

Date: .....4/1/20.....

Approved as Minutes: .....5/13/2021.....

## Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority Board Meeting

**Call to Order:** 12:07pm

**Members Present:** Mia Chapman, Janet Mason, Willard Whitson, Kitty McCammon, Mary Jaeger-Gale, Jeff Geisler, Jim Masek, Dave Long, David Hislop, Brandon Higgins, and Dana Bradley

**Members Absent:**

**Ex-Officis Present:** Paula Roach and David Hunt

**Ex-Officis Absent:**

**Others Present:** Don Cason, Emily Ostertag, Taylor Hardin, Karen Tegen, Mike Reardon, and Sean Reckert (Carolina Climbers Coalition)

**Public Comments:** Presentation on Chimney Rock trails from the Carolina Climbers Coalition Chimney Rock Village Boulders Club and Trail

- Signed easements with Chimney Rock Village
- One major feature is that the trailhead starts right in downtown Chimney Rock. Hikers can walk from Main St. to the trail, between Medina's and the Burntshirt Tasting room
- ½ miles, steep trail, with stone or locust steps
- Views of 3 waterfalls
- Complete views of Chimney Rock and the Rocky Broad River
- Provides several different bouldering opportunities
- Climbers are repeat visitors, with the climbing season in the winter—bringing potentially thousands of tourists in the off-season
- The trail is still under construction, with about \$10,000 still needed for completion. Goal for completion is Summer 2021
- Hoping to extend trail up to the Ghost Town Cliffs— 3 of the most difficult cliffs in NC
- Statistics were provided on climbing recreation and revenue trends
  - As of 2016, about 6% of all visitors to Chimney Rock Village were rock climbers
- Potential for this trail to link to the Hickory Nut Gorge Trail, which could provide a connector between the upper gorge and the lower gorge.

**New Board Member Introduction:** Mia Chapman, Community Coordinator for American Zinc Products.

**Additions / Deletions from Agenda:** ----

**Motion to approve Agenda:**

**Approval:** 1st: Jim Masek  
2nd: Jeff Geisler

Motion Passed.

**Prior Meeting Minutes (changes if necessary):** ---

**Approval:** 1st: Dana Bradley  
2nd: Jim Masek

Motion Passed.

**Finance Report:**

**2021 Audit Contract**

Gould Killian is the CPA firm that conducts the county's and the TDA's audit  
The fee has increased from prior years from \$4,850 to \$6,850, largely because of Rutherford Bound and State grants  
Paula Roach, Finance Director, provided a review  
Recommends the board to approve in order to move forward

**Motion to approve the 2021 Audit Contract with Gould Killian**

**Approval:** 1st: Mary Jaeger-Gale  
2nd: Jeff Geisler

Motion Passed.

**Finance Report Highlights:**

## Highlights

- Occupancy tax continues to increase—coming in at \$1.7 million
- 42% of January collections and 97% over budget
- RFF Update
  - Revenue streams continues to be way up, with expense items staying on budget
  - Projecting a fund balance near \$1.8million
  - The increased occupancy tax can be attributed to several things, such as the automated tax collection from Expedia, AirBnB, VRBO, etc. as well as increased visitation to our rural community during the pandemic
  - We are making great strides to make sure we are collecting as much tax as possible
  - The Finance Committee will be hearing a presentation from a new revenue monitoring software, AirDNA
  - Compliance monitoring will continue

## 2021-2022 Budget Presented

- Review of occupancy tax over the last 2 years
  - April through June projections staying conservative
  - Confident revenue will come in at around \$2.1million by the end of the year, but the projection is \$1.9million
- Paddle Trail grants will cause an increase of about \$400,000
- County provided increases in salaries and benefits
- Marketing and Advertising has put together a budget request for \$465,000
- An increase in the Janitorial line item is for a full year of cleaning services at the Lake Lure Welcome Center
- Increased line items for Office Supplies, and Postage
- Building and Maintenance will see a decrease, with no anticipated funding for repairs or maintenance at the Welcome Center
- Travel budget has been increased, in case conferences and meetings are held in-person again
- Professional and insurance fees has been increased over prior year, due to an adjusted contract with Host Compliance
- Wayfinding line item will keep \$5,000 for maintenance, as well as \$15,000 budgeted for Rutherford Bound donation kiosks
- Community Programs and Events will increase, as we predict events and programs will resume in 21-22
- Group Sales line item has been budgeted for future fund program
- Relocate to Rutherford line item budgeted for future programs
- An initial \$20,000 has been placed in the Agri-Tourism line item for future programs
- A large portion of the KRCB budget will go toward paid litter pick-ups—with more than 80 miles of roadways identified

**Strategic Plan Budget Review**

- Review of the Rutherford Bound Master Plan
- Background and purpose – Tourism related infrastructure and development
- Project Background – 2-year master plan process, brought together to bring collaboration between all of our communities. Leverage local, federal, and state dollars
- Goals – establish a unified vision for all of Rutherford County, evaluating existing assets, improving quality of life to our citizens as well as increasing tourism
- Mountains to Main Streets – refresh and revitalize branding
- Recommendations
- Implementation
  - 5 legged stool
    - TDA
    - County / Towns
    - Grants
    - Industry
    - Citizens
- Vision for success (3 to 5 year)
  - Unification
  - Increase tourism spending in each jurisdiction
  - Completion of the TBRT
  - Increase community pride
  - Vibrant main streets
- These points have been accomplished in 2 years

- Implementation will require:
  - Hiring staff
  - Partnership
  - Develop cost effective way to expose visitors to the entire county
  - Rutherford Bound is not a quick-fix, it is a marathon

Videos from website Rutherfordbound.com played

FY 21-22 Strategic Plan Budget Summary reviewed

- Rutherford Bound Partners and staff have put together a budget request of about \$1.7 million for this next fiscal year
- This budget request includes, marketing, communications, planning, engineering, grant work, general advising, fundraising, implementation, etc.
- This budget request has been vetted by the Strategic Plan Committee
- The new contracts with all partners will begin in July, and all will include a 30-day exit clause

Phase II Implementation and Budget reviewed

- This request also includes matching each town \$150,000 to go toward their projects
- For the towns to receive this funding, their leadership and councils will need to be working on Phase II projects and provide proof of advancement

Review of total Rutherford Bound Funding Summary

- Grants
- Local Funding
- TDA Support
- Capital Campaign donations

**Motion to approve Financial Report:**

**Approval:** 1st: Jeff Geisler  
2nd: Mary Jaeger-Gale  
Motion Passed.

**Executive Director Report:**

Highlights:

- The TDA assisted all Rutherford Bound Partners with their 21-22 budget requests
- Attended the NV Travel and Tourism Coalition Board meeting
- Attended IPDC Board meeting
- Met with the Executive Director of the Carolina Climber Coalition
- Spoke on the phone with Buncombe County Commissioner Terry Wells about our KRCB efforts
- Attended the Lake Lure Utility Board meeting
- Hosted the Relocate to Rutherford committee meeting
- Assisted with several Rutherford Bound press events

**Welcome Center Update:**

Continues to remain busy, especially with the Spring season starting up

**Marketing Report:**

**Marketing Committee Update**

Internal Marketing Report

- The TDA ran a full page ad. in Our State magazine's March issue
- 2021 Travel Guide under production
  - Goal release date: May 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Tourism Website
  - Currently under renovation. Summer goal for re-launch

The Agency Slides presented by Taylor Hardin:

- Review of January and February reporting and numbers
  - All numbers are up for social media
  - Expenses and spending was reviewed
  - Quarterly SEO recap – 119% over last year in organic website traffic
  - Last of the Mohicans has been a popular page on the website, with lots of attention lately
    - Possible HBO film
- All other listings are up as well
- There was no Marketing Committee held this month, but TDA staff are having a quarterly meeting with the Agency on April 12<sup>th</sup>
- Committee will reconvene after the 12<sup>th</sup>

**Committee Updates:**

**Marketing Committee:**

\*See Marketing Report\*

**Agri-Tourism Committee:**

- Met in March
- The extended committee was able to meet for the first time since the being of the pandemic
- Results of marketing survey were reviewed
- Brainstorming session was held
  - Potentially filling a position to oversee agri-tourism in the county
  - A smaller sub-committee will explore this option, and is working with other counties that have similar positions or departments

**Finance Committee:**

Met in March

\*See Finance Report\*

**Tourism Strategic Plan Committee:**

- Met with all Rutherford Bound Partners on March 4<sup>th</sup>
  - Heard budget requests for FY 2021-2022
- Follow-up meeting with PMA Consulting on March 24<sup>th</sup>
  - Reviewed Proposed Program of Work for FY 2021-2022
  - Committee members continued meeting after PMA Consulting left to further discuss the Tourism Strategic Plan Budget
  - Budget requests were approved by committee

**CFHC Committee:**

- No Meeting
- Review of current donation status - \$16,975

**Keep Rutherford County Beautiful Committee:**

- Full committee met in March
- Spring Litter Sweep will be held the entire month of April
- About 80 miles of roadway approved for paid litter pick-up this Spring

**Information Committee:**

\*See Welcome Center Update\*

Met in late February

**Relocate to Rutherford Committee:**

- Met in March
- The TDA is working with Destination by Design to outline a preliminary design for a website, as an offshoot on the Rutherford Bound website
- Future programs of work are in the works

**Executive Committee:**

\*See Executive Director Report\*

**Announcements:**

- Cycle NC is still planning their event, August 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>
  - TDA will be hosting tents at the 3-day event
  - Over 400 cyclists are said to be in attendance
- TIEC is hosting 'Night in the County'—a 3-day country music festival, which might bring some overflow tourism to Rutherford County. August 26<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>
  - Tickets are already on sale
- Forest City and Rutherfordon festivals are scheduled for the Spring and Summer
- The KidSenses Interactive Museum is opening back up in April

**Meeting Adjourned:** 2:08pm