

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, January 27, 2021

- Present (Voting):** Himanshu Karvir, Chair; Gary Froeba, Vice Chair; Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Brenda Durden, John Luckett, John McKibbon, Kathleen Mosher, James Poole
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore
Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- CVB Staff:** Victoria Isley, Marla Tambellini, Hannah Dosa, Daniel Bradley
- BC Finance:** Don Warn, Buncombe County/BCTDA Fiscal Agent
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bisette
- Agency:** Ashley Keetle, 360i
- Online Attendees:** Matt Raker, Noah Wilson; Mountain BizWorks
Dianna Pierce, Carli Adams, Glenn Cox, Connie Holliday, Jennifer Kass-Green, Sarah Lowery, Kathi Petersen, Tina Porter, Glenn Ramey, Whitney Smith, Jason Tarr, Landis Taylor; Explore Asheville Staff
Madison Davis, Asheville-Buncombe Regional Sports Commission
Angie Arner, Meghan Jackson, Emery Morris, Susan Neikirk, Nick Smart; 360i
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
Jackson Tierney, Bob Michel; Asheville Homestay Network
Lew Bleiweis, Asheville Regional Airport
Chip Craig, John Ellis, Jim Muth; Past BCTDA Board Members
Sharon Tabor, Black Mountain - Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce
Timothy Love, Buncombe County
Rick Bell, Engadine Inn & Cabins
Chris Corl, Harrah's Cherokee Center – Asheville
Jason Sandford, Ashvegas
Daniel Walton, Mountain Xpress
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 9:00 a.m.
- Chairman Karvir welcomed Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore and Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley as new ex-officio board members.
- Minutes from the December 16, 2020 BCTDA regular monthly meeting were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- The December 2020 financial statements were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- Chairman Karvir appointed John Luckett, Kathleen Mosher, and Chip Craig to serve as the BCTDA's finance committee.
- Matt Raker and Noah Wilson with Mountain BizWorks presented the BCTDA Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund's 6-month interim report.
- A budget amendment, in the amount of \$21,235, to enable a \$40,000 BCTDA contribution to the One Buncombe Fund from Earned Revenue, was approved with an 8-1 vote.
- In her President & CEO's report, Ms. Isley reviewed recent lodging metrics and introduced three strategic imperatives that will direct recovery efforts and initiatives.
- Ms. Tambellini and Ashley Keetle provided a Recovery Marketing & Messaging presentation.
- Brief updates from Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore and Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley were provided.
- 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 four public comments were received in advance of today's meeting and directed staff to develop a process to receive live comments at future BCTDA meetings.
- With a 9-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 10:26 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 said meeting materials are provided on the [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com) website.

Board Member Roll Call: Board members responded as Chairman Karvir called roll verifying all BCTDA members were virtually in attendance, except for Ms. Mosher, who joined the meeting a few minutes late.

Welcome New BCTDA Ex-Officio Board Members

Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore

Chairman Karvir welcomed Asheville City Councilmember Sandra Kilgore to the board and shared information regarding her background. Councilmember Kilgore was recently elected to Asheville City Council and was appointed to fill the ex-officio seat formerly held by Julie Mayfield.

Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley

Chairman Karvir welcomed Buncombe County Commissioner Robert Pressley to the board and shared information about his background. Commissioner Pressley was elected to the

Buncombe County Board of Commissioners in 2016 and was recently appointed to fill the ex-officio seat formerly held by Joe Belcher.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Mr. McKibbon made a motion to approve the January 27, 2021 regular meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Luckett seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

December 2020 Financial Reports

Mr. Warn reviewed the December 2020 financial reports. There were no questions posed by board members.

Mr. Celwyn made a motion to approve the December 2020 financial reports as presented. Ms. Durden seconded the motion. There was no discussion and with all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0.

Appointment of Finance Committee

Chairman Karvir appointed the following people to serve as this year's BCTDA finance committee: John Luckett (chair), Kathleen Mosher, and Chip Craig.

BCTDA Tourism Recovery Efforts

Chairman Karvir shared background information on the BCTDA's Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund, established in 2020 by Senate Bill 704, which allowed the board to create a one-time, \$5 million fund to provide emergency COVID-relief grants to businesses from the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF). Chairman Karvir briefly reviewed the mission and timeline and introduced Matt Raker and Noah Wilson from Mountain BizWorks, administrators of the Fund, to present a 6-month interim report.

BCTDA Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund Report

Mr. Raker said the COVID pandemic has been the most challenging experience our local businesses have ever faced and that the BCTDA's Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund was a significant part of the community's ongoing recovery efforts. He said as part of the grant agreement, all 394 businesses that received funds submitted a 6-month interim report and he turned it over to Mr. Wilson will share the results.

