

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

Friday, January 19, 2024 9:00 am

Ocracoke Community Center

Present (Voting): Kenny Ballance (Chair), Susie O'Neal Rockel, Lisa Landrum (remote), Jennifer Esham (remote), and BJ Oelschlegel

OTTDA Staff: Helena Stevens, Cynthia Carver-Calvitti, Hyde County Commissioner, Randall Mathews

I. Call to Order

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

II. Additions/Deletions to the Agenda

Board Member Terms

NCTIA Updates

III. Approval of OTTDA Board Meeting Minutes – November 20, 2023

Jennifer motioned to approve the November 20, 2023 minutes with the change of the fiscal year to 23/24. Susie seconded. Motion passed.

IV. Avenir Bold Advertising Update

Tom Hickey discussed the spring Ocracoke Island 2023 ad plan, highlighting the importance of optimizing the media channel mix and allocating funds in the market with the most potential impact.

- Tom highlighted the success of Ocracoke's 2023 campaign, with a 25% increase in new users and a positive trend in travel sentiment despite economic weaknesses.
- Travelers remain optimistic about their finances and continue to plan trips despite concerns about a potential recession, with the volume of visitors calling about travel remaining robust.

2024 Marketing strategies for Ocracoke Island

The effectiveness of various marketing channels for travel companies, highlighting email as the most important channel despite claims of its decline. Historical performance data is used to inform the 2024 marketing plan, with a focus on channels that have proven effective in the past. Ocracoke aims to attract new visitors by building a broad target reach, focusing on free-thinking, curious, and flexible individuals.

Digital marketing strategies for Ocracoke Island tourism.

Recommends allocating 13% of the budget to paid search and 22% to social media, citing historical performance and intent-based messaging as reasons for prioritizing these channels.

Native ads are added to the mix this year, offering a more seamless and performance-driven ad format through sponsored content that blends in with the website's environment.

The strategic allocation entails dedicating 80% of the programmatic budget to Native Ads, while 20% will be distributed among Search, Social, and YouTube channels. To optimize algorithmic efficiency, the plan emphasizes continuous spending of the programmatic budget from mid-March through Memorial Day, foregoing scheduled breaks.

Addressing ferry issues for island visitors.

Eleanor Talley highlighted the pressing need to improve the visitor ferry experience, citing excessive wait times at Hatteras and Ocracoke ferries. Changes in routes have also extended travel times. Talley stressed the importance of addressing these issues proactively through social media, advocating for alternative routes such as Cedar Island and Swan Quarter to provide smoother travel experiences for visitors.

IV. Financial Discussion/Hyde County

FY 23/24 Ocracoke Occupancy Tax Collection Summary and Projection

The Hyde County Occupancy Tax Collections for December 2023 were \$15,352, an increase of \$243 compared to December 2022. Year-to-date, the collections for the current fiscal year are \$397,351, 4.3% higher than the same period in the previous fiscal year. Projected total 2% collections for the fiscal year range from approximately \$492K

to \$497K, surpassing the initially budgeted \$490K for FY 2023/2024. Monitoring of collections will continue.

Dipplod also discussed detailed information for the first six months of the year, which shows actual expenditures of \$250,000 and 60% of the budget still remaining for the year.

V. New Business

a. Excess Funding Usage

Excess revenues will be used toward the tram stop bench at Ride The Wind and sponsoring the social event for the Worrell 1000 Race.

b. FY 24/25 Budget Planning Update

The Budget Committee aims to commence the budgeting process on January 22nd, delineating priorities for the upcoming fiscal year and deliberating initial adjustments. Subsequent meetings in February will involve the presentation of a draft budget, a working session, and a follow-up gathering to refine the second draft. The objective is to finalize the budget ahead of the March 22nd board meeting. By March 1st, the intention is to distribute the budget for a two-week review by the board, facilitating discussions and eventual approval before initiating legal steps for publication.

