

HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes
March 27, 2025
Gaines Auditorium, Lake Junaluska

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

Members/Staff Absent: Jennifer Best, Jeff Hillis, Chad King

Guests Present: Sam Cullen, Jane Mauer, Andrew Marshall

1. **Call to Order – Chair Jim Owens**
2. **Introductions**
3. **Adjustment of Agenda**
4. **Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)**
 - Jane Mauer presented the newest edition of Smokies Life and the spring edition of the Smokies Guide.
5. **Board Comments – None**
6. **Consent Agenda | VOTE**
 - **Request approval of minutes – [February 26, 2025](#)**

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

7. **Finance Reports**
 - [February Financial Report](#) – *Kristian Owen*

Kristian Owen presented the February Financial Report as follows:

- Total Checking/Savings - \$4,633,851.99
- Total Assets - \$4,682,473.44
- Net Pension Liability - \$290,621.00
- Total Liabilities - \$308,508.42
- Occupancy Tax Revenue February - \$204,727.47
- Occupancy Tax Revenue YTD - \$1,611,050.32
- Total Income February - \$236,584.18
- Total Income YTD - \$1,833,998.62
- Total Expenses February - \$159,684.62
- Total Expenses YTD - \$1,450,488.16
- Change in Net Position February - \$76,899.56
- Change in Net Position YTD - \$383,510.46

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

Corrina Ruffieux presented the occupancy tax and lodging data, showing that overall, January was up by 8%, but the FY is down 10% from previous years due to the impacts of Helene. The YOY comparison shows that January 2025 was the highest January we have ever had.

8. Old Business

- [Committee Meeting Dates Remainder of 2025](#) | **VOTE**

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the remainder of the 2025 Committee meeting dates, as presented. Angie Frisbee seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Lease Extension 2025-2026](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that this is the 2nd lease extension out of 4 and Lake Junaluska Assembly offered to waive the 5% rent increase for this year due to Helene.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the lease extension. Dr. Shelley white seconded the motion. Mike Huber abstained from the vote. Motion passed unanimously.

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

Mike Huber made a motion to approve the resolution of disposition, as presented. Scot Blair seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

9. New Business

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

Corrina Ruffieux explained that the HCTDA received 9 applications for the committee and the Board members from the current PDC reviewed the applications and are recommending 6 of the applicants because they fulfill the required categories.

Angie Frisbee made a motion to approve the presented PDC members. Bridget Shaughnessy seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Code of Conduct & Ethics Policy](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux reminded the board that the HCTDA is working toward Accreditation through Destination's International.

Mike Huber made a motion to approve the Code of Conduct & Ethics policy, as presented. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) and [Annual Statement](#) | **VOTE**

Chuck Dickson commented that representatives from zip codes used to recuse themselves from voting for anything that occurred within their zip code, and he wanted to clarify that it isn't necessary unless there is a financial interest. Jim Owens and Corrina Ruffieux agreed.

Mike Huber made a motion to approve the Conflict of Interest Policy and Annual Statement, as presented. Dr Shelley White seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Ice Fest Weekend Budget](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained to the board that the Ice Fest Weekend is a Visit Haywood event and the HCTDA staff plans, manages, and markets the event entirely. She proposed to the board that Ice Fest Weekend partners not have to complete a grant application to receive funds for supplemental events, such as the Cool Jazz Concert and Frosty 5K.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the Ice Fest Weekend budget, as presented, and authorize the HCTDA to spend up to the following amounts from each zip code: \$80,000 from Maggie Valley, \$27,000 from Waynesville, \$7,000 from Clyde, and \$2,500 from Canton. Mike Huber seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

10. Staff Reports/Announcements

- [2024 Annual Report](#) – *Corrina Ruffieux*

Corrina Ruffieux presented the 2024 Annual Report, highlighting the completion of the Destination Master Plan, the new Visit Haywood brand, the projects HCTDA was able to fund in the community, and all the new marketing initiatives that were completed. Corrina explained that the HCTDA managed a more cohesive marketing plan, instead of advertising towns individually, and the results indicate success. Ashley Rock-Rice explained that we had a strong year with our PR firm, MMGY NJF. Visit Haywood received over \$5M in advertising equivalency. Corrina Ruffieux reminded the board that the HCTDA staff pivoted after Hurricane Helene to help support emergency response, then launched the Gift of Haywood Campaign and hosted Ice Festival 2024. Corrina explained that the welcome center visitor attendance has decreased, but we are working to increase foot traffic. The mailed visitor guides decreased, mostly because we paused advertising to request visitor guides. Corrina noted that of all the visitor spending, 60% is at Haywood County small businesses. Corrina presented the Facts & Figures information, which is for the 2023 calendar year. It shows that tourism drives over 2,000 drives and over \$900 in tax savings for locals.

- Destinations International CEO Summit – *Corrina Ruffieux*

Corrina presented that she just attended the CEO Summit in Savannah, GA and there were leaders from all across the US and the world. She attended sessions such as “Tourism Leadership in an Era of Global Uncertainty” and “Navigating the Future, Leadership in an Evolving World.”

- Visit Haywood T-Shirt Contest – *Alycin Ray*

Alycin Ray presented Visit Haywood’s first ever t-shirt design contest that is open to all artists in Haywood County. The goal of the campaign is to get locals excited about Haywood County, and also gain some fun designs for T-shirts and other merchandise. Ashley Rock-Rice added that these t-shirts are limited edition, and we will have this contest again each year.

- National Travel & Tourism Week Open House May 8, 2025

Corrina Ruffieux announced that Visit Haywood is hosting an open house at the Welcome Center. We are working to gather prizes, if anyone would like to include an item or coupon. The goal is to level up our profile and allow the community to see our space and meet the team.

- May board meeting – extra long

Corrina Ruffieux reminded the board that Chris Brown, HRMC will be presenting at the May meeting in addition to voting on our tourism promotion grants and reviewing our FY 25-26 budget and asked them to block additional time for the May meeting.

- Next TDA Board meeting is April 23, 2025

Angie Frisbee asked if there is a plan for HCTDA to have data for hotels/motels. Corrina Ruffieux explained that the HCTDA used to pay for STR data, but it has become so expensive for individual properties to submit their data to, that the data we paid for was not very comprehensive or useful. Corrina acknowledged that is a current data gap that we are working to find a solution.

- Adjournment

Chuck Dickson made a motion to adjourn. Angie Frisbee seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 9:42 AM.

11. Ten Minute Media Communication Session