Mr. Wilson shared a PowerPoint presentation in which he provided an overview of the grants given out via the BCTDA's Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund. He said \$5 million in funding was awarded to 394 local tourism-related small businesses, in amounts between \$2,000 and \$30,000 per entity, and an estimated 4,787 jobs would be retained, recovered, or created for area residents.

Next, Mr. Wilson summarized the results of the survey, highlighting that 97.5% of grantee businesses remain in operation and that 3,341 jobs have been retained and rehired so far in the process. He shared quotes from business owners that illustrated what the grants meant to them in terms of paying for critical expenses, powering pivots, leveraging resources, and showing belief in the value of small businesses in the Asheville area. He then shared challenges and ongoing needs that were identified, including the need for additional assistance in marketing, addressing operating restrictions, and guidance in other operational areas.

Mr. Wilson shared the current financial condition of businesses, indicating 40% of recipients consider their business to be financially challenged. He read quotes that implied a desire for the BCTDA to promote Asheville to bring back visitors safely and responsibly to help with recovery.

Mr. Wilson wrapped up his report by stating the Fund had a huge impact on local businesses, however, there continue to be ongoing challenges. He said a key question to ask is how the businesses can be supported so that they are even healthier six months from now.

Ms. Ashburn thanked Mr. Wilson for today's report and for the Mountain BizWorks organization's efforts to get the funds into the hands of business owners so quickly in June.

Mr. Wilson said a detailed report to accompany today's presentation will be forthcoming. He added the Fund was incredibly significant in keeping many businesses open and he would rank it on a national-level scale.

Chairman Karvir thanked Mr. Raker and Mr. Wilson for the presentation and everyone who worked behind-the-scenes to make the BCTDA Tourism Jobs Recovery Fund a reality. Ms. Isley echoed that sentiment, thanking them for their leadership.

BCTDA PPP Webinar

Ms. Isley said as stated by Mr. Wilson, businesses still need help and Explore Asheville continues to offer pathways to additional assistance and resources for community partners. She said one example is that last week, Explore Asheville hosted an informational webinar on the new PPP funding program to ensure local partners were plugged in to available relief resources.

BCTDA Contribution to the One Buncombe Fund

Ms. Isley said in April 2020, the BCTDA was a founding sponsor of the One Buncombe Fund, contributing \$50,000 from Earned Revenue. She briefly reviewed the impacts of the Fund, which Buncombe County has recently reinstated for a second round of grants.

BCTDA Proposal & Budget Amendment to Support Local Businesses

Ms. Isley said staff is recommending the BCTDA make a second contribution to the One Buncombe Fund, in the amount of \$40,000, from Earned Revenue. She noted Earned Revenue funds are non-occupancy tax dollars that are not subject to legislative mandates and are primarily used to support the community. She presented a proposed budget amendment, in the amount of \$21,235 which, when combined with dollars already budgeted, will allow for a \$40,000 contribution to the One Buncombe Fund.

In response to Mr. Celwyn's question asking where the money will go, Mr. Warn said it will go into the One Buncombe Fund, administered by Mountain BizWorks, to provide grants and forgivable loans to businesses. Mr. Warn added Buncombe County recently received a \$7.8 million grant to use to provide to individuals for emergency rental and utility bill assistance.

Mr. Celwyn said it would be his preference to give the \$40,000 to individuals. Chairman Karvir noted that when money goes to businesses, they employ people which, in turn, helps individuals. Ms. Durden agreed and said that when you support businesses and keep them afloat, you are supporting individuals. Mr. Warn noted the opposite is true for Buncombe County, stating money is available to support individuals, but not businesses.

In response to Ms. Ashburn's question asking the percentage of loans versus grants, Ms. Isley said this round of One Buncombe funding will be awarded as grants.

When the discussion ended, Ms. Ashburn made a motion to approve the budget amendment as presented, transferring \$21,235 from Earned Revenue/Appropriated Fund Balance to Earned Revenue/Program Support, which will allow for a \$40,000 contribution from the BCTDA to the One Buncombe Fund to help the local community with COVID recovery. Vice Chairman Froeba seconded the motion and there was no additional discussion. A roll call vote was taken and with all in favor except for Mr. Celwyn, the motion carried 8-1.

President & CEO's Report

Ms. Isley shared a PowerPoint presentation in which she reviewed lodging occupancy for calendar year 2020. She noted how the negative hotel metrics trickle down throughout the tourism community and into the wider Asheville area. Ms. Isley reviewed the following three strategic imperatives that will serve as Explore Asheville's guiding principles to help bring economic vitality back to the community:

1. Balanced Recovery & Sustained Growth
2. Encourage Safe & Responsible Travel
3. Engage & Invite More Diverse Audiences

Next, Ms. Isley reviewed the collaborative effort of the local public safety campaign that was launched in November and said collateral materials are available to businesses free of charge.

