



**Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority
Board Meeting Minutes**

Friday, September 15, 2023 9:00 am

Present (Voting): Kenny Ballance (Chair), Martha Garrish, Susie O'Neal
Rockel, Lisa Landrum

OTTDA Staff: Helena Stevens, Sharon Brodisch

I. Call to Order

Chair Kenny Ballance called the meeting to order at 9:00 am

II. Additions/Deletions to the Agenda

Martha suggested discussing the signs on Lighthouse Road.

III. Approval of OTTDA Meeting Minutes – July 14, 2023

Kenny motioned to approve the minutes. The board unanimously approved. Motion passed.

IV. Avenir Bold Update

A PR Update was presented by Avenir Bold, highlighting successful media outreach results. Ocracoke was mentioned in Better Homes and Gardens, with the article's lead image and editorial coverage. Editorial coverage was also secured in Southern Living, Coastal Living, and National Geographic. These accomplishments resulted from work done by Helena and Eleanor, who actively attended media events, contacted the press directly, and fostered relationships within the media community. The positive outcomes we are experiencing are a testament to our hard work and valuable contributions from the community and the media. Eleanor will represent Ocracoke with regional writers at the VisitNC In-State Media Mission next week.

V. Financial Discussion/Hyde County

a. FY22/23 Ocracoke Occupancy Tax Collection Summary and Projection through July 30, 2023

Jeff Dippold could not attend the meeting, so Helena read the financial summaries.

During July 2023, the OTTDA received \$83,096 in Occupancy Tax collections. This is \$4,812 greater than the \$78,284 collected in July 2022.

Assuming the remaining months of FY 2023/2024 have collections equal to the comparable months of FY 2022/2023, the OTTDA should be able to realize the full \$490,000 amount of Occupancy Tax collections budgeted for FY 2023/2024. While this is very early in the fiscal year, Jeff will follow each month's collections closely to determine if there are any issues in achieving this year's revenue goal.

b. FY 23/24 Ocracoke Occupancy Tax Collection Summary and Projection through August 31, 2023

During August 2023, the OTTDA received \$114,350 in Occupancy Tax collections. This is \$17,470 greater than the \$101,692 collected in August 2022. For the first two months of the current fiscal year, OTTDA 2% collections totaled \$197,446. This amount is \$17,470 (or 9.7%) greater than the \$101.692 received during the first two months of FY 2022/2023.

Assuming the remaining months of FY 2023/2024 have collections equal to the comparable months of FY 2022/2023, the OTTDA can project total 2% collections of approximately \$504K. This is approximately \$14K greater than the \$490K originally budgeted for FY 2023/2024. While still early in the fiscal year, the OTTDA Board may want to consider potential uses for excess revenues in light of new requests and/or other identified priorities.

A budget committee needs to be organized to determine usage of excess funds.

VI. New Business

a. Ocracoke Health Center Seafood Festival Funding

The Ocracoke Health Center requested \$2,000 from the board to fund the Ocracoke Seafood Festival. Helena polled all board members, and the majority voted to approve the requested amount. Kenny motioned to ratify the decision to fund the event for \$2,000.00. Martha seconded the motion. Motion passed. The money will be used for expansion and potentially purchasing the old Masonic Lodge. Kenny noted that future requests for event funding should be made well before the event.

VII. Old Business

b. Island Inn Update – Ken DeBarth

Efforts are underway to restore and enhance the Island Inn Commons, with progress made and potential for greater achievements with sufficient funding. Updates are necessary, custom frames are being constructed, and a plan has been formulated to extract, replenish the soil, and replant a declining oak tree. Topsoil and fill dirt have been used, and infrastructure is in place. Additional funding has been secured for improvements. The upcoming Waterman's Festival aims to support the island and benefit OPS financially. Public restrooms and addressing the septic field are critical priorities.

On October 25, an exciting day is planned in the garden organized by David Tweety and the Arts route. The event includes an art auction, with special invitations extended to donors and significant contributors.

c. Electronic Vehicle Charging Station Project

There was a discussion revolving around the challenges of securing grants and land for charging stations on Ocracoke Island. The impending rise of electric vehicles drives the need for charging stations. Finding a suitable location and navigating regulatory issues are key concerns. The involvement of the Park Service and the Department of Transportation was discussed, as well as obstacles, including limited space and parking. The board discussed the importance of reaching out to NPS Superintendent Dave Hallac. Despite the complexities, the board acknowledged that charging stations are necessary for tourists and locals. Helena will contact Dave Hallac to determine the Park Service's willingness to put charging stations on Park Service property as a first step before pursuing grants.

d. Hyde County Funding for Lobbyist

Hyde County seeks \$12,000 from OTTDA to support the FY2023-24 lobbying contract. (See attachment for request). Kris Noble emphasized the importance of avoiding controversy and potential community unrest. She also reiterated the importance of joining the NCTIA, the suggestion made by Witt Tuttle, as the NCTIA will lobby for its members. Bob Steinberg, a lobbyist, has been instrumental in the progress of Ocracoke and has a good relationship with Kris. Martha motioned to allocate \$5,000 to the lobbyist. Susie seconded the motion. Motion carried.

e. Ferry Funding Letter

In coordination with Kris Noble and her team, Helena drafted and emailed a letter to the governor and Ocracoke's state representatives to support adequate funding for the ferry division requesting:

- Fully fund and earmark operational funds for the sound class ferries to Ocracoke, including a four-boat schedule that mirrors the 2018 schedule.
- Guaranteed and continued funding of the Ocracoke Passenger Ferry each year.
- Remove all language regarding Ocracoke Priority Pass language to allow for public input sessions and bring it back in the short session.

f. Springer's Point Signage

The One-Way sign at the end of Lighthouse Road was lost during Dorian. The board will request NC DOT to replace it. Martha contacted Keith about a sign at the end of Lighthouse Rd. She reported that DOT did install a one-way sign next to Albert Styron's store. There was not a one-way sign installed next to Sharon Miller's house. Martha will follow up to find out why.

VII. Executive Director Report

In August, Helena had the opportunity to attend two conferences: the Visit NC Media Mission in Washington DC and ESTO, a US Travel Association conference. Two travel writers expressed interest in visiting and writing about Ocracoke during the media mission. The conferences also provided valuable insights into the potential application of artificial intelligence in the travel industry, particularly for administrative tasks like minute-taking. Helena also mentioned a trial of Otter, a transcription service, for minute taking.

Several significant developments took place, including the preparation of itineraries for visiting writers, the distribution of walking maps, the installation of a column wrap at the New Bern airport, and ongoing efforts to secure the annual director's liability insurance. Additionally, there are discussions about adding a new tram stop to Ride the Wind. Potential advertising opportunities at Norfolk Airport are being explored. Based on recommendations from VisitNC and Kris Noble, Helena suggested that the Ocracoke TDA join the North Carolina Travel Industry Association, and the board agreed. Martha made a motion to join NCTIA, Kenny seconded the motion.

VII. Public Input/Questions/Comments

No comments

VIII. Next Meeting Date – November 17, 2023, at 9:00 am.

IX. Adjourn.

Kenny moved to adjourn, and Martha seconded. The meeting adjourned at 10:20 am.

FY23/24 Board Meeting Dates:

November 17, 2023

January 19, 2024

March 22, 2024

May 17, 2024

June 21, 2024