



OCRACOKE TOWNSHIP TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
June 21, 2024

The Ocracoke Township Tourism Development Authority Board met on Friday, June 21, 2024, at 9:00 am via Facebook Live Stream (Zoom) set up by Donny Shumate.

Board Members: Kenny Ballance (Chair), Susie O'Neal Rockel, Robert Chestnut, Lisa Landrum (remote), BJ Oelschlägel

Staff: Helena Stevens

Others: Kris Noble (Hyde County Manager), Senator Bob Steinburg, Bill Rich

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

II. APPROVAL OF MAY 17, 2024 MINUTES

MOTION: Kenny Ballance moved to approve the May meeting minutes. SECOND: Susie O'Neal Rockel VOTE: Unanimous

III. Financial Discussion/Hyde County

A. Hyde County Occupancy Tax Collections

In Jeff Dippold's absence, Helena Stevens reported on the occupancy tax collections for May 2024 (overnight stays in April 2024), which totaled \$26,573, representing a 20% decrease from May 2023. This decrease was attributed to Highway 12 closures and reduced ferry runs. Year-to-date collections reached \$451,066, a 2.8% increase from the previous year. A total of \$489,049 is projected for FY 2023-24, slightly below the \$490,000 budget, based on an 80% collection rate for the final month.

The need to closely monitor monthly collections in FY 2024-25 due to ongoing transportation issues was emphasized. The board discussed potential strategies to mitigate the impact of these issues on future collections and agreed to revisit this topic at the next meeting.

B. Kris Noble informed the board that the county's assistant finance officer had incorrectly paid lobbying invoices from the TDA fund. She assured the board that the county would reverse these payments and provide updated financial statements. The exact amount of misappropriated funds was not specified during the meeting.

MOTION: Susie O'Neal Rockel moved to allocate \$5,000 of the refunded money to CP Engineering for the sloop channel cut through engineering fees. SECOND: BJ Oelschlägel DISCUSSION: The board clarified that this allocation would not affect the TDA's current budget

as it comes from the refunded money. Questions were raised about the timeline for the engineering work and its potential impact on dredging operations. VOTE: Unanimous

IV. BOB STEINBURG LOBBIEST UPDATE

Kris Noble, Bill Rich, and Senator Steinburg provided comprehensive updates on lobbying efforts and infrastructure initiatives. They reported on the April resolution addressing Ocracoke's challenges and tourism impact, highlighting its reception among state legislators.

Senator Steinburg elaborated on his role as a lobbyist, explaining how he leverages his connections in the state legislature to advocate for Ocracoke's needs. He emphasized the importance of maintaining relationships with key decision-makers in both parties and outlined his strategy for the upcoming legislative session.

Ms. Noble reported that funding has been secured for dredging projects through the Shallow Draft Navigation Fund. She detailed FY 2025 funding requests, including \$7.2 million for Roloson Channel and \$5.1 million for Silver Lake Harbor. These amounts were noted as unprecedented, reflecting increased attention to Ocracoke's needs.

Bill Rich provided an update on the \$20 million beach nourishment project estimate. He outlined the application process, potential funding sources, and the expected timeline for decision-making. The board discussed the potential impact of these initiatives on Ocracoke's infrastructure and tourism, expressing both optimism and concerns about implementation timelines.

The board agreed on the need for a communication strategy to keep the public informed about the progress of these projects. It was decided that regular updates would be provided at future meetings and through various public channels.

V. PR UPDATE

- Eleanor explains the overall goal of this is to raise awareness and help achieve a long term solution to the transportation issues that are impacting residents and visitors.

She outlined a plan to address Ocracoke's economic challenges caused by transportation and media issues. Key actions include increasing funding for transportation improvements through a 12-month media and advocacy campaign, developing a dedicated campaign page for public engagement.

The campaign plan includes creating a 12-month active landing page, engaging the community and visitors for op-eds, maintaining ongoing social media and media outreach efforts, and focusing advocacy letters on legislative sessions. The budget allocates the largest portion to agency fees for media outreach, with flexibility to reallocate funds as needed. Additional resources will include advocacy letters, social media graphics, campaign hashtags, op-ed templates, and official contact information, all aimed at creating a comprehensive toolkit for community involvement.