Ms. Isley encouraged board members to mark their calendars for the BCTDA's annual planning retreat scheduled Thursday and Friday, March 25-26. She concluded her report by stating the CVB Staff Recap, Destination Dashboard and Quick List are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

Recovery Marketing & Messaging

Ms. Tambellini and Ashley Keetle with 360i shared a PowerPoint presentation in which they provided insight on current travel sentiment and an outline of media and messaging strategies moving forward.

Ms. Tambellini also reviewed the winter promotions that were executed to help support businesses during the challenging winter months, including an Asheville Restaurant Week sponsorship, the Curated Asheville campaign to encourage small, more customized experiences that include social distancing, and a campaign to promote *National Plan for Vacation Day*.

After sharing what would be considered a more promising travel sentiment from recent research received, Ms. Tambellini said her team continues to monitor data and many pandemic-related variables as they look ahead to start transitioning back into the marketplace. She said the messaging will promote safe and responsible travel when the time is right. Ms. Tambellini added promotional efforts will also help to inspire potential visitors to keep Asheville top-of-mind in the planning stages while supporting our tourism community's recovery efforts by setting the stage for spring and summer visitation.

Ms. Keetle said looking ahead, the goal for marketing and messaging is to balance recovery and sustained growth by reaching responsible travelers when they are ready to travel with media they are using. She reviewed highlights of the media plan which included how media will

be used to support business and marketing objectives, and next steps in planning for spring and summer.

Following the presentation, Ms. Tambellini and Ms. Keetle answered all related questions.

Chairman Karvir thanked Ms. Tambellini and Ms. Keetle for the report and encouraged them to utilize local businesses and talent in marketing efforts whenever possible moving forward.

Asheville City Council Update

Councilmember Kilgore said she learned a lot about the BCTDA's work in the reports presented today and thanked the board for its efforts to help with pandemic-related recovery.

Councilmember Kilgore reported on city-related business, including the hotel moratorium and the proposed points system being considered for future hotel approval, the Civil Service Board grievance procedures rules and regulations, and the Asheville Police Department's dashboard and tip app that were recently launched to improve transparency and communications.

Chairman Karvir thanked Councilmember Kilgore for the update.

Buncombe County Commission Update

Commissioner Pressley reported on county-related business, including increasing restaurant capacity from 30% to 50%, approval of a \$200,00 contribution to the One Buncombe Fund, and the Commission's desire to expedite funds to businesses as soon as possible to help with recovery.

Chairman Karvir thanked Commissioner Pressley for his report.

Miscellaneous Business

Mr. Celwyn said as mentioned in previous meetings, he would like to utilize the \$3 million in the Tourism Product Development Fund to support businesses or individuals in our community.

Chairman Karvir replied that after last month's meeting, he reached out to key legislators and, based on a myriad of reasons that included concerns associated with last year's approval, there is currently not support to introduce another local bill to use TPDF funds again as was done via a significant effort in 2020. He added the BCTDA will continue to support the community using dollars from the Earned Revenue Fund whenever possible.

Ms. Rockoff echoed Chairman Karvir's response by stating that following last year's approval of the local bill, constitutional issues were raised in the summary report by the Attorney General's office. She added TPDF dollars must be used in accordance with the legislation and it would take a local bill passed at the state level again to use the funds. Mr. Celwyn reiterated that is what he is suggesting.

Mr. Poole said that while he agrees with Mr. Celwyn's sentiment to help the community, he has also had conversations with elected officials and said there is not an appetite to support another bill of this nature. He also expressed concern about the uncertainties that lie ahead during this unprecedented time and feels it is best to utilize every dollar possible from Earned Revenue to go towards recovery instead of trying to get legislative authorization to spend TPDF dollars.

Vice Chairman Froeba said he agreed with Mr. Poole's position and a discussion on this topic continued, centering on fund balances and restrictions related to using TPDF funds.

When the discussion ended, Chairman Karvir thanked everyone for their input.

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, January 26, 2021. He reported four comments were received by the deadline and emailed to the board. The public comments will be kept on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Chairman Karvir gave direction for staff to develop a process to allow for live public comments to be made during virtual BCTDA meetings, as was done at in person meetings prior to the start of the pandemic. Ms. Isley responded that staff will work through the logistics to put a process in place for the February 24 meeting.

Adjournment

Mr. Lockett moved to adjourn the meeting and Ms. Durden seconded the motion. With all in favor via a roll call vote, the motion carried 9-0 and the virtual meeting adjourned at 10:26 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, February 24, 2021, at 9:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Jonna Sampson, Executive Operations Manager (absent)



Hannah Dosa, Community Engagement Specialist