Tryon Tourism Board
(Tryon Tourism Development Authority)
Minutes
March 4, 2024
4:30 P.M.

Chairman Mason-Freeman called the meeting to order at 4:30 pm at the Tryon Town Hall with five members present with a sixth member arriving shortly thereafter.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Maria Mason-Freeman, Chairman; John Vining, Vice-Chairman; Bill Crowell, Tryon BOC Rep; Jeff Fissel; Allan Casavant; and Melanie Jackson (arrived 5:34 pm)

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Meg Rogers, Secretary

Welcome New Tryon Downtown Director Lourdes Gutierrez

The Authority members welcomed Lourdes Gutierrez who was hired as Tryon Downtown Director on January 30, 2024 after the resignation of Michelle Newman. The Board members introduced themselves to Gutierrez. Gutierrez told the members that she would be working part-time, usually in the afternoons. Gutierrez was also working for Polk County Recreation on programs and projects.

Welcome New Member Melanie Jackson

The Authority members welcomed newly appointed member Melanie Jackson. Jackson had served previously on the Authority but had to resign due to time constraints. The members were pleased to welcome her back.

Approve Minutes from January 8, 2024

Minutes from the January 8, 2024 regular meeting were reviewed. Fissel made a motion to approve the January 8, 2024 regular meeting minutes as presented. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 6 to 0.

Approve Financial Report for January & February 2024

The Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-24 financial reports for January and February 2024 were reviewed.

Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-24 Revenues as of January 31, 2024 totaled $12,857.72 (36.22%). Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-2024 expenditures as of January 31, 2024 totaled $17,355.83 (48.89%). Fund balance as of January 31, 2024 was $ 60,304.96.

Tryon Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-24 Revenues as of February 29, 2024 totaled $14,281.17 (40.23%). Tourism Development Fund FY 2023-2024 expenditures as of February 29, 2024 totaled $19,521.80 (54.99%). Fund balance as of February 29, 2024 was $ 59,418.31.

Fissel made a motion to approve the financial reports for January and February 2024 as presented. Casavant seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 6 to 0.

The Authority members were asked to be thinking about the budget for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. Casavant asked about billboards and wondered if the Town of Tryon would consider a satellite annexation to create a space for a billboard.

Designate Contact Person for Advertising Grants Program

Tracey Daniels, website and social media management contractor for ExploreTryon, explained that, although the application forms for the Tourism Authority's advertising grant program were available to applicants through the ExploreTryon.com website, the scope of her service contract did not include managing the grant program or interacting with applicants. She asked that the Authority appoint someone as the contact person for the grant program. Since the program was developed by Michelle Newman when she was a member of the Authority and managed by Newman when she was employed as the Tryon Downtown Manager, the Authority suggested that Newman might be contracted to coordinate the grant program into the future. The Authority members asked Daniels to direct all applications and applicant questions to the Authority's secretary, Meg Rogers. Rogers would relay the submitted applications to the Authority members and add them to meeting agendas for discussion and action. Applicants' questions regarding the program that Rogers could not answer from the current guidelines would be relayed to the Authority as well.

Tourism Advertising Grant Application from Polk County Film Initiative

A grant application submitted by the Polk County Film Initiative (PCFI) for funding for lodging of guest judges for the 2024 Tryon International Film Festival (TRIFF) was reviewed. Lodging expenditures did not qualify for funding under the grant program's guidelines. Fissel made a motion to not approve funding for the PCFI grant request as presented. Mason-Freeman seconded the motion. Motion was approved by a vote of 6 to 0. The applicant, Debra Torrence, Executive Director of PCFI was present and asked permission to resubmit a revised application for consideration at the next month's Authority meeting. Torrence was told that $1,500 remained in the grant program budget for the current fiscal year which would end on June 30, 2024.

Saluda Grade Trail Update

Commissioner Bill Crowell reported that the Saluda Grade Train project steering committee met in Saluda and planned to keep the project message in front of the public and provide Rails to Trails and Saluda Grade Trail information at booths at local events to build public support. A contract had been signed with the rail line owner, Norfolk-Southern, and donations and funding were being solicited. Changes in Norfolk Southern administrative staff could cause issues with the purchase contract.

Website & Social Media

Tracey Daniels presented her reports for February and March 2024.

Social Media Status Report-ExploreTryon Facebook Page (Updates below for last 30 days)

- 5-8 posts per week; tourism focused for February and March Reports
- 5 new followers in during January and 6 new followers in February
- Average post reach 3,900 in February Report and 4,200 in March Report
- Post engagement: 360 (likes, shares, comments, etc.) in January down from December-(January was usually a slow month) and 614 (likes, shares, comments, etc.) in February
- 121 Clicks to Website in January and 98 Clicks to Website in February

- Most liked posts (January)–
  * Nina Simone brick plaza post
  * Coffeehouse memorial for Bill Ingham (most viral post)
  * Trade Street Creamery expansion post (photo and link to article)
  * Chili Cookoff Competition post for TDDA 4th Friday in February
- Most liked posts (February)–
  * We love Wednesdays-First Peak post
  * Return of April Fools Festival in Tryon
  * Happy 10th Anniversary to Dark Horse Antiques
  * Chili Cookoff Competition results post

Website Update

- Worked on SEO for business listings & wording updates in January
- Removed antique shop, Carriage Antiques, from business listings in January until business reopens
- Added Jay & Co image and social media links in January
- Removed Strictly Nails from business listings in February
- Added Tryon E-bike Delivery Service to convenience page in February
- Verified Marengo restaurant contact information from its website in February

Miscellaneous

- Answered incoming questions via e-mail in January & February
- Conversation with Melinda re-website event coordination and overall update in January & February. First Peak Visitors Center had five full-time employees to do website & social media management, brochures, marketing, visitor center assistance, weekly e-newsletters, etc.
- County Tourism meeting was scheduled for 3/12/2024 and Daniels planned to attend
- Melanie Jackson (rep. of Yonder) had relayed her willingness to rejoin the Authority-Daniels was pleased that Jackson had been reappointed by the Tryon Board of Commissioners in February
- Daniels would be helping Tryon Downtown Development Association (TDDA) with back-end Facebook administration and page access research with help from Tryon Staff Dispatchers Blake Arledge and Tara Atkins and new Tryon Downtown Director Lourdes Gutierrez in March.

Daniels reported that Instagram rules had changed. Newman had managed the Instagram for ExploreTryon and TDDA under her position as Tryon Downtown Director. For tourism, Daniels had asked for TDDA to hashtag ExploreTryon in the TDDA Instagram to drive traffic to ExploreTryon's website and Facebook pages. A combo account with TDDA focused on downtown and Tourism Authority focused on tourism over area was suggested. Daniels would need passwords and access. Daniels would check with First Peak about access and authorization policies they use for staff on social media. Social media demographics were discussed briefly. Facebook reached an older demographic, but the Instagram demographic was important to tourism marketing. Snap Chat and TikTok demographics were less important for tourism promotion. At one time there was a link for ExploreTryon.com website to Instagram page for ExploreTryon. TDDA had an email newsletter service. Gutierrez was working on cleaning up the DowntownTryon.org website and getting the links working and setting up to capture visitors asking for information on downtown Tryon. Instagram

account currently had a glitch for sharing. Daniels stated that both ExploreTryon.com and DowntownTryon.org needed local businesses to share and cross-promote each other, ExploreTryon and TDDA to maximize effectiveness of social media marketing for all. Mason-Freeman asked what TDDA could not promote. TDDA mission was to promote downtown events and Tryon business special events with static posts that were focused strictly on downtown. Some Authority members considered it nonsensical for the ExploreTryon and DowntownTryon websites and social media to be separate, but funding sources with restrictions made it necessary. There was some concern about past partnership promotions where Town of Tryon and Tryon Tourism Authority had both contributed to PCFI, but only the Town of Tryon logo appeared on PCFI TRIFF marketing materials without the ExploreTryon.com name anywhere. TDDA goals had changed over time with early goals focused on streetscape sidewalk improvement projects in downtown and new goals were now focused on supporting business community downtown. Mason-Freeman stated that the tourism marketing needed to reach an audience not yet coming to Tryon and not yet coming to local events like Tryon Fine Arts Center programs. Fissel recommended marketing that lets more folks know about the events going on in the area. Casavant suggested more outreach using text messaging instead of e-mail or e-newsletters.

Casavant suggested reaching out to Sidestreet Pizza as one of the most popular local restaurants to let Tryon Tourism put information cards in the restaurant for patrons to fill out with contact info and turn in to Tryon Tourism Authority with incentive of a restaurant gift card drawing from info entries. Daniels reported that similar requests to Sidestreet Pizza had been turned down.

SWOT Analysis Update – Work Plan Discussion

The Authority members discussed advertising and marketing. Mason Freeman suggested, if goal is to advertise outside the area, then advertising on websites reaching potential visitors far away, such as vacation rental search sites or Air B&B search sites, would make sense. Tryon Tourism had a rack card that needed an update. Daniels was making sure that the current cards were distributed to NCDOT welcome centers as needed, but the scope of her service contract did not really include management of advertising for the Authority, except for Facebook ads. Mason-Freeman wanted the rack cards distributed to all the Tryon area vacation rentals to put in the rooms/houses for guests. Mason Freeman suggested magnetic stickers with QR code or ExploreTryon.com website for local hosts to put on refrigerators in vacation rental properties.

Casavant stated that Tryon needed a better mix of retail, restaurants and bars to attract the younger travelling market. Casavant also wanted more trail signage. Melrose Mountain Climbing Area had no signage and signage for the Missing 40 trail near Saluda had fallen down. The new outdoor recreational area for rock climbing at Melrose Mountain was discussed briefly. Lack of parking, difficulty of access and incomplete construction of the facility were reasons the Town of Tryon had not actively marketed the new facility yet. However, Polk County Trails website had a lot of information and maps on available outdoor recreation opportunities in Polk County.

Gutierrez worked with Polk County Trails group at Polk County Recreation. The downtown plaza information board kiosk was not being used effectively. Gutierrez suggested that TDDA use the backside of the kiosk, not visible from street, for a mural, possibly sponsoring a high school art contest to design an image for the space. For the front side of the kiosk, TDDA and Tryon Tourism needed to decide what was best to include.

Mutual promotion and support were recommended by Daniels. Tryon Together initiative a few years ago sponsored a media marketing retreat for local business owners with clear instructions on how to cross-promote to get the most out of social media, but businesses did not keep it up after initial efforts. Some downtown businesses had not posted anything on social media for months.

SWOT homework for the next meeting was for Authority members to decide how much funding, if any, to devote to social media advertisements and how much funding, if any, to allocate to improved signage for recreational trails.

Other

- **Joint Meeting** – Cassavant asked if a joint meeting between the Tourism Authority, Polk County Board of Commissioners and Tryon Board of Commissioners could be arranged to exchange information. Scheduling a joint meeting with Tryon Board of Commissioners was possible, but joint meeting with Polk County Board of Commissioners could be more challenging to arrange.

Confirm Date for Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting of the Tryon Tourism Development Authority was confirmed for Monday, April 1, 2024 at 4:30 pm at Tryon Town Hall, McCown Room.

Adjourn

Casavant made a motion to adjourn. Motion was seconded by Mason-Freeman. Meeting was adjourned at 5:50 pm.

Prepared by

Meg Rogers
Secretary

Approved:

Marie Mason-Freeman
Chairman