- Jennifer expresses concerns about the landing page plan, feeling it may have negative impacts.
- Susie suggests focusing on positive aspects, such as a new ferry fleet, to generate input and momentum.

After extensive discussion, the board requested Eleanor to revise the plan, addressing the concerns raised and incorporating more positive messaging. Eleanor agreed to provide a more detailed breakdown of the proposed budget and expected outcomes at the next meeting.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. FY24/25 Board Meeting Dates

Helena Stevens proposed the following dates for FY24/25 board meetings: August 23, 2024; October 25, 2024; December 13, 2024; February 21, 2025; April 11, 2025; and June 20, 2025. These dates were chosen to avoid major holidays and peak tourist seasons.

MOTION: Kenny Ballance moved to approve the proposed meeting schedule. SECOND: BJ Oelschlägel VOTE: Unanimous

B. ED Annual Employment Contract

The board reviewed the annual employment contract for the executive director role. The contract includes a 3% salary increase from the previous year, in line with cost of living adjustments. The board discussed the performance metrics for the coming year and agreed to conduct a comprehensive performance review at the next meeting.

MOTION: Robert Chestnut moved to approve the Executive Director's contract with the proposed salary increase. SECOND: Susie O'Neal Rockel VOTE: Unanimous ACTION: Kenny Ballance to sign the approved contract after the meeting.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

A. Ocracoke Island Inn Project Update

Ken DeBarth reported on the progress of renovations and landscaping at the Ocracoke Island Inn. Recent accomplishments include the installation of handicap parking signs and completion of new windows. A fundraising fish fry is planned for July 3, 2024, with proceeds to be split between landscaping and operational costs. Ken requested board members' assistance in promoting the event and provided details on ticket sales and expected attendance.

B. Public Restrooms Update

Bob provided an update on the public restrooms. The operating hours are set from 7 AM to 8 PM. The cleaning schedule includes three cleanings per day during peak season,

reducing to twice daily in the off-season. Bob discussed plans for new signage, including clear indicators of handicap accessibility. He also mentioned ongoing challenges with sand accumulation and proposed several solutions for the board to consider. The board agreed to review these proposals and make a decision at the next meeting.

VIII. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

Helena Stevens presented a detailed report covering various aspects of OTTDA's operations:

1. **Website Performance:** The website saw a 9% increase in overall traffic month-over-month and a 28% increase year-over-year. Domain authority remained steady at 40. Helena noted that the increased traffic correlates with recent PR efforts and discussed strategies to capitalize on this growth.
2. **Public Relations Activities:** Recent press visits included hosting Jason Frye (freelance writer and NC Weekend host) from May 22-27, and Michael Law (Planetware.com travel writer) from May 19-21. Helena highlighted that Ocracoke secured the number two spot in Planetware's "Most Romantic Places in North Carolina" list, discussing the potential impact on tourism.
3. **Photography:** A collaboration with Discover Carolina photographers from May 28-31 resulted in new high-quality images for marketing materials. Helena will share these images with the board once they are delivered and outlined plans for their use in upcoming campaigns.
4. Helena plans to update the website with fresh content from Discover Carolinas photoshoot.
5. In process of creating video content to play on NC Ferry division passenger ferry TV screen.
6. **Upcoming Events:** Helena will attend the ESTO Conference (August 11-14, 2024, in Columbus, OH) and the VisitNC New York Media Mission (tentatively set for September 9-11, 2024). She outlined the potential benefits of attending these events and how they align with OTTDA's marketing strategy.
7. **Social Media:** Follower counts were reported as: Instagram - 21,872; Facebook - 25,842; X (Twitter) - 4,107. Helena noted a 5% increase across all platforms since the last meeting and discussed strategies for further growth and engagement.
8. **Additional Activities:** Helena reported on the ongoing work of renumbering tram stop signs with Jason Daniels. She also discussed the distribution of walking maps and plans to transition to digital formats in the future, outlining the potential cost savings and environmental benefits.

IX. PUBLIC INPUT/QUESTIONS/COMMENTS There were no public comments.

X. NEXT MEETING DATE The next meeting is scheduled for August 23, 2024.

XI. ADJOURNMENT MOTION:

Kenny Ballance moved to adjourn the meeting. SECOND: Lisa VOTE: Unanimous

The meeting adjourned at 11:15 am.