



Transylvania County Tourism Development Authority Minutes of 8/26/21 Virtual Board Meeting

Present: Grant Bullard, Layton Parker, Libby Freeman, David Guice, Dee Dee Perkins, Jessica Whitmire, Ali Lien

Absent: Mac Morrow

Staff Present: Clark Lovelace, MJ Gordon, Corey Gafnea

Guests Present: Karen Tessier, Christian McLaughlin, Jonathan Griffin

Call to Order – Layton Parker

Layton Parker called the meeting to order at 8:31 AM.

Presentation of Minutes – Layton Parker

LP presented the minutes of the July 22, 2021, board meeting for review. Dee Dee Perkins made a motion to approve as presented. David Guice seconded. Motion passed.

Director's Report – Clark Lovelace

Financials – CL noted both May and June numbers are reflected on the R&E report that was sent in the advance packet. There were no questions. High returns continue, with a record of \$227K for June. Note that \$114K, just over half, of that revenue was from Airbnb and HomeAway. FY21 year-end revenues finished at \$1,867,000. Expenses were in line with budget, finishing within 1%. In the end, revenues far exceeded expenses, resulting in a flow of significant dollars to our fund balance. There are still a few year-end adjustments that need to be made that shouldn't affect the total numbers, but will need to be done before we consider these final, therefore no motion needs to be made.

A discussion was held about short term rentals (STR). TCT subscribed to AirDNA about 6 months ago and we now have more data from STR in Transylvania County as well as the surrounding counties. There hasn't been time to delve into the information, but Clark did a cursory look and will send some initial stats to the board. According to this data there are approximately 1,000 STRs in our county. Henderson County has about the same number of STRs but three times the population. Jonathan noted that there are approximately 150 occupancy payment returns sent to him but only 7 that he receives from hotels. Hotel occupancy levels are finally up to our 2019 levels.

Office Report and Tourism Update – Restaurants schedules are in flux due to Covid-19 and staffing issues. Several new businesses have opened including Stella's Sweet Boutique and Lil' Speck. The Ecusta Trail closed on August 12. CL asked if any questions on his update with the advance packet. There were none.

In the wake of Tropical Storm Fred (Aug. 17) which caused extensive damage to our public lands and rivers a discussion was had about how to let our visitors know about the conditions in our public

lands and rivers as well as provide them with our responsible exploration messaging while they are here. Clark shared that we have a travel advisory pop up that directs web users to important information on the pandemic, trail closures, etc. It was suggested that we ramp up this process and be more proactive about having a messaging plan in order. Staff will get with emergency services and public land managers and work something up.

Chair Report – Layton Parker

Ecusta Trail – Layton gave an update on the Ecusta Trail, which closed earlier this month. There is still a funding request from Conserving Carolina and the Friends of Ecusta Trail. The request is for 20% of TCT annual revenue for five years. At this point there are a lot of moving parts which makes it difficult for the board to make a decision. Clark and Dee Dee have reached out to Jim Fatland for a meeting, but haven't been able to connect with him. It was suggested that the TCT Board talk to each County Commissioner prior to making a decision. The timing and connection is important. Layton would like a list of conditions that would need to be in place prior to making this financial commitment.

TCT Organizational Structure – At the August County Commissioners meeting the commissioners voted to remove the “autonomous organization” option from consideration. That leaves two options. Continue with a structure similar to now where TCT contracts with the chamber for administrative and operational support or have the staff folded into the county HR and payroll systems. Layton reminded that the board expressed a desire at a past meeting to move away from the current structure because that didn't achieve the primary objective of dedicated TCT staff. He asked if any opinions had changed. No one indicated that theirs had. He shared that for the remaining option to work, the job descriptions and salaries for the positions through the county needed to match what the TCT board felt appropriate, essentially something similar to how things are currently. He is working with the county to find out those answers. The chamber is also working on finalizing their opinion on what structure they desire moving forward. A joint meeting is planned for next month.

2022 Board of Directors – The request to the County Commissioners for Layton to stay on as TCT Board Chair has been moved to the next commissioners meeting in September. There are two open positions for the 2022 board, one for accommodations owner/operator and the other for interested individual. Layton noted that Grant, Libby, and Clark volunteered to meet after our last meeting to discuss recommendations and asked if one of them would share what was discussed.

Grant indicated that there are no new applications with the county, but there are a couple still on file that were submitted within the last two years or so, Mark Tooley and Kevin Howell. There was also interest in having Mike Hawkins serve and he has expressed a desire to do so if asked. For the accommodations position, Clark reached out to Greystone Owner, Shannon Ellis, who cannot serve, but is suggested General Manager Paulette Todd, who indicated that she would be willing to serve. Feedback from the board was to reach out to Paulette Todd about filling out an application since that position is currently open.

Marketing Report – Karen Tessier

KT noted that as more and more events are coming back the Adventurist eblast is once again being sent out after a 15-month hiatus. Our Facebook audience slightly decreased, but our Instagram audience is continuing to increase. Birmingham AL has recently been added to CLT, RAL ATL, and Nashville TV markets. A new Partner Marketing program will be rolled out in late September and will include advertising opportunities for the 2022 Adventure Guide, a stand-alone county/regional map, print and digital media and sweepstakes. She reviewed the website metrics which showed impressive growth, especially organic growth. CM presented images from recent photo shoots and advertising campaigns.

Destination Infrastructure Committee – Dee Dee Perkins

The committee continues to focus on cycling, downtown Brevard, the PNF intersections, arts, and other elements of our infrastructure. Right now, they are focused on getting bike racks at strategic locations in downtown Brevard. This includes a work group that includes Melanie Spreen, Aaron Baker, and a few DIC members. No specific updates on the other areas.

Overtourism – Dee Dee Perkins

A discussion was held about tourism and the perception in the community. How can we balance tourism while protecting our assets? Some locals feel the scale is tipped toward tourism. It was noted that language and vocabulary are important. Where is the tipping point? There are big concerns from tourism-related businesses that they will lose current employees and/or can't hire qualified employees due to a lack of affordable housing. They also lose summer college students as potential employees for the same reason and they can't compete with camps and NOC who provide their workers with housing. Restaurants in particular are struggling. STRs are negatively impacting the lack of housing options. The city can't put a moratorium on them, but could possibly work on zoning.

Old Business

Corey reminded that board members are provided a branded golf shirt to promote our organization. Reach out if you need one.

New Business

Layton indicated that Lori Roberts has stepped down as TCT's representative on the Transylvania Economic Alliance board. We need a new appointee. It is often a past board member or someone very familiar with tourism and our organization. Let Clark or Layton know if you have any suggestions.

Layton shared that we may need to review our priorities and set some goals, particularly for the board. It seems we are taking on too much. Three-hour meetings aren't sustainable. How can we be more effective? The good news is that no one can question the dedication of our board members and staff.

Public Comment

None

Meeting Adjourn

LP made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:15 AM

Minutes respectfully submitted by Corey Gafnea