Key Dates:

- January 22, 2024: Kickoff Meeting
- February 9, 2024: Presentation of Draft Budget and Working Session
- February 16, 2024: Second draft to be circulated by March 1, 2024
- March 22, 2024: Board review for approval
- April 5, 2024: Potential Date for Budget Hearing

c. Worrell 1000 Race Sponsorship

OTTDA is sponsoring a social for \$2800.00.

VI. Old Business

a. Island Inn Update

The project has hit key milestones: siding removal, plywood installation, and crafting window frames to match originals. Thanks to a \$12,500 Covington Foundation grant and five \$2000 sponsorships, window-related expenses are covered. Infrastructure upgrades include water and electric service improvements. Phase 1 landscaping is done, and Phase 2 is planned for spring/summer. Restroom progress is good, pending sand delivery for the septic field. Future plans include seeking 2024 funding. The overseer, away until early February, can be reached via new contact details.

Kenny proposed a meeting with Ken DeBarth to tour the Island Inn property to happen in March. Other board members present agree.

b. EV Charging Station Project

Helena shared that a meeting needs to be coordinated between the Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative, Tideland EMC, and the National Park Service along with Susie Rockel and Randall Matthews.

c. Tram Stop Update

A new tram stop will be added at Ride the Wind, which will necessitate adding an additional trash pickup stop to the contract with Rene Flores and updating signage and maps at the stops on Hatteras and Ocracoke islands. Bob Chestnut with Ride the Wind shared that the optimal place for the bench is near the two trees in front of the property so a shelter will not be needed, only the bench.

D. Lighthouse Road Signs

Board member Lisa reported Sharon has one of the DOT-provided signs indicating no trespassing on her property near Springer's Point. Kenny will coordinate with Sharon to obtain the sign and have it put up at her property.

E. Future of the Pony Herd

Kenny and Helena plan to draft a letter to Dave Halleck regarding the pony herd's future. OCBA has sent a letter to the Park Service, and Dave Hallac will be present at their next meeting on February 20, 2024, in person or via Zoom to discuss the topic. Randall expressed frustration with the National Park Service's decision-making process, but acknowledges Dave's openness to public input.

F. Fletcher Letter Update

Kenny explained that the TDA is unable to fund a specific private project without giving that opportunity to all. Kenny made a motion to write a letter to Mr. O’Neal explaining that the TDA is unable to fund his fence project. The board unanimously agreed

G. Board Member Terms

Three board members' terms will be over in October 2024: Kenny, Jennifer, and Lisa. Randal thanked Kenny for his time and will continue to look for additional board members.

H. NCTIA Updates

Randall provided an update on the ferry situation and dredging, mentioning the RPO and DLT's efforts to address these issues. He expressed frustration with the Army Corps of Engineers for not prioritizing repairs to the Hatteras Inlet route, which has caused damage to boats and impacted the number of people using the route. County manager Noble and Congressman Murphy are working behind the scenes to address the issue, with hopes of seeing Murphy in late January or March to discuss the impact and potential solutions. Randall emphasized the importance of advocating for the ferry division, particularly between Hatteras and Ocracoke, as it's the most expensive route and the first to be cut when funding is lacking. Morgan, the Army Corps district manager, is aware of the situation and may be making progress, but Randall expresses frustration with the lack of action and the need for continued advocacy. Randal emphasized the importance of addressing the economic impact of ferry underfunding to politicians on the Appropriations Committee.

VII. Executive Director Report

Helena discusses various projects, including a pitch sheet for the IMM Trav Media marketplace show she is attending in January, signage for tram stops, FY24/25 budget planning and coordination with the Worrell 1000 sailing team. Helena plans to update Ocracoke's website with new visual assets and crowdsourced content. Helena and Katherine Waldrop are working on social media and completing the 2024 Walking Map. Helena scheduled Chris Cavanaugh to present at the March 22 TDA board meeting to give an overview of TDAs for new board members.

VIII. Public Input/Questions/Comments

No comments

IX. Next Meeting Date

March 22, 2024

X. Adjourn

11:30 a.m.

