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BUNCOMBE COUNTY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY REACHES SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT WITH WAYFINDING SIGN FABRICATOR

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (February 13, 2013) — A settlement agreement resulting in payment to the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA) was reached this week, effectively ending the legal dispute between the tourism group and the vendor that fabricated wayfinding signs that began peeling shortly after installation in 2010.

The fabricator, L & H Signs, Inc. from Reading, PA agreed to drop its claim for \$299,826.78, the amount it said was still owed by BCTDA and withheld when the signs began failing. L & H Signs also agreed to pay BCTDA \$50,000 as part of the settlement.

Gary Rowe, attorney for the BCTDA stated "I am pleased that we were able to conclude this trying process in a manner that was beneficial to the BCTDA and the people of Buncombe County and Asheville. The BCTDA has proceeded throughout this matter in a professional and determined manner in an attempt to rectify an unfortunate situation that was caused by none of its own action.

We are also pleased that L & H Signs, Inc., stepped up to the plate and agreed to this resolution with considerable concessions and payment of monies as reflected in the settlement," he said. "The BCTDA has made every effort possible to thoroughly analyze every aspect of this litigation and I feel confident that it made the most reasonable, intelligent and beneficial settlement possible."

He added, "Buncombe County and the City of Asheville have a wayfinding project of which they can both be proud. Credit for concluding this matter and giving the public what it bargained for should go to the time, effort and hard work of the BCTDA throughout this process."

BCTDA hired Geograph Industries in Harrison, OH to repair the peeling signs, using the remainder of the dollars originally allocated for the project, but withheld from L & H Signs, Inc. after the signs began peeling. Geograph Industries successfully fabricated the signs using the same process and specifications given to L&H Signs.

The wayfinding project was the culmination of more than three years of community input and public meetings to address design and implementation of the project. BCTDA granted \$1.5 million dollars for the project from the Tourism Product Development Fund which comes from one percent of the four percent lodging tax paid by overnight visitors staying in lodging accommodations in Buncombe County. Another \$150,000 was dedicated for maintenance and attic stock for a five year period.

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The original project went through a state public bidding process that required granting the project to the lowest responsible bidder. As required by law, the project was well advertised. No Asheville or Western North Carolina firms bid on the original project. As installation of the signage system neared completion, several of the vehicular signs started peeling, forcing BCTDA to take necessary steps required in the contract in order to address the problem.

The entire project encompasses 330 elements, including vehicular and pedestrian signage, parking banners and garage entrance/exit signs, gateway and district identification signs and monuments and kiosks located throughout Buncombe County. Local artisans designed the finials for the poles and many of the signs feature the literary works of notable North Carolina authors.

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