

Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority

Board Meeting Minutes

March 22, 2024, 9:00 a.m.
Ocracoke Community Center

Present: Kenny Ballance (Chair), Susie O'Neal Rockel (remote), Lisa Landrum

Donny Shumate, BJ Oelschlegel, Helena Stevens, and Randall Matthews.

Absent: Jennifer Esham

I. Call to Order

Chair, Kenny Ballance calls the meeting to Order.

II. Approval of OTTDA Meeting Minutes, January 19, 2024

Lisa motioned to approve the minutes without correction, Susie seconds. Motion passed.

III. Chris Cavanaugh – Magellan Strategy Group

The presentation delved into the operations and responsibilities of destination leadership organizations within North Carolina's tourism landscape, particularly focusing on the intricate legal framework governing occupancy taxes. It highlighted that these taxes are pivotal revenue sources for destination promotion and tourism-related expenditures.

A key emphasis was placed on the fiduciary duty of destination organizations in managing these funds prudently. The concept of destination leadership was elucidated, portraying these organizations as more than marketers, but as entities responsible for steering the strategic direction of tourism development.

The presentation elucidated the distinction between destination promotion and tourism-related expenditures, illustrating how these funds are allocated strategically to bolster destination competitiveness. It showcased examples of collaborative initiatives, such as those in Brevard and Gate City, where destination organizations partnered with stakeholders to enhance visitor experiences through product development and enhancement.

Furthermore, the concept of "tourism fairy dust" was introduced, highlighting the strategic utilization of existing assets to elevate destination appeal. By creatively enhancing infrastructure and storytelling, destinations can curate memorable experiences for visitors, thereby driving economic benefits and sustaining long-term growth.

Overall, the presentation underscored the multifaceted role of destination organizations in orchestrating tourism development, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and strategically investing in initiatives that enhance destination attractiveness and competitiveness.

IV. Avenir Bold Advertisement Update- Scott Scaggs

Scott's presentation outlined strategies to boost tourism on Ocracoke Island, North Carolina, addressing challenges like ferry frustrations and lack of awareness. The goal is to attract visitors by highlighting unique experiences and the island's laid-back atmosphere. A creative theme, "We don't have everything. You're welcome," was introduced, emphasizing Ocracoke's distinctiveness. Various ad formats, including print,

carousel, video, and native ads, were presented to showcase attractions and drive engagement. The campaign recently launched aims to maximize tourism during peak and shoulder seasons.

V. Hyde County Occupancy Tax Collections and Projections

The fiscal year's occupancy tax collections through January totaled \$409,856, marking a 4% increase compared to the previous year's first eight months. Projecting conservatively for the remaining four months, using 95% of last year's comparable period collections, yields an estimated total of \$499,000—\$9,000 above the current fiscal year's budget. Even with a more conservative approach, projecting at 93% or 90%, the total remains above budget at \$494,000. Monthly updates will continue to monitor collections.

VI. FY24/25 Budget Review

Jeff Dippold reviewed the FY24/25 drafted budget. The projected total revenue from occupancy tax collections aligns with the current fiscal year's budget at \$490,000. Despite anticipated expenditures exceeding this amount, surplus funds from previous years cover the difference. As of June 30, 2024, a projected reserve of \$275,000 exists. Utilizing \$137,000 of excess collections in the budget still maintains over \$100,000 in reserve, meeting the target of 16% of the total budget. Reallocating funds or adding budget lines remains feasible while preserving the \$100,000 reserve target.

Eleanor Talley suggests launching a public relations campaign to raise awareness about the ferry system issues, targeting stakeholders, legislators, and the public. The campaign aims to highlight the significance of the ferry system and garner support for improvements. The PR campaign can be quickly activated and tailored to align with legislative sessions. The campaign can be launched well before the high season begins with swift action. The proposed timeline allows for engagement with legislators before their session starts, potentially influencing funding decisions. She suggests working with Helena to have something to react to in a couple of weeks.

A. Jeffery Dippold suggests adding a \$35,000 line to the budget, calling it the 'Island Accessibility PR Campaign.'
Lisa motioned to approve the revised budget, BJ seconds, and the motion passed.

VII. New Business

A. Island Inn Update – Ken DeBarth

Ken updated that the restoration project for the main building is underway, primarily focusing on the installation of a septic system and exterior restoration. OPS is pursuing grants totaling \$93,000 from the French Community Foundation and the Philip Everly Foundation to support this effort and support from the occupancy tax to contribute to the restoration costs, aiming for a budget of \$500,000 for completion within 18-24 months. Landscaping initiatives, including fundraising, are ongoing, with plans for continued enhancement. The restroom project is on track for completion by the end of April, with adjustments to accommodate the septic system's location. Construction of a storage shed with OCBA is in the works to support gardening and storage needs.

B. EV Charging Station Update

Heidi Smith from Tideland EMC has an existing EV charger, and she's inquiring with the manufacturer about its suitability for our conditions, considering factors like salt and weather. This could be a convenient way to step into EV charging without starting from scratch. Heidi will update once she has that information.

C. Tram Stop Update – Helena Stevens

A bench is being installed at the new tram stop at Ride the Wind by Michael Kalna, located just left of the entry. Jason Daniels installed new signage at all tram stops, including the additional one. New walking map signage is now installed at the Hatteras and Ocracoke shelters. A QR code sticker for tram stop benches is also being developed with a link to the Tram Twitter feed.

D. Future of the Pony Herd

A letter is drafted for Superintendent David Hallac regarding the Ocracoke Pony Herd. It is confirmed the letter can be used for posts. Kenny motioned to send the letter to Superintendent Hallac and Lisa seconds. The motion passes.

- E. During the meeting, the board discussed Fletcher O'Neil's request for funding to build a privacy fence between his property and the TDA-leased parking lot. The board decided to draft a letter to Fletcher explaining their decision. Lisa motioned to build a fence between Fletcher and the TDA parking lot. Susie seconds the motion to consider. The motion fails. Three nays, and one aye. The board will draft a letter to Fletcher with the decision.

VII. Executive Director Report

March 2024:

- Coordinated the creation of the 2024 Ocracoke walking map.
- Coordinated installation of benches and signage for tram stops at Reed the Wind.
- Updated transit and ferry shelter maps for printing and installation.
- Partnered with Discover the Carolinas for photography and social media content creation.
- Scheduled photoshoot and ad placement with QC Magazine
- Coordinated with freelance writers for website and blog content.
- Gave a presentation at the virtual travel guide roadshow.
- Worked on sponsorship for the World 1000 social event.
- Coordinated filming of North Carolina Weekend show for PBS.
- Represented Ocracoke and pitched stories at industry events.
- Invited to participate in Visit NC media mission in New York in September.
- Worked on draft budget planning for fiscal year 2425.
- Managed social media presence with over 51,000 combined followers.
- Coordinated distribution of walking maps and mailings.
- Handled ongoing administrative tasks and responded to inquiries.
- Collaborated with the ferry division on marketing for the passenger ferry, including potential exposure through Tarheel Traveler. The report also mentioned ongoing activities such as updating the VisitNC database, processing invoices, and maintaining transparency through meeting minutes and packets.