

# 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, June 24, 2020

- Present (Voting):** Gary Froeba, Chair (attended in person); Himanshu Karvir, Vice Chair; Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Chip Craig, John Luckett, John McKibbon, Kathleen Mosher, James Poole
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilwoman Julie Mayfield
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher
- CVB Staff:** Stephanie Brown, Jonna Sampson, Daniel Bradley (all attended in person), Marla Tambellini, Dianna Pierce
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bissette (attended in person)
- Advertising Agency:** Angie Arner, Ashley Keetle, Lauren Jennings; 360i
- Online Attendees:** Glenn Cox, Pat Kappes, Jennifer Kass-Green, Kathi Petersen, Carli Adams, Kathryn Dewey, Connie Holliday, Sarah Lowery, Tina Porter, Glenn Ramey, Charlie Reed, Ritchie Rozzelle, Dodie Stephens, Jason Tarr, Landis Taylor; Explore Asheville Staff  
Matt Raker, Noah Wilson, Moriah Heaney; Mountain BizWorks  
Kelsey Ann Bassel, Meghan Jackson, Emery Morris, Nick Smart; 360i  
Chris Cavanaugh, Magellan Strategy Group  
Jim Muth, Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association  
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association  
Demp Bradford, Madison Davis; Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports Commission  
John Ellis, John Winkenwerder; Past BCTDA Board Members  
Tina Kinsey, Asheville Regional Airport  
Sam Powers, Chris Corl; City of Asheville  
Sharon Tabor, Black Mountain/Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce  
Catherine Hamacher, PGAV  
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas  
Daniel Walton, Mountain Xpress  
Mark Barrett, AVL Watchdog  
Kim King, WLOS  
Brooke Randle, Self-Employed  
Sunshine Request

Members of the public and additional tourism industry partners registered in advance and attended the online meeting.

### **Executive Summary of Meeting Minutes**

- Chairman Froeba called the joint virtual meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 9:00 a.m.
- Minutes from the May 27, 2020 BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- The May 2020 financial statements were reviewed and approved with a 9-0 vote.
- A Mountain BizWorks contract amendment, and a budget amendment in the amount of \$150,000 for administration costs related to the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund, were approved with separate 9-0 votes.
- Matt Raker and Noah Wilson of Mountain BizWorks shared a PowerPoint presentation in which they outlined the process followed to arrive at today's public announcement of the \$5 million in Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund awards granted to 394 local businesses.
- In her President's Report, Ms. Brown reviewed recent Explore Asheville initiatives and activities, including the Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge.
- Ms. Tambellini and the 360i team provided an advertising agency update.
- Mr. Karvir acknowledged closure of the electronic comment period of the public budget hearing.
- A ten-member CEO search committee was presented and appointed with a 9-0 vote.
- On behalf of the nominating committee, Mr. McKibbin presented a slate of officer nominations, which was approved with a 9-0 vote. The BCTDA appointed Himanshu Karvir as Chair, Gary Froeba as Vice Chair, and John Lockett as Treasurer for one-year terms, effective July 1, 2020.
- An update from Asheville City Councilmember Julie Mayfield was heard.
- In Commissioner Belcher's absence, Chairman Froeba shared a brief Buncombe County Commission update.
- Under Miscellaneous Business, Mr. Celwyn and Ms. Brown shared suggestions related to virtual board meetings.
- Under Comments from the General Public, Chairman Froeba stated there were no comments received via email by the 4:00 p.m. deadline on June 23, 2020.
- Chairman Froeba thanked Ms. Brown for serving as President & CEO of Explore Asheville for eight years and wished her well.
- Chairman Froeba thanked everyone for attending his last meeting serving as BCTDA Chair. With a 9-0 vote, the meeting adjourned at 10:53 a.m.

### **Call of the Joint BCTDA Meeting to Order**

Chairman Froeba called the virtual joint 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 the board and members of the public attending online.

*Meeting Materials:* Chairman Froeba said meeting materials were provided to the public on the [AshevilleCVB.com](http://AshevilleCVB.com) industry website and emailed to registered attendees in advance.

**Public Comment:** Chairman Froeba said members of the public were invited to provide comments in advance of the meeting via email. He noted there were no comments received by the 4:00 p.m. deadline on June 23, 2020.

**Board Member Roll Call:** Board members responded as Chairman Froeba called roll verifying all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, except for Commissioner Belcher, who was absent.

Chairman Froeba said roll call votes will be taken for all action items in today's virtual meeting to comply with a state requirement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Craig made a motion to approve the May 27, 2020 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.

