

# 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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The Inn on Biltmore – Vanderbilt Room | 1 Antler Hill Road, Asheville

### BCTDA FY 2023 Annual Planning Session Minutes

Friday, March 25, 2022

- Present (Voting):** Kathleen Mosher, Chair; Brenda Durden, Vice Chair; Andrew Celwyn, Larry Crosby, Matthew Lehman, HP Patel, Leah Ashburn, Michael Lusick, Scott Patel
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley
- CVB Staff:** Vic Isley, Marla Tambellini, Marshall Hilliard, Jennifer Kass-Green, Kathi Petersen, Jonna Sampson, Julia Simpson
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bisette/BCTDA Attorney
- Speakers:** Wendy K. Smith, University of Delaware  
Chris Davidson, MMGY Global  
Stewart Colovin, MMGY Global
- TPDF Committee:** Jay Curwen, Scott Kerchner, Fielding Lowe, David McCartney, Stephanie Moore, Jim Muth, Ken Stamps
- In-Person Attendees:** Demp Bradford, Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission  
*(Full or partial session)* Chris Cavanaugh, Magellan Strategy Group/Past BCTDA Chair  
John Winkenwerder, Asheville Hotel Group/Past BCTDA Chair
- Online Attendees:** Sarah Kilgore, Holly Oakley, Michael Poandl, Tina Porter, Charlie Reed, Whitney Smith, Dodie Stephens; Explore Asheville Staff  
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce  
Chris Corl, Harrah's Cherokee Center Asheville  
Todd Okolichany, City of Asheville  
John Ellis, Past BCTDA Board Member  
Lacy Cross, Movement Bank  
Jason Sandford, Ashevillegas.com  
Brooke Randle, Mountain Xpress  
Sunshine Request

## **Executive Summary of Annual Planning Session Minutes**

- Chairwoman Mosher called the joint annual planning session of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 8:31 a.m.
- Guest speaker Wendy K. Smith shared a presentation on the power of paradox – the value of both/and thinking.
- Ms. Isley shared a foundational progress update on Explore Asheville’s strategic pillars.
- Guest speaker Chris Davidson presented the results of a recent resident sentiment survey.
- Guest speaker Stewart Colovin facilitated a storytelling foundation workshop.
- The BCTDA’s FY23 annual planning session adjourned at 2:44 p.m.

## **Call of the Joint BCTDA Annual Planning Session to Order, Welcome & Introductions**

Chairwoman Mosher welcomed everyone to Biltmore and called the joint annual planning session of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA), a Public Authority and BCTDA, a Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 8:31 a.m. She said the agenda and speaker bios were provided in advance of the meeting and are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

Next, Chairwoman Mosher acknowledged BCTDA board members, TPDF committee members, and guest speakers present at today’s annual planning session. She thanked everyone for attending.

## **The Power of Paradox – The Value of Both/And Thinking**

Chairwoman Mosher introduced Wendy K. Smith, a professor at the University of Delaware, and shared her background and credentials. She said Ms. Smith will be speaking on the power of paradox, or polarity, thinking. Chairwoman Mosher noted polarity thinking is a strategy of taking what are often seen as “Either/Or” topics (conflicts) and viewing them as “BOTH/AND” scenarios (collaborations). Chairwoman Mosher noted Biltmore leadership has been studying this strategy for several years and she shared how it has been a game-changer for her organization.

Ms. Smith shared a PowerPoint presentation exploring the value of BOTH/AND thinking based on her many years of research. She shared examples of contradictory and competing demands and said the challenge is not *whether* we face tensions, but *how* we do so. She introduced a 4-step method of comparing a traditional (either/or) approach to challenges against a paradoxical (both/and) approach.

During the presentation, Ms. Smith received input from attendees and answered all related questions. Following a short break, the meeting resumed at 10:15 a.m.

