

**HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes**  
**September 25, 2024**  
**Lake Junaluska Bethea Welcome Center**

**Members/Staff Present:** Jim Owens, Mike Huber, Jeff Hillis, Gail Mull, Kristian Owen, Natalie Hawkins, Chuck Dickson, Angie Frisbee, Kelsie Baker, Scot Blair, Jeremy Boone, Corrina Ruffieux, Hayley Printz, Ashley Rock-Rice, Alycin Ray

**Members/Staff Absent:** Dr. Shelley White, Jennifer Best, Chad King, Amie Newsome

**Guests Present:** Jane Mauer, Brionna Dallara

1. **Call to Order** – Chair Jim Owens called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM
2. **Introductions**
3. **Adjustment of Agenda** - None
4. **Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)**
  - Jane Mauer from Smokies Life announced that the fall edition of Smokies Life is out. There is a great article about the elk that shows the total population of elk is at 240 now, and it addresses the possible hunting in the future. Jane also announced that she has the falls Smokies Guide to distribute. The elk talks are still going on in Cataloochee Valley on Sundays through October.
5. **Board Comments** - None
6. **Consent Agenda | VOTE**
  - Request approval of minutes – [August 28, 2024](#)

Mike Huber made a motion to approve the minutes, as presented. Angie Frisbee seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

7. **Finance Reports**
  - [July Financial Report](#) & [August Financial Report](#) – Kristian Owen

Kristian Owen presented the August financials (which include the July data) as follows:

Total Checking/Savings – \$3,919,285.82  
Current Assets – \$3,929,111.76  
Total Assets – \$3,966,855.57  
Deferred Outflows – \$168,884.00  
Total Liabilities – \$272,212.25  
Total Net Position – \$3,859,706.32  
Total Revenue August – \$24,684.57  
Total Revenue YTD – \$58,194.63  
Total Expenses August – \$196,136.40  
Total Expenses YTD – \$400,373.80  
Change in Net Position August – (\$171,451.83)  
Change in Net Position YTD – (\$342,179.17)

- [Occupancy Tax](#) and Lodging Data – *Corrina Ruffieux*

Corrina Ruffieux presented the occupancy tax data. July's occupancy tax was up 5.69% from last July. AirDNA data shows that short-term rental revenue was up significantly compared from last August. Revenue per available room was also up. We had a 16% growth over the past 2 years in short term vacation rentals. Future bookings show that we are pacing well for September, October, November, but are down for February. Corrina stated that winter has a shorter booking window than summer and fall. Zartico data shows that visitors tend to stay in hotels for shorter periods of time than short term rentals. In the month of August, Zartico captured data from over 9,000 devices and shows that 40% were visitors.

## 8. Old Business

- [Bylaws Update](#) | Vote

Angie Frisbee made a motion to approve the bylaws, as presented. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

## 9. New Business

- [Pigeon River Plan](#) | Vote to Support

Corrina Ruffieux presented the Pigeon River Plan. She explained that the plan does not encompass the entire Pigeon River, but looks at several pieces of property that the Towns or County already own. She stresses the historical importance of the Pigeon River, and also the environmental importance of being a headwaters county. We know that visitors that come to Haywood County are looking for passive recreation opportunities. The outdoor economy is hugely important to Haywood County and drives over \$148 million in annual economic impact to the county. Outdoor Recreation Development has been a central theme in community planning over the years. Research conducted through the Destination Master Plan shows that, on a scale of 1-5, stakeholders rate the importance of providing resident access to the Pigeon River as a 4.1. The planning stakeholders narrowed options down to 3 sites to develop more fully for this proposal. All three sites have preliminary drawings included that incorporate open space, recreational access to the river, wetlands management and flood mitigation. Preliminary cost estimates are also included.

Mike Huber asked if people are already working on acquiring the required pieces of land. Angie Frisbee asked how the projects would be paid for. Jeremy Boone stated, for historical importance, that Max Thompson was a Canton local and congressional medal of honor winner. Corrina acknowledged that should the project move forward, it would be important to include some sort of dedication to him at the park.

- [Community Change Grant Presentation](#) & [Letter of Support](#) | Vote to Approve

Corrina explained that Hanni Muerdter from the Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy was asked to take lead and write a grant for the EPA Community Change Grant. The minimum that can be received is \$10 million and maximum is \$20 million with no match requirement. The requirement is that you must have shovel-ready projects that can be completed within 3 years. The grant is looking at things that will drive meaningful impact to the county such as: increasing climate resistance, reducing pollution and increasing public health, community engagement, etc.

Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy would be the lead applicant on the grant and would be responsible for all the federal requirements, then would become a pass-through and would pass along money to Haywood County partners and municipalities to complete the projects. The application must benefit federal disadvantaged communities. The grant is drafted and it should be submitted mid-October and would know if the grant is successful by early 2025.

Corrina is requesting support from the Board to support the Pigeon River plan, as well as a vote to approve the Community Change Grant letter of support.

Chuck Dickson stated that Hanni has presented to the Town of Waynesville, and the Town has endorsed the plan. He stated that it is a once in a lifetime opportunity to access federal funds. Jim Owens added that, although Maggie Valley is not involved in this piece of the project, the Town supports it.

Jeff Hillis made a motion to support the plan and the letter of support. Natalie Hawkins seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

#### **10. Staff Reports/Announcements**

- Great Trails State Conference – Ashley Rock-Rice

Ashley just went to the Great Trails State Conference a few weeks ago. She explained that most of the attendees were public land managers. One of her favorite sessions was “Trails for All” and Greensboro built the first adaptive mountain bike trail.

- Visit NC Travel Guide Editor Visit

Ashley explained that Jeff, the Travel Guide Editor from Visit NC, came to Haywood County for a FAM tour.

- Brand Summit Update

Corrina announced that we will send out the brand guidelines information after the hurricane passes. She shared the brand voice and promise, as well as the new colors, logo, badge, and Ice Fest logo.

- DCI Immersion Trip

DCI has been in town since Monday for their immersion trip. Amie is taking DCI to Cataloochee Valley this morning.

- Ice Fest Weekend – [Sponsorship Package](#), [Promotional Ideas](#)

Corrina announced that we still need help with Ice Fest sponsorships.

- Next Mountain Mornings is Tuesday November 19<sup>th</sup> at MV Pavilion
- Next TDA Board meeting is December 4, 2024 at Springdale Resort
- Adjournment

Chuck Dickson made a motion to adjourn. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 10:03 AM.

#### **11. Ten Minute Media Communication Session**