The minutes are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### **Financial Reports**

Mr. Warn reviewed the May 2020 financial reports. He noted that on page 5, the year-to-date change in room sales should be minus six percent, not minus eight percent. There were no questions.

Mr. Karvir made a motion to approve the May 2020 financial statements 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.

The financial reports are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### **Contract and Budget Amendments for the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund**

#### **Contract Amendment for the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund**

Ms. Brown said that at a recent BCTDA meeting, an inquiry was made asking if it was possible to pay Mountain BizWorks' fee to administer the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund separate from the \$5 million approved for the program. She said after looking into this possibility, it was determined the \$150,000 can be paid out of the Tourism Product Development Fund administrative budget. Ms. Brown stated a proposed contract amendment and corresponding budget amendment were sent to the board in advance to review. She said action on this item will increase the amount of funds available to directly benefit local tourism businesses during this COVID-19 state of emergency.

Ms. Ashburn made a motion to approve the Mountain BizWorks contract amendment allowing the \$150,000 administrative fee to be paid outside of the \$5 million Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund as presented. Mr. Craig seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

#### **Budget Amendment for the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund**

Mr. Karvir made a motion to approve the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund budget amendment, transferring \$150,000 from the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF)

into the TPDF Administrative budget, Professional Services spend category, as presented to fund the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund administration fee. Mr. Poole seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

The amendments are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### **Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund Report**

Chairman Froeba said Mountain BizWorks has done an outstanding job administering the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund in such a short turn-around time, getting money into the accounts of nearly 400 local businesses as quickly as possible. He also extended his gratitude to the people involved in getting the bill passed to establish the Fund.

Matt Raker and Noah Wilson of Mountain BizWorks shared a PowerPoint presentation outlining the results of the Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund grant process. Mr. Raker said it was an honor for his organization to support this program that awarded \$5 million to local small businesses that will help create, retain, or recover over 4,000 jobs in the area. He added the funding also serves as an investment in the safe reopening of our community. Mr. Wilson then reviewed the program's purpose, timeline, applicant support, program team, eligibility criteria, application evaluation principles, and the review process before announcing the 394 businesses that were funded by the program.

### **Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund Timeline**

- May 4: Bill signed into law
- May 5: Program announced
- May 8: BCTDA special board meeting to approve Mountain BizWorks contract
- May 15: Applications opened
- May 31: Applications closed with 444 applications requesting \$13.5M
- June 10: All applications were reviewed and scored
- June 17: Final funding slate set approved
- June 19: Awardees notified
- June 24: Public announcement of all grant awards

### **By the Numbers**

- **\$5 million** – the amount of the Buncombe County Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund created by the Buncombe County TDA with occupancy tax revenue dedicated to tourism product development
- **394** – number of businesses funded from a pool of 421 eligible applicants
- **\$2,000 to \$50,000** – range of awards made, from micro-grants to full grants
- **4,787** – number of jobs retained, recovered, or created
- **7** – number of weeks from the Fund being signed into law by Gov. Roy Cooper until initial disbursements
- **63** – number of grants made to Minority Business Enterprises (MBEs)
- **232** – number of grants made to Women Business Enterprises (WBEs)
- **59** – Number of grants made to businesses outside Asheville city limits
- **3** – number of Mountain BizWorks experts who reviewed each application
- **20%** - minimum percentage of sales from people who visit, as estimated by applicants

### Breakdown of Sector Funding

Sector	TOTAL Count #	Count %	Value \$	Value %	Average
Agri-Tourism	2	1%	16,000	0%	8,000
Arts & Entertainment	57	14%	704,537	14%	12,360
Breweries, Cideries, Distilleries, & Outdoor Recreation	21	5%	316,104	6%	15,053
Restaurants & Bars	9	2%	79,030	2%	8,781
Bakeries, Cafes, and Desserts	124	31%	2,308,361	46%	18,616
Retail	26	7%	310,560	6%	11,945
Spas & Wellness	82	21%	561,799	11%	6,851
Tours And Attractions	14	4%	154,830	3%	11,059
Weddings & Events	35	9%	352,010	7%	10,057
Total	24	6%	196,770	4%	8,199
	394	100%	5,000,000	100%	12,690

The list of businesses receiving grants [can be found here](#).

Mr. Wilson said all 394 grant agreements have been fully executed and 100% of the grant funds will be disbursed by the end of June. He continued his presentation by reviewing next steps to include fund monitoring (reports), the leveraging of other relief funds, and assistance needed/being provided beyond the grants. Mr. Wilson noted additional needs include prioritizing the startup and growth of tourism-related small businesses owned by people of color and support programs to assist sole proprietors.

In closing, Mr. Wilson summarized \$5 million in local grants were awarded to 394 businesses, with 4,787 jobs recovered. He thanked the BCTDA for leading and funding this program for the community. Chairman Froeba thanked him and Mr. Raker and the Mountain BizWorks team for doing an exceptional job of administering the Fund.

Ms. Ashburn noted that saving 4,787 jobs equates to about 5% of Asheville's population, stating this single program made a tremendous impact in such a short period of time. She commended and thanked everyone involved for their efforts.

In response to Councilmember Mayfield's question regarding the number of applications received vs. funded, Mr. Wilson said 444 applications were received, with about 90% being approved to receive awards.

Chairman Froeba thanked Mr. Raker and Mr. Wilson for the presentation and a virtual round of applause was received.

The PowerPoint presentation is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### **President's Report**

Ms. Brown shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting recent Explore Asheville initiatives and activities, focusing on the Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge. She said this initiative is not only being used as a valuable resource for local businesses, it has garnered national attention and is being implemented in several other destinations across the country. Ms. Brown added Explore Asheville staff hosted Phase II town hall meetings for the lodging, attractions, and wedding sectors of the tourism industry.

### Destination Dashboard, Quick List & CVB Staff Recap

Ms. Brown concluded her update by encouraging everyone to read the reports provided in advance of the meeting and posted on the website.

CVB Staff Recaps, Destination Dashboards, Quick Lists, financial statements, board meeting minutes, agendas, and research reports can be found on [AshevilleCVB.com](http://AshevilleCVB.com).

Chairman Froeba thanked Ms. Brown for the report. The PowerPoint presentation is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### Advertising Agency Update

Ms. Tambellini said that last month, she reported about the measured and thoughtful framework developed to invite visitors back to the area safely and responsibly at the right time to assist with economic recovery. She said as previously mentioned by Ms. Brown, staff has been working closely with government and public health officials throughout the planning process.

Ms. Tambellini then turned it over Ashley Keetle, Angie Arner and Lauren Jennings of 360i. She said they will present the data-driven approach and methodology being used throughout the plan to attract visitors that are most likely to adhere to safety protocols as outlined in the [Asheville Cares Stay Safe Pledge](#).

Ms. Keetle, Ms. Arner and Ms. Jennings shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the FY 21 flexible planning approach for advertising to include market recommendations, audience updates, media approach and proposed messaging. It was noted this approach includes soft calls to action to include mask wearing and other safety measures.

Ms. Arner concluded the report by highlighting next steps, including further developing the flexible plan that will be consistently monitored and reevaluated as necessary during this unprecedented time.

Following the presentation, Ms. Brown, Ms. Tambellini, and the 360i team answered all related questions. A discussion took place centering on mask wearing, the appropriate timing to invite visitors back to Asheville, businesses reopening, COVID hotspots, advertising with visible masks, and safety communications included in hotel and attraction confirmation emails.

When the discussion ended, Chairman Froeba thanked Ms. Tambellini and the 360i team for the update.

The PowerPoint presentation is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### Acknowledgement of Closure of Electronic Comment Period of Public Hearing

Mr. Karvir said that pursuant to N.C. General Statute 166A-19.24 (e), a virtual public hearing took place on May 27, 2020, and the public was invited to submit comments on the proposed FY 21 budget via email to [Reply@ExploreAsheville.com](mailto:Reply@ExploreAsheville.com) through Tuesday, June 23, at 4:00 p.m. For the record, Mr. Karvir said the electronic comment period of the public budget hearing closed yesterday and the BCTDA did not receive any

comments related to the budget. He announced all portions of the public budget hearing are hereby concluded.

### **Approval of Proposed BCTDA FY 21 Operating Budget and Tourism Product Development Fund Administrative Budget Ordinance**

On behalf of the BCTDA's finance committee, Mr. Craig presented the FY 21 budget ordinance for approval. He noted the following:

- The budget ordinance was posted on AshevilleCVB.com for public inspection beginning in mid-May.
- The ordinance, detailed budget, and program of work documents that were presented by Ms. Brown and the Explore Asheville staff in the April and May BCTDA meetings have not changed.
- A virtual public hearing was held at the May 27 meeting after the budget ordinance was presented and the public was invited to submit comments via email through June 23, 2020, at 4:00 p.m.
- A public notice ran in the Asheville Citizen-Times' legal section.

Mr. Craig said that once approved, Chairman Froeba will sign the ordinance and the budget will go into effect on July 1, 2020.

Mr. Craig made a motion to approve the budget ordinance as presented, adopting the BCTDA's FY 21 Operating Budget, in the amount of \$15,504,194, and the TPDF Administrative Budget, in the amount of \$518,000. Mr. Karvir and Mr. Lockett simultaneously seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

The FY 21 budget ordinance is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### **Appointment of CEO Search Committee**

Chairman Froeba said he mentioned last month that he was in the process of assembling a search committee to work with SearchWide Global to hire a new CEO for Explore Asheville. He read a list of names of people who have agreed to participate on the search committee and extended his gratitude for their willingness to serve. The search committee to be considered for appointment is as follows:

- Gary Froeba, BCTDA Chair and Managing Director of The Omni Grove Park Inn
- Himanshu Karvir, BCTDA Vice Chair and President & CEO of Virtelle Hospitality
- Jane Anderson, Executive Director of the Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
- Joe Belcher, Buncombe County Commissioner and BCTDA non-voting member
- Kit Cramer, President & CEO of the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
- John Ellis, retired Managing Director of the Diana Wortham Theatre and past BCTDA member
- Julie Mayfield, Asheville City Councilmember and BCTDA non-voting member
- John McKibbon, Chairman of McKibbon Hospitality and BCTDA member
- Kathleen Mosher, Senior Director of Communications at Biltmore and BCTDA member
- Jim Muth, Executive Director of the Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association and past BCTDA chair

Chairman Froeba said the search process is already underway with SearchWide Global conducting stakeholder interviews and developing a needs assessment. He requested action to appoint the search committee.

Ms. Ashburn made a motion to appoint the search committee as presented. Mr. Craig seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

### **BCTDA Nominating Committee**

Chairman Froeba said that at last month's meeting, he appointed Mr. McKibbon, Mr. Craig, and Mr. Luckett to establish a nominating committee to recommend a slate of officers for FY 21. He invited Mr. McKibbon to share the committee's recommendations.

Mr. McKibbon said the nominating committee met and reviewed the terms for board members. He mentioned this will be a year of significant transition as Ms. Brown's successor is chosen. Mr. McKibbon thanked and commended Chairman Froeba and Vice Chairman Karvir for demonstrating remarkable leadership and teamwork over the past year. He added that in addition to nominating a new chair and vice chair, the committee is also recommending a treasurer for the non-profit, as that is not a role of the Authority.

On behalf of the nominating committee, Mr. McKibbon presented the following slate of officer nominations, effective for a one-year term beginning on July 1, 2020:

BCTDA Chair: Himanshu Karvir  
BCTDA Vice Chair: Gary Froeba  
BCTDA Treasurer: John Luckett

Mr. McKibbon made a motion to approve the nominations as presented. Mr. Craig seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

### **Asheville City Council Update**

Councilwoman Mayfield reported on city-related business, including the City of Asheville's extended budget timeline, budget shifts to better support people of color, a 30-60-90 day plan aimed at meeting new demands, possible police department reorganization efforts, confederate monument removal, and the creation of a task force to decide the future of the Vance Monument.

Chairman Froeba thanked Councilwoman Mayfield for the update.

### **Buncombe County Commission Update**

In Commissioner Belcher's absence, Chairman Froeba reported that the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners passed a budget with no tax increase, and that a COVID-19 update on guidelines will be provided today at 4:00 p.m. on BCTV (Buncombe County Government Television).

### **Miscellaneous Business**

As requested in an email sent over the weekend, Mr. Celwyn asked that future BCTDA meetings be set up with a single Zoom link to be provided to the public so that people can attend anonymously without requiring registration in advance. Chairman Froeba responded that he will defer this request to the incoming BCTDA chair. Ms. Brown suggested that as this discussion continues, that the board also consider hiring an outside IT firm to manage technology for the online board meetings held during this ongoing COVID-19 state of emergency. She commended Ms. Sampson and Mr. Bradley for their efforts in taking on the technology responsibilities and challenges associated with hosting these complicated meetings.

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

As Chairman Froeba noted earlier, 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 June 23, 2020. There were no comments received by the deadline.

### **Farewell to Outgoing President & CEO Stephanie Brown**

Chairman Froeba thanked Ms. Brown for her performance and passion serving in her position for the past eight years and wished her the best in her new career. Ms. Brown thanked him and extended her gratitude to the Explore Asheville team for their dedication to serving the tourism partners and people of Buncombe County.

Chairman Froeba then presented Ms. Brown with a print of Asheville and engraved plaque. A brief video sharing highlights and successes from Ms. Brown's tenure was shared with the audience.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Froeba thanked everyone for attending his last meeting serving as Chairman of the BCTDA. Mr. Karvir moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. Lockett seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0 and the meeting adjourned at 10:53 a.m. The BCTDA will next meet on Wednesday, July 29, 2020, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager