

**Rowan County Tourism Development Authority
Regular Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 8, 2010**

Members Present: Dave Redden, Millie Cress, Michelle Patterson, Jerry Chandler, Steve Hall, Gretchen Witt, Andrew Watters, Kelly Alexander; James Meacham & Lesley Pullium, Staff

Not Attending: Raymond Coltrain, Brian Miller

Guests: Mark Lewis, Salisbury Tourism Development Authority. Diana Moghrabi, City of Salisbury, and Jon Barber, Rowan County Commissioner

Call to Order: Chairman Michelle Patterson called the TDA meeting to order at 12:05 PM.

James Meacham gave the invocation.

Patterson asked Jon Barber if he would update the board regarding the RCTDA Board appointments from the Rowan County Commission meeting that occurred last night.

Barber reported that Mr. James Thompson who is employed in the Rowan County Assessors Office was appointed to the RCTDA board.

Meeting Agenda:

Motion: Dave Redden made a motion for approval of the meeting agenda.

Second: Millie Cress

Motion: Approved

Approval of the Minutes:

Motion: Millie Cress made the motion for approval of the August 2010 regular meeting minutes.

Second: Gretchen Witt

Motion: Approved

Committee Reports:

Budget & Finance Committee

Meacham reported that RCTDA finished the month of August with a net income of \$17,438. The year-to-date total revenue is \$93,842 with expenses of \$ 45,692 leaving a net income of \$48,149. Meacham noted that RCTDA finished the month of July 2010 up 8.1% in occupancy tax collections from the previous year. There is one property that still has outstanding taxes at this time both for the month and the previous month.

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Moving forward the interesting trend will be around September – November which is when the market started to rebound last year. Comparing this year's totals with last years will offer a good indication of whether the market is sustaining itself and will continue to improve.

Meacham reported that there are indications that the Travelodge will be declaring bankruptcy. Meacham has been in touch with Jay Dees, the Rowan County Attorney and Dees is working on this issue.

Meacham said that some of the hoteliers have approached him about a new policy stating that if a property is collecting the taxes but not remitting them the TDA as the marketing agency for the destination will effectively remove that property from the marketing promotions and materials as they are collecting the taxes but not contributing them. Meacham said that he will touch base with some of the other hoteliers and get their input and then bring the policy before the board for consideration in October.

Personnel & Policy Committee

Meacham reported that in regards to the new part-time position, over 100 applications were received all were graded and scored on a baseline system. The ten top scoring applicants were invited in for a skill assessment test, seven of those actually came in to take the test and the top two scoring candidates were invited in for formal interviews. Meacham, Patterson and Pullium met with those two candidates and during that process of evaluating the candidates it was realized that there were two very good candidates that fit two very different but important needs with the bureau. Melissa Murguz, who has been working with RCTDA as the Trolley Coordinator was promoted to Visitor Center & Trolley Coordinator and will be continuing her duties with the Trolleys as well as the Visitor Center.

The original position of Tourism Services Coordinator has been filled by Kristen Trexler, who is a NC State graduate in Tourism and Recreation and is from Rowan County. Kristen will be working with the marketing campaigns, the kiosk and community partners program, updating the calendars and generating newsletters and other public relations.

Both positions are part-time and allow the staff to expand and cover more of the work load as well as stay within the budgetary guidelines. Melissa and Kristen are currently in Greenville, SC at a tourism training program. Both will attend the October TDA Board meeting.

Patterson reported that at the last TDA meeting it was agreed that RCTDA would participate in a Joint Marketing Committee with STCDC. The RCTDA Executive committee along with the Personnel Committee will be meeting to revise the By-Laws making changes to include the Joint Marketing Committee.

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Meacham reported that since the board reappointments have been completed the Executive committee will meet to determine a slate of officers for the TDA board and will present those to the board at the next meeting.

Marketing Committee:

Meacham gave the committee report updating the board on the NC Cooperative marketing program that markets the entire destination in partnership with the NC State Tourism Division. At this time, 15% into the program, 5807 leads have been collected, from just 3 print ads and the Thomas Sweepstakes currently being featured on visitnc.com. The Thomas the Tank Sweepstakes in which RCTDA partnered with several community partners to offer a weekend package for a family of four has generated 7,000 leads. 2000 of those individuals have agreed to supply their contact information for future marketing.

Meacham reported on the latest tourism economic statistics reported by the state of North Carolina for the past year. A press release was published in the Salisbury Post last Sunday that detailed the information released. In 2009, the Rowan County tourism economy grew which is really amazing considering that only 6 counties in the entire state grew in 2009. Rowan was the 2nd fastest growing county with \$118.5M in tourism expenditures. There was an overall 2% increase and 60 tourism related jobs were added and locally tax receipts rose. The entire state tourism economy was down 7.4% totally. Rowan County actually outpaced the state by 9.4% which shows how well the local partners have performed. Catawba and Guilford counties were down 14%,

The partnership marketing program with the state is very important in the goal to continue to grow the local tourism economy. The state marketing is all targeted to out-of-state individuals.

Commissioner Barber commented that being one of only six counties that grew in entire state was very impressive and if people are attracted to the area for tourism what is the interrelationship for economic development? This goes beyond just tourism and equates to economic development. Meacham agreed that tourism is economic development at its purest form.

At the last RCTDA Board meeting the Joint Marketing Committee was approved and 10 appointments have been made to the that committee with five members from the RCTDA Marketing Committee and five from the STCDC Marketing Committee. Kelly Alexander is serving as the Committee Chair and the committee's first meeting will be Thursday, September 9th.

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The CVB staff will support the 10 member committee which will develop sub-committee's to address various marketing components such as grants, sponsorships, the kiosk and partnership education program, and the Holiday marketing campaign.

The STCDC Board will be reporting to the Salisbury City Council at the September 2010 meeting and the RCTDA Board will submit a written report to the Rowan County Commission.

Tourism Master Plan: Patterson reported that at the last RCTDA meeting the board approved setting aside the funding for a Tourism Master Plan and authorized her to work with the Salisbury Tourism & Cultural Development Commission to establish a joint taskforce from RCTDA and STCDC to develop the details of an RFQ for a Tourism Master Plan. Patterson, Lewis, Meacham, and Morris have met and developed a roster of individuals and are in the process of contacting those people to see who is willing to serve on that committee. Once the committee is in place work will begin on the development of an RFQ to send out for bid.

The F & M Trolley Condition: Meacham reported that at the recent F&M Customer Appreciation event at Fieldcrest Stadium the F&M Trolley was in route to participate in the festivities on behalf of RCTDA and F&M and broke down right outside the gates of the stadium. The F&M Trolley is in very poor condition. Meacham has met with Paul and Steve Fisher to talk about the Trolley and possible funding. Meacham said there have been some very basic conversations with the leaders of both TDA boards about the condition of the Trolleys. The Trolleys are used for many rentals, tours and events as well as for Saturday tours April to October.

RCTDA has owned the Trolley's since 2001 the condition of the F&M Trolley has deteriorated substantially and has some severe repair issues. F&M has expressed that the F&M Trolley will need to be available and working for the Holiday Caravan Parade as the F&M staff uses it each year to participate in the parade. The City mechanics are doing a great job keeping it going with any option available to them.

Meacham reports that both staff and the City Transit engineers have been looking at replacement options. Any new Trolley acquired would assume the role of the F&M Trolley with a possible in-kind sponsorship from the F&M Bank. The current F&M Trolley would be used as replacement parts for the RBA Trolley as they are both the same make and model.

Salisbury Tourism Development & Cultural Commission:

Mark Lewis gave an update on the STCDC stating that the occupancy tax revenues collected by the STCDC were up 7.6% in July. STCDC is currently having the same issue with the Travelodge regarding tax collection.

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Lewis reported that STCDC is projecting collections of around \$300,000 this year and he reminded the board that 1/3 of those funds can be used for capital related projects. \$100,000 of those funds roughly will go to the Destination Development Committee who is charged with overseeing and recommending projects back to the full STCDC board for utilization of those funds. The committee has been discussing three items in particular which include wayfinding signage, Trolleys and the Kiosk system.

The City of Salisbury had previously completed a wayfinding and signage study and that information has been used in discussions by the STCDC Destination Development Committee in which they agreed to hire Buzz Bissell of Bissell Designs to design the components of the wayfinding signage system.

Another topic of conversation has been the upkeep and replacement of the Salisbury Historic Trolleys. The STCDC feels the Trolleys are very important to the overall tourism package in Downtown. Neither of the TDAs can borrow money so the STCDC has been looking into the possibility of the City of Salisbury purchasing a Trolley through the capital replacement budget and then the Trolley can be leased to own from the City of Salisbury through a capital lease.

The third item that the Destination Development committee has discussed is the Kiosk system (POS) that can be placed at all of the tourism sites around the county to direct visitors to other tourism sites and attractions.

The other \$200,000 of the total budget will go to the Joint Marketing committee for use in destination marketing in combination with the marketing funds from RCTDA. Lewis said that it is important to have one face which represents the destination to the visitor and that will be the staff of the Rowan County Tourism Development Authority and Visitor Center. Lewis said that STCDC values the relationship and the organization and is looking forward to working together.

Lewis said that the Historic Salisbury Foundation has been awarded a marketing grant for OctoberTour 2010. \$5000 from each TDA was awarded with some of the funds being in-kind and with stipulations relating to promoting the entire destination, production of video and photos, and sharing of demographic data and mailing lists.

Next Meeting Date:

The next regular scheduled meeting of the TDA Board will be held on Wednesday, October 13, 2010 at 12 Noon. The meeting will take place in the Gateway Building, Salisbury. There being no further business to discuss meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Steve Hall
Secretary to the Board
Prepared by: Lesley Pullium, Clerk to the Board