



The Critical Role of the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority and Occupancy Tax in Building Community Vitality

Introduction

Haywood County's occupancy tax is a vital resource that funds the Haywood County Tourism Development Authority (HCTDA), to invest in programs and projects that drive sustainable growth and enhance the quality of life for all who call Haywood County home.

The Role of a Tourism Development Authority

A Tourism Development Authority is much more than a promoter of overnight stays—it is a strategic partner in community development. By managing and deploying occupancy tax revenue, the HCTDA builds a positive destination brand that drives increased spending, boosts local tax revenues, and supports critical local services.

In today's competitive, interconnected world, every community must work hard to capture its share of attention, consumers, and investment. Through strategic brand management and marketing initiatives, the HCTDA creates an enduring image that attracts visitors, builds local amenities, and supports workforce development. The HCTDA work, funded by visitors through the occupancy tax, goes beyond filling hotel rooms; it transforms our county into a destination where people want to visit, live, work, and invest.

Recent Investments and Their Impact

Every dollar entrusted to the HCTDA is reinvested on behalf of Haywood County through a range of programs that support local economic and community development. Recent investments include:

Calendar Year 2023

- **Grants for Community Events:**

- \$334,000 in grants to local entities and non-profits supported popular events and programs—such as the Canton Labor Day Festival, Apple Harvest Festival, Maggie Valley Fall Days, Smoky Mountain Bluegrass Festival, Haywood County Farmers Market, Summertime Sidewalk Music in Waynesville, Whole Bloomin' Thing, and Blue Ridge Music Trails—which see high-volume attendance from both visitors and locals, driving increased spending at local businesses.

- **Capital Project Grants:**

- \$437,000 in grants were awarded for capital projects designed to enhance Haywood County's infrastructure for the benefit of both locals and visitors. Investments included projects like the Dahlia Ridge Trail at Haywood Community College, Treehouse Overlook at Chestnut Mountain Park, Lake Junaluska Overlook & Connector Trail, Maggie Valley Festival Ground enhancements, Richland Creek Greenway bridge, Pigeon Community Multicultural Development Center mural, and facility improvements at the Shook-Smathers House.



Calendar Year 2024

- **Strategic Planning Initiatives:**
 - Over the past year, the HCTDA completed an extensive, research-based county-wide brand and master plan. The plan was built on input from over 500 locals, stakeholders, and residents as well as over 1,300 past and potential visitors. This project, driven by significant community input and strategic analysis, lays out a clear 10-year roadmap for Haywood County's future—guiding smart, forward-looking investments that will ensure tourism's sustainable growth and a higher quality of life for all residents.
- **Media Outreach and Brand Promotion:**
 - \$100,000 was invested with our public relations partner, resulting in a high return on investment. The 82 tourism news stories generated by media relations reached an audience of 241 million and had an advertising equivalency value of over \$5 million. This extensive outreach ensures that Haywood County remains highly visible to potential visitors and investors. In the direct aftermath of Helene, the HCTDA collaborated with local government and other community entities to ensure news coverage accurately relayed Haywood County's capacity for visitation. This was vital to maintaining a positive image for the destination and directing business to recovering local partners.
- **Small Business Relief Efforts:**
 - In collaboration with the Haywood Advancement Foundation, the HCTDA developed the Haywood County Helene Small Business Relief Grant Program. A direct donation of \$100,000 from the HCTDA to the fund spurred an additional \$300,000 in community donations, providing essential support to small businesses impacted by Hurricane Helene. Additionally, the HCTDA launched the "Gift of Haywood" recovery campaign during the 2024 holiday season. This targeted initiative drove significant engagement at local establishments, boosting sales tax revenues while helping preserve jobs and support the local economy after the impacts of Helene.
- **Additional 2024 Community Grants:**
 - Over \$385,000 in promotion and capital grants were awarded to local entities and non-profit organizations for a variety of events and programs—including Appalachian Heritage Weekend, Smoky Mountain Christmas, Folkmoot International Festival, HART Holiday Harmony, Jeep Fest, Arts Studio Tour, and fireworks events in Maggie Valley and Lake Junaluska.

Conclusion

Every investment made by the HCTDA—whether in media outreach, community events, capital projects, or small business relief—directly benefits Haywood County residents and supports community vitality. These initiatives create quality amenities, foster cultural engagement, and drive economic growth. The occupancy tax is not just a funding mechanism; it is an essential resource that builds a stronger, more vibrant Haywood County for today and for generations to come.