's request, it will then be forwarded to the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners for further and final consideration.

Ms. Patel said the reason she was late paying the property's October occupancy tax on time was because it was necessary for her to take her father to Georgia for a chemotherapy treatment. When she realized the error, she immediately reached out to Ms. Sampson to start the waiver request process. Ms. Patel asked the board to consider waiving the \$1,816.36 penalty based on the extenuating circumstance involved and her excellent payment history, noting this is her first late offense.

In response to Mr. McKibbon's question asking if the payment has now been made, Ms. Patel replied affirmatively.

Mr. McKibbon made a motion to approve the Sleep Inn West's penalty waiver request as presented, in the amount of \$1,816.36. Mr. Celwyn seconded the motion. Discussion included Chairman Karvir confirming the amount of the waiver in response to a question by Vice Chairman Froeba. A roll call vote was taken and with all in favor, the motion carried 6-0.

Chairman Karvir said the BCTDA's recommendation will now be forwarded to the Buncombe County Commissioners to make the final decision. Ms. Patel thanked the board for approving the request.

November 2020 Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the November 2020 financial reports and answered all related questions. Based on a request that had been received from Mr. Celwyn, Mr. Warn shared a comparison of this year's financial standing to last year's during his report. A brief discussion on this topic took place centering on the reasons behind the increases and decreases during a challenging and unprecedented year.

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to approve the November 2020 financial reports as presented. Mr. Celwyn seconded the motion. There was no further discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0.

Final June 2020 Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the final June 2020 financial statements and answered all related questions. These revised financial statements are being presented in conjunction with the FY 2019-20 audit.

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the final June 2020 financial statements as presented. Mr. Lockett seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0.

FY 2019-20 Audit Presentation

Chris Kessler, CPA/Principal, State and Local Government for the accounting firm of CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA), introduced himself and shared a PowerPoint presentation in which he provided an overview of the BCTDA's FY 2019-20 audit and process. He said the final June 2020 financials that were just presented by Mr. Warn are in alignment with the financial statements CLA has issued, which are in accordance with Government Audit Standards.

Mr. Kessler reviewed the audit reports that were distributed to the board in advance of the meeting. He reviewed how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the BCTDA's processes and procedures in 2020, and how the use of technology was instrumental in the continuation of business functions and safely completing the audit.

Mr. Kessler said he was pleased to report that the audit result rendered a 'clean and unmodified opinion' on the FY 2019-20 financial statements, and the BCTDA's significant accounting policies are in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and consistent with industry practices and standards.

The Auditors' Required Communications stated:

- Scope of audit proceeded as planned.
- Financial statement disclosures are neutral, consistent, and clear.
- No difficulties were encountered in performing the audit.
- There were no disagreements with management.
- No audit adjustments or findings were reported.

Mr. Kessler offered his gratitude to Explore Asheville and Buncombe County Finance staff for their assistance in getting the audit done quickly and efficiently. He shared his contact information and invited board members to reach out with any questions. In response to Chairman Froeba's inquiry asking how he would grade this audit, Mr. Kessler said he would give it an A plus.

Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Kessler for presenting the audit report and called for action.

Vice Chairman Froeba made a motion to accept the BCTDA's FY 2019-20 audit as presented and place it on file. Mr. McKibbin seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0.

Maui Invitational Update

Demp Bradford, president of the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission (ABRSC), shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the Maui Invitational basketball tournament that took place November 30 through December 2 at Harrah's Cherokee Center - Asheville. He also noted two other basketball events have taken place in Asheville over the past few weeks.

Mr. Bradford provided an overview of the tournament to include organizers/sponsors, teams, COVID safety protocols and testing, the controlled bubble environment, chartered flights, and the financial benefits that the tournament brought into the community during this challenging time. He concluded his report by thanking everyone involved in making the tournament a success.

Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Bradford for his efforts to secure and execute this event and congratulated him and the ABRSC on a job well done.

Next, Ms. Tambellini provided an overview of the Maui sponsorship package, including pre-tournament coverage, commercials and video spots, the Titus & Tate branded video, and website integration. She shared a video clip of an announcer highlighting Asheville's attributes, and quotes about Asheville shared on social media by Bill Walton. Ms. Tambellini reviewed preliminary tournament viewership and social metrics related to the sponsorship and offered to answer questions.

