



Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority  
Board Meeting Minutes  
Friday, May 17, 2024, 9:00 am

Meeting held virtually via Facebook Live Stream (Zoom) set up by Donny Shumate

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

OTTDA STAFF: Helena Stevens

I. Call to Order

Kenny Ballance calls the meeting to order at 9am.

II. Approval of March Meeting Minutes

Helena makes a motion to approve the minutes. Kenny seconds. Minutes are approved.

III. Avenir Bold Advertising Update

Tom Hickey gives a presentation:

Objectives: Attract new visitors, increase awareness and familiarity

Focus Areas: North Carolina, Virginia, Washington DC (excluding Pine County)

Channels & Budget: Google Search Ads, Facebook & Instagram Ads, Programmatic Ads, YouTube Ads. Budget: \$160,000. Tom Hickey notes that this is one of the most successful YouTube campaigns he has seen to date.

Key Results: Website Traffic saw a significant increase; 2024 campaign is more efficient than 2023.

Channel Performance:

YouTube: Spend: \$20,812, Impressions: 4M+, Engagement Rate: 48.83% (Benchmark: 31.9%), View Rate: 42% (Benchmark: 29%), Cost Per View: < \$0.01 (Benchmark: \$0.47)

Facebook & Instagram: Impressions: 4.8M, Reach: 1M unique people, Clicks: 34K+, CPM: \$4.40 (Benchmark: \$10.16), Cost Per Result: \$0.73 (Benchmark: \$0.94)



Programmatic Ads: Spend: \$50,000 (with \$10,000 added value), Impressions: 5M+, Clicks: 9K+, Video Completion Rate: 89.81% (Benchmark: 84.05%), Native Ad CTR: 0.22% (Benchmark: 0.16%), Display Ad CTR: 0.22% (Benchmark: 0.21%)

Conclusion: Campaign exceeds expectations; more traffic anticipated as peak season approaches.

Elenor Talley provides a PR update showcasing recent achievements in securing media coverage from prominent outlets such as Figaro, Local Palate, and Coastal Review. The ongoing efforts to promote Ocracoke were highlighted as yielding positive outcomes. Several upcoming events were announced, including a passenger ferry event on May 20 and the Whirlwind 1000 and Sailboat Cruise on May 22-23. It was also noted that both attendees would participate in the PRSA Travel and Tourism conference in Greenville, SC, from June 2 to 5. Future plans involve a New York City media mission in the fall. The successful coverage from Figaro was highlighted as particularly significant, as it helps attract international tourists to the area.

#### IV. Financial Discussion/ Hyde County

Helena reads an update from Jeff Dippold. Jeff's update on occupancy tax collections for April 2024 showed a total of \$9,789, a 13.9% increase from April 2023. For the first 10 months of the fiscal year, collections reached \$424,493, a 4.7% increase from the previous year. Projected collections for the remaining two months exceed the budgeted amount for the fiscal year, providing a surplus for potential future expenses. Further details on fiscal year 2023-2024 collections will be provided to the board as available.

#### V. Fiscal year 24/25 Budget Update

Helena provides an update on occupancy tax collections, exceeding budget. The board discusses rising costs of living on Ocracoke Island, including housing, insurance, and rental rates.

The budget has been approved and filed with the county. Helena will get a new copy of the ordinance.

#### VI. New Business

##### A. Marketing and Strategy discussion

Helena inquires if everyone is on board with the current strategy and presentation going forward.

There are concerns about ferry ridership numbers, which are reportedly low. This decline is attributed to poor ferry service over the past three years, resulting in bad PR and negative experiences deterring visitors. Conversations suggest that visitors from other parts of the Outer Banks who would usually take day trips to Ocracoke are now avoiding it. Additionally, the



overall sentiment among business owners in the village is that business is down, especially in the day-tripper economy. Although occupancy tax collections show an increase, the actual business activity feels reduced compared to previous years. There's also anxiety about road accessibility affecting visitor plans.

Helena was part of a call with Steinberg, Randall, and Chris, during which Steinberg expressed his desire to present to the board virtually at the next meeting. He will attend the meeting virtually. There was also a discussion about inviting some legislators in August to visit. Plans are beginning to take shape, and Steinberg is excited to meet the board and engage in these conversations. Progress.

Elenor discusses the PR plan for ferry issues that is in development, recognizing the complexity and need for better funding. Efforts will include raising awareness in Raleigh and Washington DC, engaging various stakeholders, writing letters, and inviting people to the island. The plan will be presented at the next meeting.

#### B. Audit contract

Julia Cahoon from Hyde County informed that the audit contract price for the TDA audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, has increased from \$3,150 to \$4,750.

Kenny makes a motion to approve the increased contract amount. BJ seconds. Motion passes.

### VII. Old Business

#### A. Island Inn Commons update from Ken DeBarth

The project will help bring the two remaining sites up to the standards of Route 12 and the Lighthouse Road site. There are two pending grant applications—one from Avery Foundation and one from the Community Foundation. If these grants are approved, it will aid the project significantly. Tom indicated that due to other big projects, there may not be any construction progress until late summer.

The bathroom building is complete. There are heaters. Galen is finishing the septic system.

Handicap parking space still needs to be addressed.

Debbie and Tom plan to build a shared storage shed and use unused space for wedding venues and improved parking negotiated with OCBA. Ken DeBarth discussed progress on the building project, including the use of World War II buoys. Kenny expressed optimism about the project's completion by the end of next year. Debbie has been monumental in raising funds.



## 1. B. EV Charging Station Update

Helena spoke to Heidi Smith from Tideland about an update on the EV charging stations. They contacted a vendor for marine environment-designed chargers but have not received a response. The current EV charger does not perform well in salt air, and there's no timeline for a solution, leaving the project at a standstill. Suggestions or ideas are welcome.

## VIII. Executive Director Report

### A. Walking Map Update

Helena relays that the walking maps are being distributed, with some rack card displays needing replacement on the sound side ferries. There's a discussion about potentially replacing racks with screens for more current and environmentally friendly distribution methods. Additionally, efforts are underway to revamp a shadowbox at the Hatteras ferry terminal for more relevant messaging or QR codes. The maps are being stored and distributed strategically to ferry offices and businesses, with consideration for future approaches such as apps or updated formats for the coming years.

### B. PR Update

Helena mentions that Eleanor covered most of the PR update and discussed potential innovations in map distribution, considering options like QR codes or digital screens. Additionally, she noted a successful visit by Deborah Holt Norris from North Carolina Weekend, with the segment scheduled to air on June 27.

### C. Upcoming Initiatives and Recent Activities

Helena presented upcoming initiatives and recent activities, including journalist visits for content creation, a photoshoot with Discover the Carolinas for advertising, and collaboration with the ferry division for a passenger ferry kickoff event. Advocacy efforts for transit funding were discussed, along with participation in the Worrell 1000 event and a TDA-sponsored social gathering. Attendees were briefed on the director's engagement at the Travel South Showcase and ongoing social media endeavors. Helena updated the board on office relocation plans and transitioning to Starlink for improved internet connectivity.

## IX. Public Input/Questions/Comments (None)

## X. Next meeting June 21, 2024

## ADJOURNMENT

Kenny motions to adjourn. The motion passes. The meeting concludes.