## **Strategic Pillars: Foundational Progress**

Ms. Isley shared a PowerPoint presentation in which she provided an overview of the foundational progress that has been made since establishing Explore Asheville’s four strategic pillars. She briefly spoke about how these imperatives were developed and designed to organize the BCTDA’s and Explore Asheville’s collective efforts around guiding principles that ladder up to broader community goals. Ms. Isley presented the topline objectives that fall under each pillar and provided examples of initiatives and successes that have been accomplished thus far in this fiscal year-to-date.

## BCTDA & EXPLORE ASHEVILLE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

 <p><b>Deliver Balanced Recovery &amp; Sustainable Growth</b></p> <p>Balance resident and visitor needs, recognizing the necessary role that sustainable, long-term growth of travel has in achieving a healthy, collective economy.</p> <p>Focus on the quality of each visit to our community – balancing growth across the seasons, business and leisure travel, and throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.</p>	 <p><b>Encourage Safe &amp; Responsible Travel</b></p> <p>Engage residents and visitors with shared values to care for and respect natural, cultural and human resources vital in delivering quality guest experiences.</p> <p>Collaborate with community organizations, local businesses and environmentally focused partners to support the sustainability and growth of our outdoor economy.</p>	 <p><b>Engage &amp; Invite More Diverse Audiences</b></p> <p>Extend a genuine invitation to Black travelers and other diverse audiences including LGBTQ visitors – connecting them with local neighborhoods, businesses, and entrepreneurs – creating more opportunities for all to win.</p> <p>Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.</p>	 <p><b>Promote &amp; Support Asheville's Creative Spirit</b></p> <p>Share stories of creators and makers who help differentiate our destination through food and drink, visual and performing arts, experiences and more.</p> <p>Support product development, place making and community connections, enabling new experiences and business opportunities throughout our community.</p>
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### *Deliver Balanced Recovery & Sustainable Growth – Topline Objectives*

- Balance quality of life for residents and experience for visitors through project investments.
- Collaborate with broader community leaders to ensure sustainable growth and alignment.
- Protect and evolve Asheville's brand to further differentiate from competing destinations and inspire higher quality visits.
- Improve the quality of each visit by inspiring increased length of stay and dispersal.
- Accelerate proactive sales efforts to increase net new business to the destination.
- Drive revenue in need periods through updated group sales strategy.
- Review and update Wayfinding pedestrian signage to increase dispersal out of the downtown core.

### *Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel – Topline Objectives*

- Influence visitors to respect, protect, and preserve natural, cultural, and human resources.
- Increase the number of bookings that participate in community projects.
- Identify, qualify, and engage purpose-driven companies for the purposes of holding meetings here.
- Encourage partners to embrace sustainable and responsible tourism practices.

### *Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences – Topline Objectives*

- Extend a genuine invitation to diverse audiences.
- Develop and invest in community projects that attract and engage diverse audiences.
- Increase outreach in recruiting diverse meetings and events.
- Promote minority-owned businesses through group sales initiatives.
- Increase diversity of the partner network.

### *Promote & Support Asheville's Creative Spirit – Topline Objectives*

- Elevate Asheville's creative experiences to differentiate and inspire visits.
- Actively promote creative community and resources to groups and events.
- Create opportunities for partners to learn about and support creative spirit.

Following the presentation, Ms. Isley received feedback from attendees and answered all related questions. In response to a question from Mr. Stamps regarding how the pillars will impact the upcoming Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) grant cycle, Ms. Isley said the strategic imperatives have been woven into the revised criteria that will be used by the committee when evaluating and recommending projects.

The meeting broke for lunch and resumed at 12:30 p.m.

### **Resident Perspectives on Tourism**

Ms. Isley said under the strategic imperative of delivering sustainable growth is an objective of balancing resident and visitor needs. She said to help inform that effort, the BCTDA and Explore Asheville committed to gauging resident perspectives on tourism on an annual basis. Ms. Isley said this year, MMGY Travel Intelligence built upon a 2019 Buncombe County study that surveyed residents about their awareness and perceptions of destination tourism and its impact on the community. Ms. Isley then introduced Mr. Chris Davidson, who oversees MMGY Global's research, insights, and strategy division, to present the report.

Mr. Davidson shared a PowerPoint presentation in which he shared survey methodologies and respondent profiles and expanded upon seven key insights gleaned from the resident sentiment survey.

<b>Key Insight no. 1</b> While residents agree that tourism poses challenges, they clearly believe that tourism also provides immense value to the community, and the majority (69%), agree that the positives outweigh the negatives.	<b>Key Insight no. 3</b> Compared to 2019 residents appear to have a more positive perception of tourism.  It's possible that the pandemic has highlighted how important tourism is to the economy.	<b>Key Insight no. 6</b> Residents of Asheville have a slightly more positive perception of the impact of tourism than those who live elsewhere in Buncombe County, but the differences are minimal.
<b>Key Insight no. 2</b> The primary pain points/concerns of residents appear to be a perceived... <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. ...threat to the character/vibe Asheville</li><li>2. ...problem with traffic and parking</li><li>3. ...threat to the natural environment</li></ol> In alignment with Explore Asheville's strategic priorities, residents indicate it is important to share stories of Asheville's creative spirit, shift visitors from peak season to other times of the year, disperse visitors from downtown Asheville to other areas of the county and encourage visitors to practice responsible tourism.	<b>Key Insight no. 4</b> Buncombe County residents take an average of 3 trips a year and are interested in traveling to popular destinations. When traveling, they are intentional about supporting "local" and expect visitors to Buncombe County to behave the same way.	<b>Key Insight no. 7</b> There is an opportunity to educate residents about how taxes paid by visitors are used to benefit residents.
	<b>Key Insight no. 5</b> Residents tend to expect more of visitors than they do from themselves when it comes to buying local and committing to sustainable activities while traveling.	

During and after the presentation, Mr. Davidson answered all related questions. He noted that compared to the previous study, progress has been made regarding resident sentiment.

The full report may be found on [AshevilleCVB.com](http://AshevilleCVB.com). A short break was taken and the annual planning session resumed at 1:35 p.m.

## **Storytelling Foundation Workshop**

Ms. Isley said Explore Asheville is working to further define Asheville's storytelling foundation for sustainable growth into the future. She noted that part of that effort has included a listening tour to ensure local voices across the community and industry are represented, included, and heard. Ms. Isley said that in her 15 months as Explore Asheville's CEO, she has personally listened to more than 300 residents and stakeholders. She noted the next speaker, Mr. Stewart Colovin, EVP Global Brand Strategy for MMGY, has conducted 120 individual listening sessions, and will share a read-out of insights and themes he has heard from local community voices thus far.

Ms. Isley said the aim is to create a foundation that we can all use to share our stories of Asheville – not to create an ad campaign or a tagline.

Mr. Colovin shared a PowerPoint presentation in which he summarized responses to questions asked during his listening tour. He shared how stories based on those responses can be used to set Asheville apart as a unique destination using better storytelling. Mr. Colovin also shared examples of statements he heard that can be considered both negative and positive, depending upon varying perspectives. He concluded his presentation by stating having a storytelling platform that represents all voices in the community would be helpful in setting the further evolution of the Asheville area brand.

A brief discussion focusing on the elements of Mr. Colovin's presentation took place. Ms. Isley then reviewed next steps in the process and said the storytelling concept will be shared with partners and stakeholders at the Tourism Summit on May 18. She thanked everyone for their input.

## **Wrap-Up & Adjourn**

Chairwoman Mosher thanked everyone for attending and said today's presentations and conversations were very meaningful.

Attendees extended a round of applause to Chairwoman Mosher for hosting today's BCTDA annual planning session.

The meeting adjourned at 2:44 p.m. The PowerPoint presentations and relevant documents are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

The next joint BCTDA meeting will be in-person on Wednesday, April 27, 2022, beginning at 9:00 a.m., in the Explore Asheville Board Room, located at 27 College Place.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager