



Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority
Board Meeting Agenda
Friday, February 20, 2026 – 9:00 am
Ocracoke Community Center

Present:

Board: BJ Oelschlagel, Will Adams, Roger Garrish, Ray Murray, Doreen Gaskill

Supporting Staff: Helena Stevens, Jeff Dippold

Presenters: Justin LeBlanc, Ken Debarth, Sundae Horn

I. Call to Order

The Meeting was called to order at 9:00 am by Chair Will Adams.

II. Approval of January 9, 2026 Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the January 9, 2026, meeting minutes was made by Will Adams and seconded by Roger Garrish. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Financial Discussion / Hyde County

A. Hyde County Occupancy Tax Collections/Projections Update

Jeff provided an update on 2% Hyde County occupancy tax collections for January 2026 (overnight stays occurring in December 2025). January collections totaled \$3,637, down from \$6,685 in the previous January due to one key remitter not submitting payment. Year-to-date collections for the first seven months totaled \$427,473, representing 86% of the \$500,000 annual budget and exceeding the same period in the previous fiscal year.

Based on current trends, total collections are projected at approximately \$515,615 for the fiscal year, which is \$15,615 above budget and \$1,822 greater than FY2024/2025 actual collections of \$513,807. The board will continue to monitor collections monthly.

B. FY 2025/26 Actual Revenues and Expenses vs. Budget through January 2026

Expenses through January totaled \$264,449 and were generally in line with budget expectations. A \$30,000 payment was made to Media One for digital marketing services. OPS funding was paid in July as scheduled. The walking map is another large expenditure that is nearly at the budget. Advertising campaign totals \$60,000 a year.

C. FY 2025/26 Board Discretionary Pool

A balance of \$71,000 remains in the current year's budget. A majority of it will be used for lighthouse parking, annual tram stop maintenance, and signage. Approximately \$8,400 is unallocated for the year. \$4,000 from the cancelled Worrell 1000 event and \$3,000 from the Island Inn Starlink budget will not be utilized this year and remain available. Combined, \$12,400

is available for potential reallocation. Will moved to reallocate \$7,000 to the Board's discretionary pool. Ray seconded the motion. Motion passed.

D. Budget Committee: Updates and Next Steps

The Budget Committee reported it met twice and discussed the preliminary FY 2026/2027 draft budget. A formal public presentation is scheduled for the April 2nd meeting. The Board will enter Closed Session following the public portion of the meeting to review the drafted budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

IV. Executive Director's Report

Helena reported that the TDA continues ongoing segments with WAVY TV and the Hampton Roads Show. An upcoming segment will feature the Silver Lake Hotel, The Jolly Roger, and the representation from the Coastal Land Trust regarding Springer's Point. A music performance by Nick and Brooke is scheduled for March.

A spring e-blast was distributed to approximately 6,000 newsletter subscribers to support trip planning and highlight new developments on the island. The TDA will continue quarterly email outreach.

Helena presented to the Visit North Carolina public relations team and partner agencies for inclusion in the State Travel Guide, which is distributed at conferences and welcome centers throughout the state. The TDA is working with Bellwether Media and Chris Hannett on updated photography and videography for use on the website, social media platforms, pitch materials and programming.

The Walking map is currently in print and expected to be available shortly. Ferry station displays in Hatteras and at the passenger ferry will be updated with new maps. A digital flipbook version using FlipSnack will be distributed online and on the website.

Helena will be attending the Destinations International Marketing Communications Summit and the annual Visit NC tourism Conference.

V. Old Business

A. Island Inn Commons Project

Ken provided an update on the Island Inn Restoration project. Starlink service is currently inactive due to construction dust and related issues. The system is packaged until construction is complete. Final inspections for electrical, plumbing and HVAC have occurred and insulation is expected to begin shortly. OPS reported it is in the process of spinning off a separate 501(c)(3) entity for Island Inn & Commons. Draft bylaws have been prepared and a seven-member board of directors is being established. OPS is funding the associated legal work. Completion of the spin-off is anticipated within approximately four to six weeks.



OPS will continue to request \$20,910 from occupancy tax for Island Inn Commons operations to be included in budg. Management plans include hiring a manager and a groundskeeper. Initial event bookings include one wedding and two receptions.

Discussion occurred regarding Starlink funding. The current fiscal year budget includes \$3,000 for Starlink; funds have not yet been expended. It was clarified that the unused budget funds revert to TDA reserves unless formally transferred.

Will made a motion to remove the designation for the Worrell 1000 allocation (\$4,000) and the Island Starlink allocation (\$3,000), totaling \$7,000, and to reallocate those funds to the TDA Board Discretionary Pool. Ray seconded received. Motion carried. Following the transfer, the Board Discretionary Pool balance is \$15,400.

B. Ocracoke Access Alliance Project

Justin presented an update regarding advocacy efforts related to ferry vessel replacement, STIP processes, and transportation access issues impacting Ocracoke and Hyde County.

A new three-way funding scenario was proposed, totaling \$120,000 annually: \$40,000 from TDA, \$40,000 from the Occupancy Tax Board, and \$40,000 from fundraising/business contributions. The fiscal year for the Alliance runs Sept 1 to August 31, while the TDA's fiscal year runs July 1 to June 30.

He said that fundraising efforts haven't met expectations and asked to consider increasing TDA funding from \$25,000 to \$40,000 for this fiscal year. He said that any funds raised above the \$120,000 goal would be returned proportionally.

Board discussion included questions regarding:

- Measurement of return on investment (ROI) and success metrics
- Funding structure and proportional public/private contributions
- Impact on small businesses
- Budget timing and alignment with current fiscal projections

Justin provided background on the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) process and on challenges related to scoring ferry vessel replacement within that system. He stated that advocacy efforts are exploring:

- Potential federal exemption of ferry vessel replacement from STIP requirements
- Alternative state-level approval mechanisms
- Fast-track consideration similar to bridge replacement projects

He also referenced Hyde County's designation as a persistent-poverty county at the federal level, which may affect grant-matching requirements.

Discussion included toll revenue limitations, federal match requirements, and long-term funding sustainability.

Justin reported that discussions are ongoing regarding minor road realignment options within existing right-of-way to improve resilience. He also noted the exploration of state-level funding for a beach nourishment feasibility study.

It was suggested that the matter be referred to the Budget Committee for further review. No motion made at this time.

C. Lighthouse Parking Status/ Contract Renewal

The contract with Nana and Papa LLC (Jesse Spencer) for Lighthouse parking was reviewed. The agreement renews every two years with a 5% annual increase. Will motions to renew the contract with Jesse Spencer. BJ seconds, unanimous approval.

Fence installation near the parking lot was discussed; no action is currently being pursued.

VI. New Business- 2026/2027 Community Funding Requests

A. Fig Festival

Sundae Horn submitted a funding request for the upcoming Fig Festival. She reported that the prior year's budget was approximately \$34,000 (up from \$29,000 the previous year). Sundae's funding request included \$793 to cover a shortfall from the 2025-2026 event and \$4,475 for the upcoming 2026-2027 event. Of the \$4,475 requested for 2026-2027, \$2,000 is designated for promotion and advertising, and \$2,475 is for chef housing at the Berkley Manor. Sundae noted increased costs, including Berkley Venue expenses, and stated she forfeited fees last year in support of the event.

Chef Jamie Davis of Little Washington has committed to participating. Lodging will be provided; no chef fee will be paid. The event is scheduled for August 7-8 and is intended to support tourism during the slower seasonal period.

Discussion followed regarding fiscal year allocation and budget sequencing.

VII. Public Comments No public comments were received during the meeting.

VIII. Adjournment

Upon motion duly made by Will and seconded by Ray, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote.