

HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes
November 6, 2024
Lake Junaluska Bethea Welcome Center

Members/Staff Present: Jim Owens, Mike Huber, Jeff Hillis, Gail Mull, Kristian Owen, Natalie Hawkins, Chuck Dickson, Kelsie Baker, Jeremy Boone, Dr. Shelley White, Jennifer Best, Chad King, Corrina Ruffieux, Hayley Printz, Ashley Rock-Rice, Alycin Ray

Members/Staff Absent: Scot Blair, Angie Frisbee, Amie Newsome

Guests Present: Jane Mauer, Hannah White, Dave Barone, Beth Gilmore, Cory Vaillancourt, Rob Hites, Elli Flagg, David Francis

1. **Call to Order** – Chair Jim Owens called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM
2. **Purpose of Special Meeting** – To discuss action items related to Hurricane Helene
3. **Introductions** – All board members, staff, and guests introduced themselves.
4. **Adjustment of Agenda** - None
5. **Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)**
 - Jane Mauer announced that the fall edition of Smokies Life is out, and it includes an article about wheelchair hikes and accessibility.
6. **Board Comments** – None
7. **Hurricane Helene Recovery Response Initiatives**
 - Corrina thanked HCTDA staff for their hard work during the recovery response time following Hurricane Helene.
 - HCTDA and Visit Haywood pushed out weekly messaging to visitors and partners in collaboration with County leaders.
 - Overall Destination Information website: **[VisitHaywood.com/alerts](https://www.visithaywood.com/alerts)**
 - List of Open & Closed Businesses: **[VisitHaywood.com/helene](https://www.visithaywood.com/helene)**
 - List of Businesses with Online Stores: **[VisitHaywood.com/gifthaywood](https://www.visithaywood.com/gifthaywood)**
 - Information about recovery resources for partners: **[HaywoodTDA.com/helene-assistance/](https://www.haywoodtda.com/helene-assistance/)**
 - Visit Haywood produced driving maps to visitors and for partners to show the open routes into Haywood County
 - Staff reached out to 45 hotels/motels directly to see if they would participate in FEMA's Transitional Sheltering Assistance (TSA) for displaced families.
 - Visit Haywood sent Visit NC advertising assets for their Southwestern NC Mountain Campaign, which ran 10/15-10/31.
 - The Gift of Haywood Program is in partnership with Haywood County Chamber of Commerce, Maggie Valley Chamber of Commerce, Canton Merchants Partnership, and DWC. 85 businesses have signed up, and the launch date is November 13, 2024. 100% of the net proceeds will go toward Haywood County small business recovery.

- Visit Haywood, Haywood Chamber, and Haywood County Government conducted a Small Business Survey, and received 609 total responses.
 - Of the lodging businesses, the majority of the respondents were owners of short-term rentals, who stated that the majority of their properties were empty. Hotels/motels were full or mostly full.
 - About 56% of respondents reported that they incurred physical damage from Helene, and almost 20% stated that they have not reopened since the storm.
 - Over 67% of businesses said they would lose up to \$25,000 in revenue.
 - Word cloud shows that they need support, recovery, grants, tourism.
- Jim Owens congratulated Corrina and HCTDA team for their outstanding work during this unprecedented time.

8. New Business

- [FY 2024-2025 revised revenue forecast](#) and [budget amendment](#)
 - HCTDA is projecting a decrease of nearly \$497,000 in occupancy tax revenues for the balance of FY 24/25, approximately 20%.
 - There is also a slight decrease in visitor guide ad sales, because some businesses can no longer afford to pay them.
 - A budget amendment was presented to reduce revenue and expenses, adjusting the overall budget for the projected impacts of Helene.
 - Finance Committee felt this was the best way to approach the budget, as it is better to anticipate the worst, and the budget can be adjusted if we end up making up the revenue later on.

Mike Huber made a motion to approve the budget amendment, as presented. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Grant reimbursement request](#) from HCAC for event cancelled due to Helene
 - Haywood County Arts Council made the decision to cancel the Bluegrass Festival due to damage from Helene, with most of the vendors being unable to attend the event.
 - Finance Committee agreed that due to the circumstances, we should reimburse HCAC because they spent the money on what they were supposed to, as the advertising is required to start months in advance.

Jeff Hillis made a motion to approve the grant reimbursement request from HCAC. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- Budget Adjustment for Ice Festival Weekend
 - HCTDA is requesting to spend up to \$6,000 from the Waynesville 1% account and up to \$2,000 from the Canton 1% account in order to purchase generic ice sculptures for the Ice Stroll, instead of asking businesses to spend money during a time when they have just lost revenue.

- Jeff Hillis asked how we would determine which businesses get custom sculptures and make it fair. Corrina clarified that if some businesses still want to have a custom ice sculpture, they are welcome to purchase them, but the sculptures that the HCTDA pays for will be generic and not business-specific.
- Jennifer Best inquired how we plan to push the message that the custom ice sculptures are still an option for them. Corrina stated that we will have to adjust our Sponsorship Package and messaging.

Dr. Shelley White made a motion to approve spending from the Waynesville and Canton 1% accounts for generic ice sculptures. Kelsie Baker seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Proposed Small Business Recovery Grant program](#)
 - Small businesses are the heart of Haywood County, and this program would help them with recovery, instead of just offering another loan.
 - Corrina Ruffieux explained the outline of the guidelines for the small business recovery grant program, including what would make them in/eligible. Businesses would be required to show financial records documenting their loss.
 - The grant program has already received funding from the Haywood Advancement Foundation, The Swag & Cataloochee Ranch, United Way, NC Chamber, and the Town of Lake Santeetlah.
 - Corrina Ruffieux made the request to the HCTDA Board for the TDA to provide \$100,000 from our FY 23-24 Earned Interest Revenue from our NCCMT account to the grant program.
 - Corrina also explained that we have confirmed with both the SOG and our auditor that leveraging these dollars in this way to support tourism-related businesses is in fact allowed.
 - Jim Owens asked for more information on the selection process of the grant program. Corrina explained that there would be an independent grant committee of seven to review applications, with two TDA Board members on the committee.
 - Jim Owens asked if the Haywood Advancement Foundation has already voted to approve this initiative. Corrina confirmed that they have already voted to approve it.
 - Partnership with Haywood Advancement Foundation, required [Memorandum of Understanding](#)

Chad King made a motion to approve the Memorandum of Understanding, as presented. Natalie Hawkins seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- TDA appointed Grant Members – Natalie Hawkins and Jeremy Boone

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve Natalie Hawkins and Jeremy Boone to serve on the Small Business Recovery Grant Committee. Jeff Hillis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- Fiscal support of Grant program & associated [Budget Amendment](#)

Jeff Hillis made a motion to approve the budget amendment, as presented. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Budget Amendment](#) for Gift of Haywood & additional donations
 - The budget amendment will allow us to create new GLs to manage the Gift of Haywood program and allow us to donate the proceeds to the Haywood Advancement Foundation for the grant fund.

Chad King made a motion to approve the budget amendment, as presented. Mike Huber seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Jim Owens announced that 1-40 will be open with 2 lanes by New Years Day.

9. Adjournment

Jennifer Best made an announcement to the Board that Corrina has stepped into being a tremendous community partner during these hard times. She thanked Corrina and HCTDA staff for all they have done.

Jim Owens adjourned the meeting at 9:45 AM.

Next TDA Board meeting is December 4, 2024 at Springdale Resort