Tryon Tourism Board
(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)
Minutes
October 2, 2023
4:30 P.M.

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:40 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with four members present. A fifth member arrived at 4:45 pm.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Maria Mason-Freeman, Chairman; John Vining, Vice-Chairman, Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep; Allan Casavant (left early at 5:56 pm); and Jeff Fissel (arrived late at 4:45 pm)

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Jim Fatland, Ex-Officio Treasurer; Meg Rogers, Secretary; and Michelle Newman, TDDA Downtown Director

Approve Minutes from September 11, 2023

Vining had sent a request to Secretary Rogers for amendment of the September 11, 2023 minutes on page 2 designating Vard Henry as the Tryon Parks Committee representative on the Tryon Saluda Grade Trail Committee. Amended minutes from the September 11, 2023 regular meeting were reviewed.. Vining made a motion to approve the September 11, 2023 regular meeting minutes as amended. Crowell seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0.

Approve Financial Report for September 2023

The Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-24 financial report for September 2023 was presented by Ex Officio Treasurer Fatland.

Tryon Tourism Development Fund Total Revenues as of September 30, 2023 were $4,859.02. FY 2023-2024 Tourism Development Fund expenditures as of September 30, 2023 totaled $7,290.04. Fund balance as of September 30, 2023 was $ 62,427.54.

Fatland noted that the amendment to allocate $5,000 for advertising grants was approved. The $5,000 was in the Event marketing expense line item and funding for the grants would be provided by an Appropriation from Fund Balance. Fatland also noted that occupancy tax revenues were significantly lower that the prior year as of September 30. For the three months of the current fiscal year, the monthly amounts for Occupancy Taxes have been similar.

Crowell made a motion to approve the financial report for September 2023 as presented. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 5 to 0.

Crowell noted that 2021 and 2022 showed higher occupancy taxes due to "stay"cation market generated by COVID and preferences for shorter distance vacation travel. Failure to capture "stay"cation visitors and entice them to return was discussed briefly. Newman suggested that a better restaurant–retail mix and extended operating hours would improve rate of return visits. The members considered the 2021 occupancy tax collections to be an aberration due to COVID and some high attendance regional events and 2023 collections were more normal.

Saluda Grade Trail Update

Newman reported that a total of $12 million was appropriated for the Saluda Grade Trail in the North Carolina Budget over the next two years. An additional $4 million was needed to buy the North Carolina segment of the trail route from Norfolk Southern. Polk County Community Foundation awarded a large grant for the survey work. Other grant awards from the Western North Carolina Community Foundation and other foundations, as well as heavy fundraising would be needed.

Newman reported that the Tryon Board of Commissioners had created a committee to advise on preparing for the new trail. Members had been appointed and only one seat remained to be filled. The first meeting for this new advisory committee was tentatively scheduled for October 24, 2023. Time for the meeting had not yet been set pending a poll of the appointees for a convenient time for most members.

A public input meeting had been scheduled for Thursday, October 19, 2023, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm at Polk County High School. The project feasibility study was underway. Casavant and Fatland attended a recent stakeholders meeting with project coordinators at Tryon Depot. Chairman Mason-Freeman stated that the Saluda Grade Trail should increase occupancy tax revenues when completed. Casavant stated that addition of new restaurants to downtown from medium cost to high end would be needed. Vining asked if Tryon had a program to recruit businesses. Newman responded that Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) offered technical support, marketing and online listings as well as facade beautification grants, if needed.

Advertising on AirBnB and VRBO

Newman reported that Tryon Tourism was only doing social media advertising on Facebook managed by Website and Social Media Contractor Tracey Daniels. Vining asked which booking website generated the most occupancy tax revenue for Tryon? Chairman Mason-Freeman suggested putting posts on the ExploreTryon Facebook page for local accommodations providers/occupancy tax collectors instead of Tryon ads on booking sites. Newman reported that Daniels was working on updating the ExploreTryon website and Facebook pages to improve Search Engine Optimization (SEO). North Carolina's VisitNC website also had options for advertising.

Chairman Mason-Freeman suggested scheduling a meeting with area accommodation providers to get their ideas on how to help them increase occupancy. Chairman Mason-Freeman asked if other towns scheduled input sessions with accommodation providers? Newman suggested scheduling a meeting with accommodations providers in the slow months during the winter or leading up to the holidays. Crowell made a motion to invite the local accommodation providers who collect Tryon Occupancy Taxes to attend the November 6, 2023 Tryon Tourism Development Authority meeting to provide input. Vining seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 4 to 0. Options for increasing tourism were discussed and included daily Facebook ads, increasing e-mail and phone outreach, partnering with small business support groups like Mountain Biz Works or Blue Ridge Community College Small Business Center, to offer workshops, and organizing accommodation-retail-event ticketing package deals coordinated with organized events. Partnering with Tryon Arts & Crafts School's new photography program to develop photography weekend packages was also suggested.

Website & Social Media

No report from Tracey Daniels. Newman reported that Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) was updating its website and, after the changes, the TDDA website might connect differently with the ExploreTryon website calendar. TDDA was partnering with Tracey Daniels on this project.

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Assignments

Newman reported she was in touch with the company that did the recent Tryon rebranding project regarding tweaking Tryon's branding materials in preparation for the future Saluda Grade Trail. Newman would be doing other preparations for the November 6, 2023 meeting with occupancy tax collectors. Newman also hoped to bring updates from the newly formed Tryon Saluda Grade Trail Advisory Committee after their meetings began.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was confirmed for Monday, November 6, 2023 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room.

Adjourn

Mason-Freeman made a motion to adjourn. Motion was approved unanimously. Meeting was adjourned at 5:22 pm.

Prepared by

Meg Rogers

Meg Rogers
Secretary

Approved:

Marie Mason-Freeman
Chairman