

**Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority,  
A Joint Meeting of the Public Authority and Nonprofit Corporation**

---

The Omni Grove Park Inn – Seely Pavilion

**Annual Planning Retreat Minutes**

Thursday, March 23, 2018

- Present (Voting):** Jim Muth, Chair; Gary Froeba, Vice Chair; Leah Ashburn, Andrew Celwyn, Chip Craig, Himanshu Karvir, John Luckett, John McKibbon, Paula Wilber
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Buncombe County Commissioner Joe Belcher  
Asheville City Councilmember Julie Mayfield
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- BC Finance:** No one was present from Buncombe County Finance
- Advertising Agency:** Lauren Wegmann, Peter Mayer Agency
- CVB Staff:** Stephanie Brown, Marla Tambellini, Glenn Cox, Pat Kappes, Dianna Pierce, Jonna Reiff
- CVB Staff Absent:** None
- Guests:** Paul Ouimet, Destinations International  
Ron Storto, Biltmore Farms, LLC & Past BCTDA Chair  
John Ellis, BCTDA Finance Committee  
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce  
Bob McMurray, Black Mountain/Swannanoa Chamber of Commerce  
Demp Bradford, Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission  
Jane Anderson, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association  
Chris Corl, US Cellular Center Asheville

**Executive Summary of Retreat Minutes**

- Chairman Muth called the annual planning retreat of the BCTDA, Public Authority and Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 8:59 a.m.
- Mr. Ouimet led a facilitated session in which he shared the results of the DestinationNEXT survey assessment with the board.
- During the facilitated session, Ms. Brown provided an overview of the reach, influence and economic impact of Buncombe County's occupancy tax,

- administered through the BCTDA via the CVB's program of work and the Tourism Product Development Fund.
- Ms. Pierce shared a PowerPoint presentation focusing on Groups Sales & Services strategies.
  - Mr. Bradford shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission's initiatives and successes and requested additional funding in the next fiscal year. With a 9-0 vote, the BCTDA approved increasing the level of support for staffing and bid fees as requested.
  - The annual planning retreat of the BCTDA, Public Authority and Nonprofit Corporation, adjourned at 4:08 p.m.

### **Call of the Joint BCTDA Annual Planning Retreat to Order**

Chairman Muth called the joint annual planning retreat of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA), a Public Authority and BCTDA, a Nonprofit Corporation, to order at 8:59 a.m. and welcomed everyone. He thanked Mr. Froeba for his generosity and hospitality in hosting the retreat at the beautiful Omni Grove Park Inn.

### **BCTDA & Annual Planning Process Overview**

Ms. Brown said tourism in this community has been nurtured by leaders over a long period of time, and the roles of the BCTDA and CVB have changed and evolved significantly in the 30+ years since Buncombe County's occupancy tax was established. She added it has been a collaborative effort to build the Asheville brand. Ms. Brown said she is grateful to have everyone around the table today to hear the results of the DestinationNEXT assessment survey and embark upon the process to develop a road map to continue to shape the success of the Asheville area as a sustainable tourism destination.

Chairman Muth encouraged everyone to engage in the conversation and ask questions during Mr. Ouimet's presentation.

### **BCTDA Facilitated Session - DestinationNEXT**

Mr. Ouimet, of Destinations International, shared a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the results of the Asheville area's DestinationNEXT survey, a tool designed to provide destination marketing organizations with insights about their cities to help develop practical actions and strategies for sustainable success in a dramatically changing world.

Mr. Ouimet said he's done 150 assessments, and it was a pleasure to have done one for the BCTDA, as Asheville is a spectacular destination with outstanding attractions, tourism-related businesses, and amenities.

First, Mr. Ouimet provided a recap of the Futures Study presented at last month's BCTDA meeting, which included the top 25 trends and strategies in destination marketing. He added half of them were not even on the radar to watch three years ago, which shows how rapidly things are changing.

Next, Ms. Brown shared a PowerPoint entitled, "Destination Support Strategies," in which she reviewed the legislative mandate, mission and vision of the BCTDA. She provided a general overview of the impact Buncombe County's occupancy tax has had on the Asheville area and how tourism marketing helps to attract businesses, job

seekers and college students. She then reviewed how the different areas of the CVB's program of work helps to foster outreach and facilitate growth.

A discussion took place on public perceptions and communication strategies, with suggestions being offered on ways to share the message of the positive benefits of tourism.

After retreat participants took a short break, Mr. Ouimet shared the assessment results for Asheville, beginning with the Scenario Model that categorizes destinations based on the strength of the destination and community engagement. Mr. Ouimet said in the short time frame that the survey was available, 371 responses were received from tourism industry, government, chamber, and food and beverage stakeholders, and 1,654 responses were received from residents and visitors.

Mr. Ouimet said that based on the strength of the surveys, Asheville places in the *Trailblazer* category. He added that as with any type of assessment, there's good and bad news associated with that classification and it is important to direct attention to the areas that received lower scores. He noted that, most often, the biggest challenge for *Trailblazers* is to avoid complacency. He encouraged everyone to continue to push to become a better destination and find ways to further increase community support and engagement.

Mr. Ouimet shared insights gleaned from questions answered in the survey from the first subset of responders (stakeholders) and reviewed each variable. The categories included: attractions and entertainment, destination performance, accommodations, brand, mobility and access, events, communication and internet infrastructure, air access, sports and recreation facilities, convention and meeting facilities, industry support, funding support and certainty, partnership strength and support, workforce, hospitality culture, effective advocacy program, economic development, local community support, regional cooperation, and having an effective destination organization governance model. Mr. Ouimet reviewed the results and shared key takeaways from the findings that included opportunities for improvement.

Mr. Ouimet continued his presentation by sharing the results of the surveys received from the subset that included residents (15%) and visitors (85%).

Next, Mr. Ouimet recommended strategies and best practices for moving forward while including examples of success from other destinations.

After a break for lunch, retreat participants divided into three breakout groups and were tasked to come up with responses to two questions that were posed for consideration: name the three most important issues facing the destination; and agree upon the single most important action that should be taken by the Explore Asheville CVB. After time was allowed for brainstorming, each group reported out their answers.

Mr. Ouimet wrapped up the session by answering questions and encouraging the board to use the assessment and today's discussion to develop a list of critical initiatives facing the destination. He said they should then be separated into categories based on whether the BCTDA/CVB should take the lead, offer support through resources in staffing and funding, or defer to another organization/group that is better suited to handle the initiative. Mr. Ouimet thanked the board for their time and said he looks forward to continuing the process at the Tourism Summit in May.

Chairman Muth thanked Mr. Ouimet for his work on the survey and for attending the retreat to present the findings.

The PowerPoint presentations are on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau. Following a short break, the meeting reconvened at 3:10 p.m.

### **Group Sales & Services Strategies**

Ms. Pierce shared a PowerPoint presentation focusing on goals and activities of the Group Sales & Services team. She reviewed an historical comparison of sales goals to actuals, groups and room nights booked by area of origin and market segment, and other team metrics that are tracked. Ms. Pierce then reviewed sales team successes, challenges and opportunities and current trends. She reviewed highlights from FY 2017-18 YTD and areas of focus for FY 2018-19 related to client contact, brand boosters, communications, and trade events.

Ms. Pierce then said that the CVB meets regularly with the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports commission on the “fifth” area of emphasis for the sales team. She said Mr. Bradford will now review successes related to this partnership.

Ms. Pierce answered questions posed by the board throughout her report.

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

### **Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission Update**

Mr. Bradford thanked the board for their generous support of the Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission (ABRSC). He said it’s been a great partnership made easier by sharing office space with the CVB. Mr. Bradford shared a PowerPoint presentation focusing on collaborative sports-related successes secured or executed in this fiscal year, to include: the Spartan Race, FedCup - the World Cup of Women’s Tennis, The Gala Gymnastics Competition, Southern Conference basketball championship, and Haute Route. He reviewed metrics and the significant economic impact gleaned from each of these events, derived from using the Event Impact Calculator, subscribed to Explore Asheville CVB.

Mr. Bradford then outlined the ABRSC’s *Path for Growth*, which includes: working to recruit 2-3 additional major events in addition to what is already hosted, increase awareness of Asheville and Buncombe County as a sports destination, and work with strategic partners to develop facilities outlined in the Sports Facilities Analysis Study commissioned in 2017 that will increase opportunities for sports tourism. He said the plan to accomplish these goals is to add one full-time position to the team and hire two interns each semester. Mr. Bradford said the estimated cost of this supplemental staffing totals \$55,000.

In addition, Mr. Bradford said he would like to establish a bid fee account, administered through the CVB, in the amount of \$40,000 for the first year, with criteria to be vetted and jointly approved by the ABRSC and CVB leadership.

Mr. Bradford continued his presentation by sharing strategies on how to increase awareness of Asheville as a sports destination and how the team will work with partners to develop additional facilities.

Once Mr. Bradford had answered all related questions, Ms. Brown clarified that the official request is to increase support of the ABRSC from the current level of \$150,000 to add one full-time position and two interns, bringing the total to approximately \$250,000, which also includes bid fees. She said the City of Asheville still contributes \$45,000 to the budget each year.

Board members expressed support of the increase in funding and asked for a detailed budget from the ABRSC so that they can review how those dollars are spent.

Mr. Froeba made a motion to keep the momentum going and provide additional support to the ABRSC in FY 2018-19 as requested. Mr. Lockett seconded the motion. A vote was taken and with all in favor, the motion carried 9-0. Mr. Bradford thanked the BCTDA for its support and said he will share the detailed budget soon.

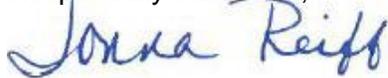
The PowerPoint presentation is on file with the Explore Asheville Convention & Visitors Bureau.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Muth thanked everyone for attending and engaging in today's discussions and activities. The retreat adjourned at 4:08 p.m. and was followed by a reception hosted by Vice Chairman Froeba.

The BCTDA will next meet on Friday, March 23, 2018, beginning at 8:30 a.m., for the March board meeting, to be held at the Omni Grove Park Inn's Country Club.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jonna Reiff". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jonna Reiff, Executive Operations Manager