

Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority
Board Meeting Minutes

Friday, August 23, 2024 9:00 am

Meeting held virtual via Facebook Live Stream

The Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority Board met on Friday, August 23, 2024, at 9:00 am via Facebook Live Stream (Zoom) set up by Donny Shumate

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

OTTDA Staff: Helena Stevens, Jeff Dippold (remote)

- I. Call to Order
 - Kenny Ballance called the meeting to order at 9am
 - Helena adds new business to add a vote for new office space for the TDA
- II. Approval of June Meeting Minutes.
 - MOTION: BJ makes a motion to approve the June meeting minutes. The motion passes.
- III. Financial Discussion/Hyde County
 - FY 2023-2024 Total Revenues: Ended at \$493,387, exceeding the budget by \$3,387 and surpassing the prior year by \$7,148 (1.5%).
 - June vs. July: June collections were lower, but July rebounded with \$101,804, \$18,700 more than July 2023.
 - 2024 Budget: \$490,000 budgeted, the same as last year.
 - Projection: If 95.5% of collections are realized for the rest of the year, revenues will meet the budget.
 - Occupancy Taxes: Totaled \$493,000 for the year.
 - Reserve Usage: \$76,698 of reserves were used, leaving excess reserves of \$62,000.
 - Total Expenses: Expenses were \$570,000, \$59,000 under budget due to savings in advertising, contracted services, and other categories.
 - Excess Reserves: Reserves increased by \$62,000 more than expected, providing a strong financial buffer.
 - FY 2024-2025 Projections: (end of FY24-25) Reserves are projected to be at least \$100,000. The reserve amount entering FY24/25 the amount would be \$260,000. , exceeding the initial goal of \$100,000.

IV. Avenir Bold Update

Eleanor explains the campaign is moving forward, with a focus on addressing issues in a positive way for visitors.

Progress since June includes:

- Developed visual branding and a campaign logo.

- Created a campaign landing page.
- Started compiling resources for community advocacy.

Scott presents with a power point presentation. A visual identity was created for "The Access Project" to highlight the initiative.

The logo is intended for public use on items like magnets or stickers, helping spread awareness.

Landing Page: A campaign webpage has been developed to provide:

- An overview of the initiative.
- Updates and news about the project.
- A section called "Here's How You Can Help" with three involvement levels: learning, advocacy, or volunteering.
- A petition form for supporters to sign and optionally send messages.
- Resources for easy access to legislator contact info, ferry service details, and a business owner toolkit.

Elenor concludes the update with a petition explanation and summarizing the next steps.

- **Petition:** Used to collect email addresses for future advocacy.
- **Next Steps:**
 - Finalize the website.
 - Engage community via email, social media, and media outreach.
 - Launch and activate the campaign.
 - Monitor results and report back.

The team is progressing with campaign setup and outreach.

V. Old Business

Helena reads the report on the Island Commons Project.

- **Building:** Sheathing, vapor seal, and siding installation have started. One window sash installed, with more ordered. The low area under the building is being filled to prevent water ponding. Electrical power is connected.
- **Restrooms & Septic:** Restrooms and septic system completed, opened in May. OCBA is responsible for maintenance.
- **Landscaping & Exteriors:** Garden planting completed, fig garden groundwork done. Retaining structure and walkways are underway. All dedication bricks for pathways have been sold.

- **Storage Shed:** Plans complete, construction to begin in a few weeks, funded by occupancy tax grants.

Progress continues across all areas of the project.

VI. New Business

New Board Member Recruitment Status

- Kenny will be stepping down from the chair. Grayson Kirk will be stepping into the position of Chair.
- New officers will be elected in October.
- Efforts to engage young people and address community concerns like mosquito control and waterways are ongoing.
- Randal explains frustration expressed over public misunderstandings and lack of civic engagement, especially via social media.
- Suggestions for improving communication, like town halls, were discussed but questioned due to low public interest.
- Recent budget increases were highlighted, including significant funding for EMS and schools, with challenges around balancing taxes and funding needs.

Randall discusses a few current issues in the forefront of conversations.

- **Taxes & General Fund:** 57% of general fund revenue comes from property taxes, with 40% from Ocracoke, which has higher costs for services like trash removal and housing deputies.
- **Tax Rate Comparison:** Hyde County's property tax rate is high but comparable to other counties facing similar challenges, like Edgecombe and Terrell.
- **Challenges:** High cost of living and floodplain restrictions make it difficult to attract corporate development, though some growth is happening on the mainland.
- **Hyde County Economy:** The NC Department of Commerce ranks agriculture as the top industry in Hyde County, contributing most to the GDP, followed by commercial fishing and forestry—surpassing tourism.
- **Agribusiness:** Although the county may appear inactive, significant agribusiness activities are happening that may not be obvious to the untrained eye.
- Three components that make up 75% of our budget, and that's public safety, the school system, and solid waste.

B. Randall and Kris discussed school funding and taxes.

- **School Funding Issue:** Hyde County is treated as one school district but operates two separate schools, leading to insufficient funding. Legislative changes are needed to address this.
- **Challenges:** Maintaining two schools requires more resources, despite the county's contributions, and regionalization is not a favored solution.
- The county allocated \$1.8 million to the schools, but they requested \$2.3 million.
- **Tax Rate Impact:** Each penny of the tax rate now generates about \$122,000, up from \$88,000, showing the direct link between increased funding requests and higher taxes.

V. Executive Director Report

- The board needs to vote on a contract with John Giagu for office space at the former Native Seafood building, starting September 1, 2024, for one year at \$1,400, as budgeted. The contract would have started in June, but the office is not ready for occupancy until September due to remodeling.

MOTION: BJ makes a motion to agree on a contract with John Giagu for office space in the former Native Seafood building. The motion passes.

- Current Projects: Working with Avenir Bold and the board on ferry DOT advocacy, branding, PR, and developing a toolkit with templates and contact lists.
- Website and Media: Updating Visit Ocracoke NC website with new photography and sponsored content, participating in trade shows, and preparing for media missions with Visit NC, including one in New York.
- Public Relations Achievements: Featured in Outside Magazine's surf towns article, and producing a promotional video for the passenger ferry, which was delayed due to review issues. The video will be used on the website and updated for next year.

Media Coverage: PBS NC Weekend featured Ocracoke with positive community feedback. Ocracoke is now part of the Visit NC Outdoor Alliance and participated in a successful virtual media tour.

Upcoming Events: Media missions in New York (Sept 9-11) and Durham (Oct 1) to pitch Ocracoke to writers and media.

Ongoing Initiatives:

- Website and social media management with Katherine Waldrop and Discover Carolinas
- Database updates, administrative tasks, and budget work with Jeff
- Tram stop sign renumbering project with Jason Daniels

Helena reviewed Overview of ESTO Conference Insights

VII. Public Comments

Kris Noble gives dredging updates on the Shallow Draft Grant:

- Dredging Work: Conducted from July 16 to July 22, removing 21,961 cubic yards of spoil material, which significantly improved the channel corridor according to ferry captains.
- Ongoing Efforts: Miss Katie has worked on the Hatteras connector channel and is expected to report an additional 3,000 cubic yards removed. Sloop is currently in good condition, with remaining funds for further shallow draft work.
- Grant Amendment: Received extra funding to widen Sloop Cut from 100 feet to 200 feet and to permit an additional disposal area north of Sloop. This will enhance efficiency and benefit both local and Dare County dredging efforts.
- Dredging: Removed 22,000 cubic yards of spoil; permits for widening Sloop Cut and new disposal area secured.

- Army Corps Request: Asked for extended sand placement to cover entire revetment area.
- Official Meeting: Discussed projects and a comprehensive access plan with Congressman Murphy and US Army Corps officials.
- FEMA Designation: Hyde County awarded a \$10 million grant for resilience projects, including access planning and infrastructure improvements.
- Kris continued explaining a few other ongoing projects such as storm water management projects underway. Planning an elevated tram shelter, seeking new electric trams and EV chargers, and developing a long-term access plan while also updating storm water management ordinances.
- Monthly meetings with engineers and the mosquito control board focus on progress. Recent grant work provided GIS mapping and condition analysis of stormwater infrastructure. The current Lassie grant will create a Master Plan with detailed plans for three construction projects.

VIII. Next meeting date will be October 25, 2024

IX. Adjournment

MOTION: Lisa makes a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion passes.