

HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes
May 28, 2025
Hemlock Building, HCC

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

Members/Staff Absent: None

Guests Present: Jane Mauer, Andrew Marshall, Kaitlin Gausey

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 updated that visitation is down 6.4%. In April this year, Cataloochee had over 12,000 visitors, and last year it topped out at 27,000. Overnight stays are down 20%. She will have the Summer Smokies Guide to give to us soon.
5. **Board Comments - None**
6. **Consent Agenda | VOTE**
 - **Request approval of minutes – [April 23, 2025](#)**

Angie Frisbee made a motion to approve the minutes, as presented. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

7. **Finance Reports**
 - [April Financial Report](#) – Kristian Owen presented the April financials as follows:
 - *Total checking/savings - \$4,696,056.01*
 - *Pre-paid expenses - \$11,040.00*
 - *Total Assets - \$4,707,439.97*
 - *Total Liabilities - \$12,308.41*
 - *Total Net Position - \$4,162,066.56*
 - *April Occupancy Tax Revenue - \$161,882.97*
 - *YTD Occupancy Tax Revenue - \$1,973,890.01*
 - *Total Monthly Income - \$184,370.40*
 - *Total YTD Income - \$2,239,898.90*
 - *Total April Expenses – \$195,722.62*
 - *Change in Net Position April - \$(11,352.22)*
 - *YTD Total Expenses – \$1,790,445.09*
 - *Change in Net Position YTD - \$449,453.81*

- [Occupancy Tax & Lodging Data](#) – Corrina Ruffieux presented the Occupancy Tax and Lodging data, showing that for the month of March, the occupancy collections were down 13.68%. For the fiscal year, we are tracking down 10% overall.
- The monthly tax comparison shows we are tracking lower than last year, but on par with previous years.
- AirDNA data shows future pacing compared to the same period last year. June, July, August are all pacing down. Western NC Counties future pacing are also down.

8. Old Business

- [Budget Amendment - Bank Fees](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina explained that we added an online store to sell merchandise, but all the previous charges for online store were coded to bank fees. This amendment would create a new GL for the online store, and move the previous charges to the new GL.

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

9. New Business

- Budget Forum
 - [Budget Narrative](#)

Mike Huber stated that the Finance Committee worked diligently on the FY 25-26 budget, and thanked Corrina for writing the budget narrative. The Finance Committee looked at a couple of different versions of the budget, and feel that this version of the budget is both fiscally responsible and optimistic.

- [Proposed FY 25-26 Budget](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that on the revenue section of the budget, a conservative \$3,000,000 for estimated occupancy tax revenues was decided upon. She called out the Fund Balance Appropriation, which contains some rollover funds for a OTPF grant, expenses for the video shoot in addition to several strategic one-time marketing project allocations.

Corrina Ruffieux presented the marketing & sales section of the budget, highlighting the major projects such as a national brand partnership, PR enhancements, and Open Haywood campaign.

Mike Huber made a motion to move the budget forward and call for a public hearing on June 25, 2025. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- Grants – Promotion and Legacy:
 - [Grant applications and details](#)
 - [Committee Recommendations](#) | **VOTE**

Jeremy Boone explained that Product Development Committee scored the grant applications individually, and then met to discuss the grants to ensure alignment with the Visit Haywood brand and Destination Master Plan. The final recommendations reflect the consensus of the group.

Jim Owens reinforced that the HCTDA is awarding grants for the entire county, and board and committee members need to look at the big picture and forgo opinion and personal benefit.

Corrina Ruffieux reminded the board how the occupancy tax is collected and restricted for spending and of the challenges of having 1% funds divided into 10 “buckets”. Corrina also reminded the board that, if there are funds available, the HCTDA will host a second round of grant funding in the fall.

Jim Owens reminded the board that after the Product Development Committee reviewed and scored the grants, the Executive Committee met to review the recommendations. Mike Huber called out that the Executive Committee recommended less funding for the Appalachian True Heritage Weekend grant, but generally agreed with the balance of the PDC recommendations. Jeff Hillis stated that it is important to determine what the Board criteria will be – the grant score, or the funding available. Angie Frisbee stated that the Product Development Committee did not know the available funding at the time of scoring, but it did influence their decision to fund a grant.

- Canton – Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the Canton grant funding. Scot Blair seconded the motion. Gail Mull recused herself. Motion passed unanimously.
- Clyde – Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the Clyde grant funding. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
- Lake Junaluska – Chad King made a motion to approve the Lake Junaluska grant funding. Jeff seconded the motion. Mike Huber recused himself from the Lake Junaluska grants. Motion passed unanimously.
- Maggie Valley – Mike Huber made a motion to approve Maggie Valley grant funding. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
- Waynesville – Jeff Hillis made a motion to approve Waynesville funding, with \$25,000 to Appalachian True Heritage Weekend. Mike Huber seconded the motion. Chuck Dickson recused himself from all Waynesville votes, and Scot Blair recused himself from the Haywood Restaurant Week application. Motion passed unanimously.
- County-Wide – Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the County-wide grant funding. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Scot Blair recused himself from the Haywood Restaurant Week application vote. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Expedia VRBO Contract](#) | **VOTE**

Dr. Shelley White made a motion to approve. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Marketing & Communications Plan](#) **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux presented the first-ever comprehensive plan to guide the FY 25-26 marketing efforts to align with the Destination Master Plan. Corrina reminded the board that a Marketing plan is a required document through Destinations International Accreditation program.

Mike Huber made a motion to approve the Marketing and Communications Plan, as presented. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [MMGY Scope of Work](#) | **VOTE**

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the scope of work to extend the PR agency contract through the end of June 2026 and authorize the Executive Director to sign. Angie Frisbee seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Website RFP](#) | **VOTE**

Bridget Shaughnessy made a motion to approve the website RFP. Dr. Shelley White seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Greenway Field Technician Proposal](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux reminded the board that she serves on the Haywood County Greenway Committee. Haywood Waterways Association presented this cost-sharing proposal to fund a Field Technician to handle Greenway litter cleanups, serve as the public contact, organize volunteer events, and provide monthly reports to each partner.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the funding for the project, provided the full funding amount is obtained. Bridget Shaughnessy seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

10. Staff Reports/Announcements

- Fat Burger Month Update

Corrina Ruffieux highlighted that 160 people completed the challenge and received a T-Shirt. 100% of the participants who completed the survey stated that they tried a new restaurant due to the campaign. Scot Blair added that the Scotsman sold way more burgers than he expected.

- Annual T-Shirt Contest

Alycin Ray presented the T-Shirt contest. We received 17 designs from 12 local artists and voting is open until June 6th.

- Group Press Trip

Amie Newsome announced that we hosted a recovery-focused group press trip. The journalists got to have one-on-one conversations with businesses who were affected by Helene.

- Open Haywood Campaign

Corrina Ruffieux presented the Open Roads, Open Skies, Open Haywood campaign. She explained that we are producing a video, and that Visit Haywood will give Elk Bucks to visitors who stay 2+ nights mid-week, which can be spent at Haywood County businesses who sign up to participate.

- Next TDA Board meeting is June 25, 2025 at 9 AM
- Adjournment

Chad King made a motion to adjourn. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 10:19 AM.

11. Ten Minute Media Communication Session