

**HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes**  
**January 22, 2025**  
**Gaines Auditorium, Lake Junaluska**

**Members/Staff Present:** Dr. Shelley White, Chuck Dickson, Jeff Hillis, Bridget Shaughnessy, Chad King, Natalie Hawkins, Gail Mull, Corrina Ruffieux, Hayley Printz, Alycin Ray, Ashley Rock-Rice

**Members/Staff Absent:** Jim Owens, Kristian Owen, Mike Huber, Angela Frisbee, Jeremy Boone, Jennifer Best, Scot Blair, Amie Newsome

**Guests Present:** Jane Mauer, Caleb Smith

1. **Call to Order** – Vice Chair Dr. Shelley White called the meeting to order at 9:03 AM
2. **Welcome New TDA Board Member** – Bridget Shaughnessy
3. **Introductions**
4. **Adjustment of Agenda** – Change the order of items, as needed, until we have a quorum
5. **Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)**
  - Jane Mauer presented data for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which shows that visitation is down 14.9% from 2023. It is the lowest annual total since 2018. All data can be found at <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/>. Jane also announced that Cataloochee's visitor numbers were down 44% from last year. The winter version of the Smokies Guide is out. There is an article that addresses the park closures on the east side. Jane also announced that Charlie Sellers is the interim Superintendent after Cassius Cash left.
6. **Board Comments** – None
7. **Consent Agenda | VOTE**
  - **Request approval of minutes** – [December 4, 2024](#)  
Jeff Hillis made a motion to approve the consent agenda, as presented. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
8. **Finance Reports**
  - [November](#) and [December](#) Financial Reports – *Corrina Ruffieux*
    - Corrina reviewed the December financial report, stating that our cash assets are very healthy, with \$4,478,681.15 in the bank. She stated that the financial reports were reviewed in detail at the Finance Committee. Chuck Dickson agreed that there were no concerns with the financial reports.
  - [Occupancy Tax Data](#) – *Corrina Ruffieux*
    - Corrina presented the occupancy tax data, showing that November ended up being down about 4%, which was less than projected.
    - Corrina reminded the Board that they had reduced the budget by 20% to account for the lower occupancy tax due to Helene. Finance Committee determined it was better to leave the budget as-is for now.

## 9. Old Business

- Correct Board term description in [HCTDA bylaws](#). [Section 3, Page 3]
  - The current bylaws state that appointments to the Board will be made in alignment with the HCTDA fiscal year; however, the Haywood County Board of County Commissioners vote on the TDA Board positions and they do so on the calendar year. The language in the bylaws needs to be updated to reflect the schedule that we have been following.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the bylaws with the proposed changes. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

## 10. New Business - None

## 11. Staff Reports/Announcements

- Audit Update
  - Corrina explained that, due to Helene, the audit has been delayed. The auditor confirmed that the audit will be complete by the end of January. As soon as it is complete, we will distribute copies to all Board members.
- Small Business Recovery Grants update
  - Corrina reminded the Board that there were 126 applications for over \$2.26 million. The Haywood Advancement Foundations awarded a total of \$350,000 to Haywood County businesses affected by Helene.
- Gift of Haywood updates – results
  - Corrina announced that we shipped ornaments to 30 different states, and presented a map of which states purchased, showing that most were purchased by states on the east coast.
  - Corrina explained that we sold 813 ornaments, but still have over 2,000 left. We have about half of the magnets left, and about 50 beanies remaining. The sales were lower than we were hoping for. However, we will continue to work to sell the product.
  - We did receive more donations than we were anticipating. During the Balsam Range concert, we were able to raise \$8,590 from 25 donations.
  - Caleb Smith shared with the Board that Balsam Range loves Haywood County, and they take Haywood County everywhere they go on tour. After Helene, they did a couple of fundraising shows and started a Go Fund Me account. He announced that they raised an additional \$12,880 and Balsam Range will be donating that money to the HCTDA for the Small Business Recovery Fund. The Board thanked Caleb and all of Balsam Range.
- Advertising & PR update
  - The Gift of Haywood campaign received over \$277,000 in PR coverage.
  - We have some fun new winter ads running, which have been doing really well. Due to these ads, our #2 visited webpage from November to January is the winter landing page, with over 22,000 unique viewers.

- Our #1 visited page from November to January is the Ice Fest page, with over 36,000 unique viewers.
- Ice Festival Weekend updates & volunteer recruitment
  - Ice Festival Weekend starts next Thursday! There are tons of activities and events across the County over 4 days.
  - We received coverage in Our State January 2025 due to hosting a journalist last year during Ice Fest.
  - Corrina presented the parking and event maps for the Ice Stroll and Ice Festival, showing the wide array of activities that we have planned.
  - Ice Festival t-shirts are available to purchase! They are \$20 now, and will increase to \$25 during Ice Fest Weekend.
  - We really need volunteers for the Ice Stroll and Ice Festival. All volunteers receive free entry to the Maggie Valley event.
  - We have sold 253 tickets so far. Corrina presented the heat map, showing where tickets have been purchased from. The pre-sales are pacing much slower, as last year at this time we had already sold 1,500 tickets. Corrina asked the Board for help with spreading the word to promote ticket sales.
- Improved Promotion Grant and new Capital Grant Guidelines – in the works
  - We are about to open the next cycle of grants. We will have new Capital Tourism grant guidelines and have revised the Promotion grant guidelines. We will send the guidelines in advance of the February meeting. Corrina presented the grant timeline, showing that the applications will be due March 27<sup>th</sup> and the Board will vote on grant applications at the May 28<sup>th</sup> meeting.
- New! Fat Burger Month
  - Corrina announced that the HCTDA will be doing a new event called Fat Burger Month to showcase unique burgers across the County. The event will take place in March, to align with March Madness. This event is designed to grow into a larger event in 2026.
- Next TDA Board meeting is February 26, 2025
- Adjournment – Dr. Shelley White adjourned the meeting at 9:43 AM.