



Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority
Board Meeting Agenda
Friday, January 9, 2026 - 9:00 am
Ocracoke Community Center

Present:

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

Supporting Staff: Helena Stevens, Jeff Dippold

Presenters: Justin LeBlanc, Ken Debarth

Kris Noble - County Manager

I. Call to Order

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

II. Approval of October 24, 2025 Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the October 24, 2025, meeting minutes was made by BJ Oelschlägel and seconded by Will Adams. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Financial Discussion / Hyde County

A. Jeff provided the Occupancy Tax Collections update for the first six months of FY 2025/2026 (through December 2025).

- December collections were approximately \$2,600-\$2,700 higher than December 2024, reversing a two-month period in which collections were slightly below the prior year.
- Year-to-date collections through December totaled \$423,836, approximately \$14,663 above the same period in FY 2024/2025.
- A conservative projection using 90% of the prior year's second-half collections estimates FY 2025/2026 total collections at around \$518,000-about \$18,000 above the \$500,000 budget and roughly \$4,200 higher than the previous fiscal year's total.

B. Review of FY 2025/26 Actual Revenues and Expenses vs. Budget

Jeff reviewed the Revenue and Expense versus Budget report through November 30, 2025, noting that December ledger information was not yet available. Through November, revenues and expenditures were tracking at or below budget, with several categories expected to increase beginning in January.

C. Review of OTTDA Accumulated Net Earnings (Fund Balance)

Jeff reviewed the fund Balance Analysis as of June 30, 2025. The fund balance totaled \$179,800.58. The Board's target reserve level of \$100,000 was noted, leaving excess reserves of approximately \$79,000 above the target. The adopted FY 2025/2026 budget allocates \$46,443 from excess reserves, leaving approximately \$33,143 remaining.



When combined with the current conservative revenue projection above budget (approximately \$18,000), the Board could have roughly \$51,000 of additional potential spending capacity in the current fiscal year; Jeff recommended considering a more conservative approach (approximately half) to preserve flexibility for FY 2026/2027.

Board Discussion: Members discussed strategic deployment of any available excess reserves, with an emphasis on access-related initiatives (including continued support for the Ocracoke Access Alliance) and potential seed funding for engineering/feasibility work related to dredging and beach nourishment.

D. Review of FY25/26 Board Discretionary Pool and Potential Uses:

Jeff reviewed discretionary funding through November 30, 2025. Approximately \$51,000 of the \$143,000 discretionary budget had been expended, including expenditures for tram stop maintenance and lighthouse parking. Of the \$25,000 discretionary pool, \$15,000 was paid to the Ocracoke Access Alliance, with remaining support addressed through public relations-related budget categories. The Board discussed whether additional discretionary allocations should be considered later in the fiscal year.

E. Status of OPS Reimbursement An update was provided on the status of OPS reimbursement.

F. FY 2026/27 Budget Committee: Proposed Meeting Dates and Budget Preparation Timeline.

Jeff outlined the proposed FY 2026/2027 budget development schedule:

- Budget Committee kickoff meeting: January 29, 2026 (target 9:00 a.m.).
- Second Budget Committee meeting: February 9, 2026 (remote option available).
- First draft presented to the Board in closed session: February 20, 2026 (regular Board meeting).
- March 2026: revisions and refinements.
- April 3, 2026: budget formally presented to the Board for approval.
- Public hearing and budget adoption: approximately 2-3 weeks after April 3, subject to scheduling and required notice/advertising.

IV. Executive Director's Report

Helena Stevens, Executive Director, provided the following updates:

WAVY TV/ Hampton Roads Show Partnership: OTTDA has purchased a package of approximately 8-10 segments. Recent segments included:

- "Plan an Escape to Ocracoke Island" (December), featuring local guests highlighting off-season experiences and planning for warmer months.



-A more recent segment featuring Brooke German (Little Rituals) and Clayton Jernigan (Jerniman's Campground) focused on wellness and activities.

OTTDA receives associated social placements and a web click-through to OTTDA's website following each broadcast. Early response indicates increased website traffic and inquiries after broadcasts. The Board discussed the value of targeting the Hampton Roads/Tidewater market, including military families.

Digital Marketing Campaign (Advertising Line Item)

The FY 2025/2026 advertising line item (\$60,000) is funding a strategic digital marketing campaign with Media One.

- Helena reviewed three creative concept groupings included in the packet (e.g., "No Rush," "Rediscover Simple," and "Escape to the Island") and requested initial Board feedback. Members expressed a preference for Concepts 1 and 2; one member noted Concept 3 as the most visually compelling.
- Visit NC & Digital Event Distribution: Visit NC has launched a refreshed website and partner portal; OTTDA is populating destination content and events with stronger narrative framing to support travel intent and distance justification.
- OTTDA is also populating events and updates on Patch as an additional distribution channel for regional audiences, with discussion of possible Access Alliance updates as appropriate.
- IMM Media Marketplace (New York): Helena is preparing for the International Media Marketplace (IMM) in New York (January 20-21), which includes uploading destination content and meeting with 25 travel media in scheduled 15-minute appointments.
- 2026 Walking Map: A new draft was received and distributed. Helena requested Board review and feedback and noted the final submission deadline of January 14 to ensure delivery by mid-February. Helena will email the draft to members who prefer a digital version.

OTTDA Website: OTTDA continues refining the new website, including adding SEO/alt-text tagging to images and ensuring that 2026 event content is up to date.

V. Old Business

A. Island Inn Commons Project

Ken provided an update on the Island Inn Project. The HVAC plan finalized and bids have been released; the electrical plan finalized, and the bid process is underway. The layout and wall finish selections are finalized; work is progressing with sequencing dependent on mechanical trades. Ocracoke Preservation Society is developing an operational structure to manage the building and grounds once construction is complete, including the formation of a separate 501



(c) (3) board to oversee day-to-day management. New mission statement shared: "The Island Inn and Commons is a cultural, tourist, botanical, and community center in the heart of historic Ocracoke Village." Ken outlined anticipated operational needs and costs, including staffing (part-time groundskeeper and manager), insurance and event inventory (tables/chairs). Ken noted interest in renting upstairs office space to the OTTDA and encouraged early discussion to support infrastructure needs (outlets/layouts). Ken shared recent success (historic home tour and holiday lights) and ongoing interest in collecting historic photos and stories related to the Island Inn for archival and interpretive use.

8. Ocracoke Access Alliance Project

Justin provided an update on the Ocracoke Access Alliance, established in September 2025 to advocate for safe, reliable, and efficient access to Ocracoke Island, focused on ferry funding/programs and NC-12 hotspots.

Organizational & Funding Status:

Approximately \$75,000 raised in contributions and pledges to date, including \$25,000 from OTTDA.

Annual target: approximately \$120,000 (\$10,000/month).

Current funds support operations through the end of April.

Budget structure: \$8,000/month for lobbying services; \$2,000/month for administrative expenses (registrations, filings, website, outreach materials).

Fundraising efforts slowed around Thanksgiving, with limited responses (few direct refusals).

The Alliance plans renewed outreach to island businesses and vendors, including escalations to corporate decision-makers where appropriate.

Advocacy Work - Ferry System:

The General Assembly has not yet passed the biennial budget. The House and Senate proposals both fund the Ferry Division below identified needs; the Alliance is advocating for at least the House level and additional funding to reach full operations and maintenance.

The Ferry Division faces a deferred maintenance backlog of approximately \$68 million; proposals include significant allocations to address that backlog, and the Alliance will continue advocating for full funding in subsequent cycles.

The Alliance is pursuing a longer-term strategic planning conversation with NCDOT leadership regarding the ferry system's future vision, including service models, routes, fleet platforms, and stakeholder engagement. Potential funding mechanisms discussed include state support, federal grants, or congressional earmarks.

NC-12 Hotspots & Coastal Resilience:



Ocracoke hotspot: planned spring sandbag work using an improved design; a Coastal Resources Commission variance is being pursued to allow the design before rule changes take effect.

Kris confirmed support for the variance and outlined emergency permitting and funding mechanisms that can be triggered if integrity is compromised during a storm event.

The Alliance is coordinating with the County on longer-term options, including feasibility work for beach nourishment and alignment with potential structure-hardening strategies on the island's north end. Justin also reported on other hotspot efforts (including Buxton jetty rebuild and related nourishment, and ongoing discussions regarding Pea Island road relocation concepts).

Additional Discussion Items:

Members discussed visitor perception and public education challenges-balancing transparency about access issues while avoiding negative destination messaging.

VI. New Business

A. 2026 Priorities and Committee Assignments Committee assignments were acknowledged as established. Discussion of broader 2026 priorities was deferred to a future meeting.

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

VIII. Adjournment

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