

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 BCTDA Annual Planning Retreat Minutes

Thursday – Friday, March 25-26, 2021

- Present (Voting):** Himanshu Karvir, Chair; Gary Froeba, Vice Chair; Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Brenda Durden, John Luckett, John McKibbon, Kathleen Mosher
- Absent (Voting):** James Poole
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore
Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley (Thursday)
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley (Friday)
- CVB Staff:** Victoria Isley, Marla Tambellini, Dianna Pierce, Pat Kappes, Jonna Sampson, Daniel Bradley
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bissette
- Online Attendees:** Anthony Bennett, Kimberly Orton; RedSky Strategy
Adam Sacks, Tourism Economics (Thursday)
Erin Francis-Cummings, Destination Analysts (Thursday)
Randy Durband, Global Sustainability Travel Council (Thursday)
Earl "Butch" Graves, Jr., Black Enterprise (Friday)
Rodney Payne, Destination Think (Friday)
Carli Adams, Glenn Cox, Hannah Dosa, Josh Jones (Thursday),
Jennifer Kass-Green, Kathi Petersen, Tina Porter (Friday),
Charlie Reed, Whitney Smith, Nicole Will; Explore Asheville Staff
Ashley Keetle, 360i
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Demp Bradford, Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission
Chris Corl, Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville (Thursday)
David McCartney, Kimpton Hotel Arras
John Ellis (Thursday), Jim Muth; Past BCTDA Board Members
Rick Bell, Engadine Inn & Cabins/Asheville B&B Association
Ruth Summers, Grove Arcade Public Market Foundation
Kate Pett, Thrive Asheville
Ellen Green, Techie Traveler (Friday)
Lacy Cross, Movement Bank (Friday)
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas
Daniel Walton, Mountain Xpress

Unless otherwise noted, attendees listed were present for both days of the retreat.

Executive Summary of Annual Planning Retreat Minutes

- The BCTDA board met virtually for its two-day annual planning retreat, in which thought leaders from around the globe shared presentations and led facilitated discussions related to further developing Tourism's Four Pillars.
- Tourism's Four Pillars that are in development:
 1. Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth
 2. Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel
 3. Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences
 4. Promote & Support Asheville's Creative Spirit
- Bios of the retreat thought leaders can be found on AshevilleCVB.com.

BCTDA Annual Planning Retreat | Day 1 Thursday, March 25, 2021 | 12:30 – 4:45 p.m.

Setting the Stage

Welcome and Objectives

Chairman Karvir opened Day 1 of the virtual joint annual planning retreat of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA), a Public Authority and BCTDA, a Nonprofit Corporation, at 12:31 p.m., and welcomed everyone. He said retreat documents are provided on the AshevilleCVB.com website and additional materials will be posted after the meeting.

Board Member Roll Call: Board members responded as Chairman Karvir called roll verifying all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, except for Mr. Celwyn, who joined the meeting at 12:36 p.m., Mr. McKibbon, who joined the meeting at 2:59 p.m., and Mr. Poole, who was absent.

Chairman Karvir said he is excited about this year's annual planning retreat process and encouraged board members to actively participate in the upcoming discussions.

Community Priorities Landscape

Ms. Isley provided an overview of what she has heard on her "listening tour" of meeting with over 130 community leaders and stakeholders in her first 90 days on the job. She shared a word cloud of common themes that rose up and noted that after receiving input and reviewing strategic plans from the city, county, and other organizations, staff developed four pillars to direct Explore Asheville's efforts, which will be the focus of the annual planning retreat.

Tourism's Four Pillars

Ms. Isley presented Tourism's Four Pillars:



Next, Ms. Isley reviewed a working draft of a chart that combined strategic plans/areas of focus from the city, county, and other organizations, illuminating how Tourism's Four Pillars align with community goals and objectives.

BUNCOMBE COUNTY 2020-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN – COMMUNITY FOCUS AREAS			
VIBRANT ECONOMY <i>A robust and sustainable regional economy that builds on our homegrown industries and talent and provides economic mobility for residents</i>	RESIDENT WELLBEING <i>Our residents are safe, healthy and engaged in their community</i>	ENVIRONMENTAL & ENERGY STEWARDSHIP <i>High quality air, water, farmland & renewable energy for future generations</i>	EDUCATED & CAPABLE COMMUNITY <i>A county where all residents thrive & demonstrate resilience throughout their lives</i>
ASHEVILLE CITY COUNCIL 2020 FOCUS AREAS			
▪ A thriving local economy ▪ A financially resilient city	▪ Quality affordable housing ▪ Transportation and accessibility	▪ A well-planned and livable community ▪ A clean and healthy environment	▪ An equitable and diverse community ▪ A connected and engaged community
EXPLORE ASHEVILLE (BCTDA) STRATEGIC PILLARS			
 DELIVER BALANCED RECOVERY & SUSTAINABLE GROWTH <i>Definition of Balanced Recovery and Sustainable Growth</i>	 ENCOURAGE SAFE & RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL <i>Definition of Balanced Recovery and Sustainable Growth</i>	 ENGAGE & INVITE MORE DIVERSE AUDIENCES <i>Definition of Balanced Recovery and Sustainable Growth</i>	 PROMOTE & SUPPORT ASHEVILLE'S CREATIVE SPIRIT <i>Definition of Balanced Recovery and Sustainable Growth</i>
ASHEVILLE GREATER (CHAMBER OF COMMERCE) VISION			
▪ Economic mobility and shared prosperity (grow the pie, block-by-block, child's first years)	▪ Growing up (land, transportation, housing, resources)	▪ A place for all people (young families, retirees, people of color)	▪ Leadership (shared vision, intergenerational leadership, regional, balanced scorecard)
DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST STRATEGIC PRIORITIES			
▪ Jobs (bolster the infrastructure for a growing economy)	▪ Health and wellness ▪ Affordable housing	▪ Education (early childhood, K-12, post-secondary)	▪ Commitment to students, families and the Community School ▪ Commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)
UNITED WAY OF ASHEVILLE AND BUNCOMBE COUNTY (UWABC) KEY DRIVERS FOR CHANGE			
		▪ Commitment to students, families and the Community School ▪ Commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)	▪ New players, new leadership
THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA (CFWNC) FOCUS AREAS			
WORKING DRAFT	▪ People in need (supporting marginalized populations)	▪ Natural/cultural resources ▪ Food/farming (support sustainable local food)	▪ Early childhood development

Ms. Isley outlined the process and timeline to further develop the pillars and shared information on the national and international thought leaders who will be on hand to spark ideas and facilitate discussions. Bios of the speakers and facilitators may be found on AshevilleCVB.com, and video recordings of their presentations, along with slide decks, will be posted after the retreat.

First Pillar – Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth

Pillar Overview

Ms. Isley shared an overview of the first pillar, *Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth*. She explained this pillar focuses on as we build back tourism, how should it look and feel different? One way this can be achieved is by using messaging and marketing to help balance visitor dispersal to different parts of the county, such as at non-peak times, and working towards growing tourism in a sustainable way. She then introduced Erin Francis-Cummings to present research related to this pillar.

US Travel Sentiment

Erin Francis-Cummings, president & CEO of Destination Analysts, shared a PowerPoint presentation focusing on travel sentiment, highlighting that with more and more people being vaccinated, optimism is at near-record levels and there has been a consistent increase in travel dreaming and planning as we start to come out of the pandemic.

US Lodging Outlook

Adam Sacks, founder and president of Tourism Economics, shared a PowerPoint presentation focusing on recovery of the leisure and hospitality sector, across the country and in the Asheville/Buncombe County area. He stated that the travel industry has been the hardest hit from an economic standpoint, has lost the most jobs and, without recovery in this sector, there simply is no recovery.

Following the presentations, Ms. Francis-Cummings and Mr. Sacks answered all related questions.

Strategic Conversation & Input

Kimberly Orton, managing director of RedSky Strategy, facilitated a conversation on the *Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth* pillar. She shared what has been heard to date from interviews with board members, short-term and medium to long-term goals, projected benefits to Asheville, and links to other organizational goals. Ms. Orton received input on what the BCTDA's vision could be for this pillar, where efforts should be focused, and community organizations and/or leaders that can be brought in to collaborate to ensure success. During the conversation, responses and input from board members were recorded and will be utilized in further developing this pillar.

Second Pillar – Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel

Pillar Overview

Ms. Isley shared an overview of the second pillar, *Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel*. She said in the short-term, this pillar focuses on encouraging travelers who visit the area to do so safely as we work towards recovery, including getting vaccinated, wearing masks, and social distancing. Medium to long-term, Ms. Isley said the pillar's focus will be on attracting travelers who will protect and care for our area's natural resources like residents do to help mitigate and manage environmental impacts.

Navigating the Way Forward

Randy Durband, CEO of Global Sustainability Travel Council, said his organization has developed standards on sustainable tourism, which are [on GSTC's website](#) and are free to the public. He led a TED Talk-style discussion from South Korea focusing on the *Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel* pillar, which centered on taking a holistic approach toward developing strategies to get the right visitor to the destination at the right time. Following Mr. Durband's talk, he answered all related questions.

Strategic Conversation & Input

Ms. Orton facilitated a conversation on the *Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel* pillar. She shared what has been heard to date from interviews with board members, short-term and medium to long-term goals, projected benefits to Asheville, and links to other organizational goals. Ms. Orton received input on what the BCTDA's vision could be for this pillar, where efforts should be focused, and community organizations and/or leaders that can be brought in to collaborate to ensure success. During the conversation, responses and input from board members were recorded and will be utilized in further developing this pillar.

Wrap-Up and Friday Preview

Ms. Isley thanked board members for being engaged in today's conversations and for their valuable input, noting the third and fourth pillars will be discussed in a similar format on Friday. Chairman Karvir thanked and commended Ms. Isley on what she has accomplished in the short amount of time she has been in her role as President & CEO.

Adjourn for the Day

Vice Chairman Froeba moved to adjourn Day 1 of the BCTDA's Annual Planning Retreat, and Mr. McKibbon and Ms. Ashburn simultaneously seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0 and the virtual meeting ended at 4:49 p.m.

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BCTDA Annual Planning Retreat | Day 2 Friday, March 26, 2021 | 9:15 – 11:45 a.m.

Welcome, Thursday Recap & Friday Overview

Chairman Karvir opened Day 2 of the virtual joint annual planning retreat of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA), a Public Authority and BCTDA, a Nonprofit Corporation, at 9:16 a.m., and welcomed everyone. He said retreat documents are provided on the AshevilleCVB.com website and additional materials will be posted after the meeting.

Board Member Roll Call: Board members responded as Chairman Karvir called roll verifying all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, except for Mr. Poole and Commissioner Pressley, who were absent.

Ms. Isley asked for input from yesterday's discussions and board members collectively said that they were impressed with the speakers, informative presentations, the way the pillars are organized to work towards a balanced recovery, and the overall sense of optimism for long-term success coming out of the pandemic.

Anthony Bennett, managing partner with RedSky Strategy, provided a recap of yesterday's presentations and discussions.

Third Pillar – Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences

Pillar Overview

Ms. Isley shared an overview of the third pillar, *Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences*. She said this pillar focuses on ways to attract more diverse audiences, including Black and Brown people, families, LGBTQ, and more, reaching out to and connecting different groups and organizations and creating opportunities for all to win. She also said this pillar can help direct product development efforts and funding.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

In a question-and-answer format discussion moderated by Ms. Isley, Earl "Butch" Graves, Jr., president & CEO of Black Enterprise, spoke about the importance of making a commitment to extend a genuine invitation to people of color to visit destinations. He said this needs to be done

by reaching them in mediums in which they engage. Mr. Graves explained the challenges associated with the way diversity is defined in today's world and offered suggestions on how the BCTDA can engage in initiatives that encourage Black travel. He then answered all related questions.

Strategic Conversation & Input

Ms. Orton facilitated a conversation on the *Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences* pillar. She shared what has been heard to date from interviews with board members, short-term and medium to long-term goals, projected benefits to Asheville, and links to other organizational goals. Ms. Orton received input on what the BCTDA's vision could be for this pillar, where efforts should be focused, and community organizations and/or leaders that can be brought in to collaborate to ensure success. During the conversation, responses and input from board members were recorded and will be utilized in further developing this pillar.

Fourth Pillar – Promote & Support Asheville’s Creative Spirit

Pillar Overview

Ms. Isley shared an overview of the fourth pillar, *Promote & Support Asheville’s Creative Spirit*. She said since arriving, she has been very impressed by the deeply creative and independent nature of the area, noting local artists and makers deliver experiences that help define Asheville’s stories and culture. She said it’s important to support that creative spirit with both marketing and product development efforts.

Embracing Place DNA

Rodney Payne, co-founder and CEO of Destination Think, led a TED Talk-style discussion from Canada focusing on the *Promote & Support Asheville’s Creative Spirit* pillar, which centered on brands being built on stories. He said it’s important to get communities involved in deciding what they want to be/can own based on an area’s history, culture, environment, ethnicities, etc. Following Mr. Payne’s talk, he answered all related questions.

Strategic Conversation & Input

Mr. Bennett facilitated a conversation on the *Promote & Support Asheville’s Creative Spirit* pillar. He shared what has been heard to date from interviews with board members, short-term and medium to long-term goals, projected benefits to Asheville, and links to other organizational goals. Mr. Bennett received input on what the BCTDA's vision could be for this pillar, where efforts should be focused, and community organizations and/or leaders that can be brought in to collaborate to ensure success. During the conversation, responses and input from board members were recorded and will be utilized in further developing this pillar.

Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Ms. Isley thanked Mr. Bennett and Ms. Orton for facilitating the pillars planning process and retreat discussions. She then invited questions from the board and a brief conversation centering on the timing of anticipated legislative changes that will affect the Tourism Product Development Fund took place.

When the discussion ended, Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Isley for inviting the thought leaders to join the retreat, noting he was grateful for the different perspective shared by each speaker.

Ms. Isley thanked everyone for their time, participation, and leadership during the two-day retreat, noting the work and listening to further develop the four Tourism Pillars will continue. She reviewed the process timeline and next steps and said staff will work towards implementing the pillars in measurable ways to build back business in a balanced and collaborative manner.

Annual Planning Retreat Adjournment

Mr. McKibbon moved to adjourn Day 2 of the BCTDA's Annual Planning Retreat, and Mr. Luckett seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 8-0 and the virtual meeting ended at 11:47 a.m.

The retreat PowerPoint presentations, video recordings, and relevant documents are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau and are posted on AshevilleCVB.com.

The next BCTDA meeting will be held virtually on Wednesday, April 28, 2021, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager