



Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority
Board Meeting Minutes
Friday, September 12, 2025, 9:00 am
Ocracoke Community Center

Present: Susie Rockel, Lisa Landrum, BJ Oelschlägel, Helena Stevens, Will Adams, Justin LeBlanc

Absent: Jennifer Esham

Resignation Noted: Grayson Kirk

Note: The agenda order was adjusted at the start of the meeting to allow for the election of a new Chair and introduction of a new Board member prior to the financial report.

I. Call to Order

Prior to the official start of the meeting, Susie Rockel made a motion to elect Will Adams as Chair of the Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority. The motion was seconded by Lisa Landrum and passed unanimously.

The meeting was then called to order at 9:07 a.m. by acting Chair Susie Rockel.

II. Approval of June 20, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Lisa Landrum made a motion to approve the minutes of the June 20, 2025, meeting. Susie Rockel seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Introduction of New Board Member

Following his election as Chair, the Board welcomed Will Adams as a new member.

IV. Financial Discussion / Hyde County

Helena Stevens reported that June 2025 collections totaled \$107,400, which was \$5,932 above June 2024. July 2025 collections totaled \$108,903, which was \$5,169 above July 2024. Combined collections for June and July were \$216,304 compared with \$205,202 for the same period the year before.

The year-end summary for Fiscal Year 2024–2025 showed total collections of \$513,793 against a budget of \$490,000. Expenses were within budget, with net earnings of approximately \$43,000. Based on projections, fiscal year 2025–2026 revenues are expected to meet or exceed the \$500,000 budget.

V. Executive Director's Report

Helena Stevens reported on marketing and outreach initiatives. She noted the ongoing WAVY TV Hampton Roads Show partnership, which has featured Ocracoke segments on soft adventure, seafood and fig festivals, oysters, and the Blackbeard Festival. On-island filming in August included Howard's Pub, Ocracoke Coffee Company, Village.



Craftsmen, Island Carts, and the NPS Discovery Center, along with scenic footage of Springer’s Point, the lighthouse, the ponies, Howard Street, and Silver Lake. She stated that the transition to the new digital marketing company, Media One, is underway, including a website redesign and improvements to SEO. Domain authority remains stable at forty-one. She reported that Ocracoke hosted the Discovery Channel “Expedition X” team and continues to coordinate influencer visits. She concluded by noting recent and upcoming conferences, including ESTO in August, the Visit NC In-State Media Mission in October, and the NC Travel Industry Association in November.

VI. Old Business

Island Inn Commons Project

Ken DeBarth reported that structural work under the front of the building has been completed, and the exterior is nearly finished. The Cannon Foundation awarded a \$47,970 grant, which exceeded the original request to help offset inflation. Preservation North Carolina staff visited in August and expressed strong support for the project. He noted that inquiries have already been received for weddings and family events in 2026. Community involvement continues through sponsorships, student projects, and garden improvements. A pergola and storage addition has been completed. Fundraising has exceeded construction costs, and a historic home tour fundraiser is scheduled for Thanksgiving weekend. Starlink internet service was struck by lightning in July and remains out of service.

Lighthouse Parking Mural Project

The Board discussed progress on the proposed mural project, intended to create a barrier to prevent pedestrians from cutting through private property. Design concepts include panels featuring ponies, the lighthouse, and other historic themes. Research into materials, costs, and artist options is ongoing.

VII. New Business

EV Stations

The Board discussed the potential for electric vehicle charging stations to support visitor access. No action was taken.

FY 25/26 Board Committee Selections

The Board noted the need to establish a budget committee to make recommendations on the use of net earnings and future allocations. Formal appointments will be made later.

Parking

Parking concerns were discussed in relation to visitor access and the Island Inn project.

Community Calendar

The Board discussed the need for a coordinated community calendar to promote events and agreed to continue exploring how best to implement one.



Ocracoke Access Alliance

Justin LeBlanc presented on the formation of the Ocracoke Access Alliance, a 501(c)(4) organization created to supplement Hyde County's advocacy for ferry operations, NC 12 stabilization, dredging, and other resiliency projects. He explained that ferry operations have been underfunded for decades, with the Ferry Division borrowing against future budgets to cover current expenses. The Alliance has secured \$25,000 in initial funding from five businesses, each contributing \$5,000, covering approximately 2.5 months of operations. The annual fundraising goal is \$120,000.

LeBlanc outlined strategies for coalition-building with suppliers, such as Sysco, UPS, and FedEx, as well as for visitor engagement, including the use of QR codes and postcards distributed on ferry lines. He emphasized the importance of communications to counter negative publicity about road flooding and ferry delays.

Board members discussed the matter and agreed that visitor access is the community's highest priority. The Board further agreed that Ocracoke needs professional advocacy at the state and federal levels. Susie Rockel made a motion to allocate \$25,000 from OTTDA funds to the Ocracoke Access Alliance. Lisa Landrum seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Legislative Engagement

The Board reviewed the recent visit of Representative Kidwell, during which he toured the school, fish house, and NC 12 overwash sites. The board agreed that it is important for legislators to see island conditions firsthand. The possibility of hosting a legislative fishing trip, modeled after duck hunts attended by legislators from the mainland, was discussed. Participation in the NC Travel Industry Association's fall policy dinner was also noted as a valuable outreach opportunity. Following the discussion, Susie Rockel made a motion to allocate up to \$10,000 to sponsor a legislative fishing or hunting trip. Lisa Landrum seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

IX. Public Comments

Members of the public emphasized the need to prioritize visitor access over funding for festivals and events. While acknowledging the potential for community pushback, overall support for the access project was clear.

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:30 a.m.