Ms. Mosher thanked Ms. Tambellini for all the effort that was put into curating content for the sponsorship that highlighted Asheville so well during the tournament. Ms. Tambellini said it was a group effort and extended kudos to everyone on her team.

Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Tambellini for the report and for everything the Explore Asheville team did to make the Maui Invitational sponsorship a success.

President & CEO's Report

Ms. Isley began her first President & CEO's report by stating she is excited to be part of the team and the Asheville community. She shared a PowerPoint presentation in which she provided an overview of recent lodging metrics related to weekday/weekend hotel occupancy, entire place short-term rental occupancy, changes in revenue by lodging type, and total tax revenue by lodging type.

Ms. Isley mentioned the CVB Staff Recap, Destination Dashboard, Quick List, and other reports are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com). She concluded her report by stating she appreciates the warm welcome from board and community members and looks forward to being a team player in the balanced and sustainable tourism recovery that will help the entire Asheville area.

Marketing Update

Ms. Tambellini shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting current holiday messaging, which centers on promoting the [Holiday Gift Guide](#) and a companion initiative, "Give the Gift of Travel." The Guide is an Explore Asheville initiative to support partners, showcase Asheville makers, maintain top-of-mind brand awareness, and drive traffic to our partners' online retail sites. Ms. Tambellini reviewed the five featured gift categories and the marketing channels that will support the initiative, which include media outreach, email promotions, organic and paid social. She also demonstrated the components of the Gift of Travel tab on [ExploreAsheville.com](https://www.exploreasheville.com), which includes a customizable gift certificate. She added this is also supported by paid media and was incorporated into a holiday-themed *Let's Go There* campaign for winter. Ms. Tambellini shared metrics received thus far for the entire holiday initiative and noted that a review of the marketing recovery strategy will be shared with the board next month.

Mr. McKibbon said the Holiday Gift Guide site is “fantastic” and asked if merchants will be surveyed to learn if click-throughs resulted in purchases. Ms. Tambellini said there are challenges associated with collecting that level of data, however, other related metrics will be available to her team to review in January.

Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Tambellini for the report, adding it is great how local businesses are being showcased on the website.

Miscellaneous Business

Mr. Celwyn said at a prior board meeting, he had suggested using the \$2 million in funds accrued in the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) again to help with local COVID recovery efforts. He said that with the anticipated rough winter ahead, he wanted to recommend engaging with the state legislature to get approval in January to either use the funds as before or to directly support local workers, such as servers.

Mr. McKibbon agreed that the next few months will be very difficult for businesses and it would be beneficial to put a plan together, however, stated it would need to be done very quickly.

Chairman Karvir said the BCTDA’s \$5 million Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund that was approved as a one-time local bill last year was a Herculean effort and was championed by the tourism community. He added state legislators would have to be on board and the industry would need to lead that effort again. Chairman Karvir added the BCTDA’s objective is to make sure the funds are used in accordance with the legislation.

A discussion took place centering on the logistics that were involved in 2020 to obtain legislative approval and what it would take to do again. Chairman Karvir said the BCTDA has also supported recovery efforts with a \$50,000 contribution to the One Buncombe Fund from earned revenue, and that type of contribution could be considered again. He then requested input from board members.

Ms. Rockoff suggested a next step could be for people from the tourism community who are interested to have a conversation with local legislators to see if there would be support for another type of bill like the one done last spring.

Chairman Karvir said since he is not hearing from other board members, he will make some calls to tourism community leaders. He added the lodging association could also be contacted to gauge interest. Mr. Celwyn thanked Chairman Karvir.

Comments from the General Public

Chairman Karvir said members of the public were invited to submit comments via email to reply@ExploreAsheville.com through 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 16, 2020. He reported no comments were received.

Adjournment

Mr. McKibbon moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Lockett seconded the motion. With all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 6-0 and the virtual meeting adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

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

The next BCTDA meeting will be on Wednesday, January 27, 2021, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager