

HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes
February 26, 2025
Gaines Auditorium, Lake Junaluska

Members/Staff Present: Jim Owens, Mike Huber, Jeff Hillis, Jennifer Best, Hannah White, Bridget Shaughnessy, Chad King, Kristian Owen, Natalie Hawkins, Scot Blair, Jeremy Boone, Angie Frisbee, Gail Mull, Chuck Dickson, Corrina Ruffieux, Hayley Printz, Alycin Ray, Amie Newsome, Ashley Rock-Rice,

Members/Staff Absent: Dr. Shelley White

Guests Present: Sam Dunbar, Sam Cullen, Becky Johnson, Cory Vaillancourt, Andrew Marshall

1. **Call to Order** – Chair Jim Owens called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM
2. **Welcome new TDA Board member** - Hannah White
3. **Introductions**
4. **Adjustment of Agenda**
 - Discuss the Garden & Gun insertion order under Old Business
5. **Presentation of [Audit](#)** – Travis Kever, Gould Killian (virtual) | **VOTE to Accept**
 - Travis Kever, audit manager at Gould Killian group, called in via Teams to present the audit.
 - Travis explained pages 1-3 are the opinion of Gould Killian. He stated that it was a clean audit opinion with no audit findings and that the LGC has accepted the audit.
 - Travis stated that \$2.2 million out of \$4.2 million of the funds is unrestricted and for the Authority to spend at their discretion. Occupancy tax collections increased 7% over the previous fiscal year.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to accept the audit. Natalie Hawkins seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

6. **Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)** – None
7. **Board Comments** - None
8. **Consent Agenda | VOTE**
 - Request approval of minutes – [January 22, 2025](#)

Mike Huber made a motion to approve the minutes, as presented. Jeff Hillis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

9. Finance Reports

- [January Financial Reports](#) – Kristian Owen

Kristian Owen presented the January Financials as follows:

- Total Checking/Savings - \$4,560,189.16
- Total Other Current Assets - \$11,395.10
- Total Assets - \$4,608,809.07
- Total Deferred Outflows of Resources - \$174,162.00
- Total Current Liabilities - \$19,295.61
- Total Noncurrent Liabilities - \$292,448.00
- Total Liabilities - \$311,743.61
- Pension Deferrals - \$2,550.00
- Total Net Position - \$4,468,677.46
- Total Occupancy Tax Revenue January - \$235,311.09
- Total Occupancy Tax Revenue YTD - \$1,406,322.85
- Total Income January - \$254,218.71
- Total Income YTD - \$1,597,414.44
- Total Expenses January - \$202,129.35
- Total Expenses YTD - \$1,290,803.54
- Change in Net Position January - \$52,089.36
- Change in Net Position YTD - \$306,610.90

- [Occupancy Tax and Lodging Data](#) – *Corrina Ruffieux*

Corrina Ruffieux presented the occupancy tax comparisons, showing that July and August were up; September, October, and November were down due to Helene, and December was up 3%.

10. Old Business

- Garden & Gun Insertion Order | **VOTE**

Corrina presented that the insertion order was already budgeted for, but because of the dollar amount it requires a Board vote. It is for a \$65,000 package and will allow us to really promote Haywood County through spring and summer.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to authorize the Executive Director to sign the Garden & Gun insertion order. Angie Frisbee seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- TDA Board Meeting Date March | **VOTE**

Corrina reminded the board that we initially had the March board meeting scheduled for Wednesday 26th. However, in order for her to attend the Destinations International CEO Summit, the meeting date needs to be moved to March 27th.

Jeff Hillis made a motion to move the meeting date to March 27th. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [TDA Board Meeting Dates 2025](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina presented the proposed meeting dates for the remainder of the 2025 calendar year.

Angie Frisbee made a motion to approve the meeting dates for the rest of 2025. Mike Huber seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

11. New Business

○ [Resolution of Disposition](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina presented a resolution showing five, older and no-longer-in-use Mac computers that the TDA needs to dispose of.

Scot Blair asked if we had to dispose of them and if we were allowed to donate them instead. Kristian Owen added that if we decide to donate them, the Resolution needs to be amended to state which non-profit.

Mike Huber made a motion to table the Resolution of Disposition to a future meeting so more research can be done. Jeff Hillis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

○ FY 2025-2026 Grant Guidelines | **VOTE**

Corrina presented the definitions of Travel & Tourism and Tourism-Related Expenditures. She explained that the HCTDA staff and Executive Committee revised the grant guidelines to ensure they align with the recently completed Destination Master Plan. Corrina highlighted the 3 grant programs that will be offered this year.

- [Legacy Event Sponsorship](#) – The sponsorship program is for events that have been held for at least 10 years and have over 1,000 attendees. This program will be scored on brand awareness, economic impact, attendance, and community benefit.
- [Tourism Promotion](#) – The promotion program provides support for tourism-related events, activities, attractions, and experiences. This program will be scored on alignment with Visit Haywood brand and Destination Master Plan, visitor attraction and economic impact, impact beyond a singular business, and seasonal and off-peak promotion.
- [Tourism Capital](#) – The capital program is new this year. This program invests in physical infrastructure or facilities that enhance Haywood County's tourism economy. The program will be scored on enhancing the destination experience for all, supports the mission and vision outlined in the Destination Master Plan, attract overnight visitors from 50+ miles outside Haywood County, and drive economic growth and create meaningful impact.

Corrina presented the timelines for all three programs. The applications for Promotion and Legacy programs are due March 27th. The deadline for the Capital applications is July 18th.

Kristian Owen stated that the one thing we need to add to the grant guidelines is a statement that the applicant must be current on all federal, state, local, and occupancy taxes or will be disqualified from funding.

Chuck Dickson asked if we have a budget set for the grant cycle yet. Corrina responded that we do not yet – that will be done when we complete the budget cycle. The current funds in 1% will be available, but any additional funds that may be available have not been determined yet and will be discussed further at Finance and Executive Committees.

Scot Blair asked to be reminded how the grant applications are processed and if they are digital. Hayley Printz explained that the grants are fully digital and have document upload sections for the required budgets and marketing plans.

Chuck Dickson asked if there is a time period to provide review to applicants. Corrina responded that yes – there is 1 month built into the timeline to ask applicants additional questions and require additional documentation so we can ensure that we are supporting our partners and being as transparent as possible.

Chad King asked if there is a mechanism in place to ensure that what happened last year doesn't happen again. Jeff Hillis responded that there is more checks and balances in place. HCTDA Staff will screen the applications, the Product Development Committee will review applications, the Executive Committee will review, and then the applications will be reviewed by and voted on by the TDA Board.

Chad King made a motion to approve the grant guidelines as presented. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Product Development Committee makeup review](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina presented the updated purpose of the Product Development Committee to align with the Destination Master Plan. To ensure that this committee represents the community, we recommend that the committee be comprised of HCTDA Board of Director members as well as categories: outdoor recreation, arts & culture, retail, dining, lodging, and attractions.

Corrina stated that the application needs to be amended to ask which category the applicant would represent.

Angie Frisbee made a motion to approve the Product Development Committee makeup, including the change to the application. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

12. Staff Reports/Announcements

- IMM and DI updates – *Amie Newsome*

Amie Newsome presented that Visit Haywood had its first appearance at IMM in New York City. She brought a local handmade basket from the Arts Council and granola from Hidden Valley Farms in Clyde. She had 17 media appointments, including: Travel & Leisure, AAA, Modern South Magazine, Thrillist, and The Lovely Planet.

Amie also presented that she attended the Destinations International Marketing & Communications Summit. She was asked to serve on the Marketing Committee. She presented a couple of sessions that she attended and a couple of ideas that she gathered from other destinations.

- 2025 Visitor Guides – *Ashley Rice*

Ashley Rice presented the 2025 Visitor Guide, citing that we had 37 advertisers this year. She stated that we have visitor guide racks across Haywood County, we have a presence in the Asheville Airport, and we have a digital ad campaign running to encourage people to request a hard copy or download a digital version from the website.

- Spring Advertising – *Ashley Rice*

Ashley Rice presented the spring advertising that kicked off last week. We have ads across Meta, Google, Google Display, and targeted display. We also have traditional advertising in Our State and the Visit NC Travel Guide and a billboard in Columbia, SC on I-26.

- Ice Fest Weekend Recap

Corrina Ruffieux presented the recap of Ice Fest Weekend, showing the events that occurred during the 4-day weekend. She presented the weather conditions from 2024 and 2025 Ice Fest Weekends, reminding the Board that last year it rained during the Ice Festival and this year it rained during the Ice Stroll.

The ticket sales totaled 3327, but we did not count kid's free tickets the day of due to being busy running the event. Corrina presented the expenditures and revenues for the Ice Fest Weekend, showing that the total expenses (excluding advertising) was \$74,672 and the revenues totaled \$23,676 between sponsorships, sculptures, tickets, and donations.

Corrina announced that we issued 3 surveys immediately after Ice Fest Weekend – partner, visitor, and vendor. The visitor survey shows that 44% who came to Ice Fest Weekend also went shopping in local stores and 51% dined in restaurants. Of the total responses, 50% were local residents, 24% were day-trip visitors, and 26% were overnight visitors.

- Fat Burger Month

Corrina presented the new event designed to support local restaurants during the shoulder season. We have 14 participants this year.

- Travel Journalist

Corrina announced that we hosted a Satellite Media Tour with Jeanenne Tornatore, travel expert and journalist in Haywood County, with overnight accommodations at Springdale Resort. She had 17 live media spots where she spotlighted Haywood County as a spring break destination.

- The Critical Role of the HCTDA

Corrina reflected on the big picture of HCTDA's mission. She stated that the HCTDA serves as the bridge between Haywood County and visitors. We are the connective glue of the county that brings together visitors, locals, businesses, and non-profits. We build a stronger more vibrant future for everyone who calls Haywood County home.

Chuck Dickson asked if it would be helpful to add a statement that we are transparent, accountable, and have oversight. He stated that with all the communities represented on the TDA Board and all the Committees – there is plenty of oversight. Scot Blair added that we also have diversity in thought. Jim Owens added to the sentiment that we do, in fact, have significant oversight – we have the Finance Director of Haywood County, a Board of County Commissioner, open audits, open meetings, etc. Kristian Owen added that our audit was completed by an independent auditor, reviewed by the NC auditor, and the auditor is peer-reviewed by another independent 3rd party audit firm.

- Next TDA Board meeting is March 27, 2025
- Adjournment

Chuck Dickson made a motion to adjourn. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 10:14 AM