

HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes
June 25, 2025
Gaines Auditorium

Members Present: Jim Owens, Hannah White, Jeff Hillis, Angie Frisbee, Gail Mull, Bridget Shaughnessy, Chad King, Kristian Owen, Chuck Dickson, Jeremy Boone, Corrina Ruffieux, Hayley Printz, Alycin Ray, Amie Newsome, Ashley Rice

Members Absent: Dr. Shelley White, Mike Huber, Jennifer Best, Scot Blair

Guests Present: Jane Mauer, Sarah Zielke, Tia Evans

1. Call to Order – Chair Jim Owens called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM

2. Introductions

3. Adjustment of Agenda

4. Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)

- Jane Mauer announced that as of May, park traffic is down 9%. She also stated that the new Smokies Life Guide is out with new ranger activities and an updated map.

5. Board Comments

- Jim explained to the Board that the Haywood Chamber Annual Dinner was Monday night, and the theme of the event was resiliency and recovery after Helene. He announced that Corrina Ruffieux received the Leader of the Year award and congratulated her for her work.
- Angie Frisbee announced that Route 19's bridge will open in 2 weeks.

6. Public Hearing on FY 2025-2026 [Budget Ordinance](#) | VOTE

- Jim opened the public hearing. No public comments. Jim closed the public hearing.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to adopt the budget ordinance. Jeff Hillis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

7. Consent Agenda | VOTE

- Request approval of minutes – [May 28, 2025](#)

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

8. Finance Reports

- [May Financial Report](#) – Kristian Owen presented the May financials as follows:
 - Total Checking/Savings - \$4,638,668.50
 - Total Assets - \$4,687,407.94
 - Total Liabilities - \$304,308.93
 - Total Occupancy Tax Revenue May - \$181,904.63
 - Total Occupancy Tax Revenue YTD - \$2,155,794.64
 - Total Income May - \$200,247.51
 - Total Income YTD - \$2,440,146.41
 - Total Expense May - \$257,056.87

- Total Expense YTD - \$2,047,501.96
- Change in Net Position May – (\$56,809.36)
- Change in Net Position YTD - \$392,644.45

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

Corrina presented the occupancy tax comparison, showing that we are currently tracking down 10.29%. The year over year tax comparison shows that we are tracking a little bit low, but we are working to increase occupancy for the summer.

Corrina presented data from Zartico on the Summer Travel Outlook. Reports show that consumer confidence is going down, and since travel is an optional spend, it will be down a bit. Hotel occupancy is pacing down, but there are later booking windows so we still have an opportunity to bring travelers here. Budget travelers are exhibiting “wait and see” behaviors, and data shows that families skipped spring travel to save for summer travel.

9. Old Business

- Year-End Budget Amendments – [Administration](#), [Marketing](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux presented the Administration Budget Amendment, highlighting that the overall budget would not change, it would simply shift funds from one bucket to another to clean up the budget.

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

Corrina presented the Marketing Budget Amendment, highlighting that this amendment would change our overall budget. She explained that due to adding an additional day to the video and photo shoot, Kristian added that the \$46,200 will come from Interest Earnings and Fund Balance.

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

- [Grant Extension Request](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that the Downtown Waynesville Commission is requesting another extension for the alleyway mural project. The original grant was awarded in the FY 22-23 cycle and a grant extension was granted June 30, 2023.

Hannah White added that the Town of Waynesville lost another grant, so that was part of the delay in publishing the RFQ. Jeff Hillis clarified that Waynesville has plenty of funds available, so there would still be money to fund the project if it is extended. Chuck Dickson stated that perhaps the extension letter should specify that this is the last extension that will be granted. Jeff Hillis agreed.

Angie Frisbee made a motion to approve the grant extension. Bridget Shaughnessy seconded the motion. Chuck Dickson recused himself from the vote. Motion passed unanimously.

- Grant Guidelines Improvements – [Legacy](#), [Promotion](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux presented the revisions to the Legacy Event Sponsorship grant guidelines, showing that the only change is a clause that allows exceptions for gaps in production “due to natural disasters or states of emergency, such as COVID, Helene, etc.). She also presented the revised numbers on the scoring sheet.

Corrina Ruffieux presented the proposed revisions to the Tourism Promotion grant guidelines, adding descriptions to the Market Research section and changing a few administrative items. Jim Owens stated that Executive Committee reviewed the proposed changes. Jeff Hillis added that there was a grant application that scored just below the threshold and they decided to fund – he stated that we still want to preserve the opportunity for the TDA Board to approve applications, regardless of their average score.

Chad King made a motion to approve the grant guidelines revisions, as presented. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

10. New Business

- [DCI Contract](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux presented the DCI contract, highlighting that the full budget does not go to DCI because a portion of the budget is for media buy. Jeff Hillis added that the budget was discussed at length at the Marketing Committee and agreed with the proposed budget. Chuck Dickson added that Finance Committee also reviewed the budget.

Jeff Hillis made a motion to approve the DCI contract, as presented, and authorize Corrina Ruffieux to sign the contract. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Our State Contract](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux presented the Our State contract for \$62,705, noting that the funds are already in the budget. Jeff Hillis clarified that this contract has increased from last year. Ashley Rice confirmed that last year it was around \$50,000 and Corrina Ruffieux explained that there is additional print advertising in the new contract, which is important after our re-branding.

Jeff Hillis made a motion to approve the Our State contract, as presented, and authorize Corrina Ruffieux to sign it. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

11. Staff Reports/Announcements

- Ice Fest Weekend Economic Impact

Corrina Ruffieux presented the Event Impact Calculator (EIC), and explained that it measures the tourism-specific economic impact of an event and removes local spending to focus on spending by visitors. She explained the difference between types of impact: direct impact, indirect impact, and induced impact.

Corrina Ruffieux presented data from the Visit Haywood Ice Fest Weekend. Leveraging our Maggie Valley only ticket sales and survey data, we can input that information into the EIC for a conservative estimate of the impact of the entire four-day event.

The EIC removes local attendees from the data input into the calculator, and calculates the direct (\$434,383) and total (\$566,086) impact of the event.

- Annual T-Shirt Contest

Alycin Ray announced that the winner of the first Annual T-Shirt Contest is AJ James, from Euphoria Tattoo. His design, “Light of the Mountains” received 199 votes out of the 1,000 total public votes. Alycin Ray explained that we have purchased the shirts in 2 colors and will have them printed by a local company, Old North Prints. They will be for sale in the Welcome Center, online, and in Mast General Store in July.

- Open Haywood Summer Campaign

Corrina announced that the Open Skies, Open Roads, Open Haywood campaign is now live and we have ads running on Expedia and VRBO, YouTube, Meta, Google, and more. For the campaign, we are focusing on drive markets. Visitors who book a qualifying overnight stay can earn Elk Bucks (a digital gift card) to spend at local businesses. We had 110 businesses sign up to participate.

Corrina played the video ad, with music from Buddy Melton. Corrina asked the Board members to share the video on social media.

- Visit NC Mountains Campaign

Ashley Rice explained that Visit NC has started a new campaign to highlight the mountains of North Carolina. They are running digital, social, native and audio ads, print ads, etc. The ads will start this Friday and run through the anniversary of Helene. Ashley stated that each community would have an opportunity to show writers around their communities.

- SATW Conference

Corrina explained that there was an opportunity to bid to host the 2026 Society of American Travel Writers’ Annual Conference. The conference would allow us to bring 250 travel writers to Haywood County on the 2nd anniversary of Helene. Corrina also announced that we got a letter of support from the NC Governor. Jim Owens added that this is a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Haywood County, as the conference is usually hosted in big cities.

- Behind the Scenes – New Brand Photo/Video Shoot

Corrina Ruffieux showed behind the scenes photos from the video shoot, as well as the professional photos that were captured.

- Next TDA Board meeting is August 27, 2025 at 9 AM

- Adjournment

Gail Mull made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Angie Frisbee seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 9:53 AM.

12. Ten Minute Media Communication Session