

HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes
August 27, 2025
HCC Hemlock Building #1509

Members Present: Jim Owens, Hannah White, Jeff Hillis, Dr. Shelley White, Mike Huber, Gail Mull, Bridget Shaughnessy, Chad King, Kristian Owen, Chuck Dickson, Jeremy Boone, Corrina Ruffieux, Hayley Printz, Alycin Ray, Amie Newsome, Ashley Rice

Members Absent: Angie Frisbee, Scot Blair, Jennifer Best

Guests Present: Andrew Marshall, Jane Mauer

- 1. Call to Order** – Chair Jim Owens called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM
- 2. Introductions**
- 3. Adjustment of Agenda**
- 4. Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)**
 - Jane Mauer gave an update regarding visits to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. She stated that visits through July are down 4%. Backcountry camping is down 10% and RV overnights are down 13%.
- 5. Board Comments**
 - Hannah White announced that the County is doing a 1-year remembrance for Helene. Thursday, the first night of the Fair and on Saturday.
 - Jeff Hillis mentioned that the Marketing Committee met to review the website RFP proposals and are meeting tomorrow for finalist interviews and choose a firm.
 - Dr. Shelley White announced on Saturday September 13th, HCC will have the 3rd annual Dahlia Ridge 5K. The following week on the 18th, HCC will be celebrating the 60th anniversary of HCC.
 - Jeremy Boone announced that Product Development Committee is working on scoring capital grants.
- 6. Consent Agenda | VOTE**
 - Request approval of minutes – [June 25, 2025](#)

Jeff Hillis made a motion to approve the minutes, as presented. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- 7. Finance Reports**
 - [June Preliminary Financial Report](#) – Kristian Owen reminded the Board that the June financials are preliminary and subject to change as we go through the audit. She shared the following:
 - Total Checking/Savings – \$4,510,171.40
 - Total Current Assets – \$5,094,322.60
 - Total Liabilities – \$394,779.88
 - Total Occupancy Tax Revenue May & June – \$773,173.24
 - Total Occupancy Tax Revenue YTD – \$2,928,967.88
 - Total Income May & June – \$793,002.53

- Total Income YTD – \$3,233,148.94
 - Total Expenses May & June – \$439,334.01
 - Total Expenses YTD – \$2,486,835.97
 - Change in Net Position May & June – \$353,668.52
 - Change in Net Position YTD – \$746,312.97
- [Occupancy Tax & Lodging Data](#) – Corrina Ruffieux presented the fiscal year monthly occupancy tax comparison. She noted that for the month of June, it was down 13.49%, but for the fiscal year, we only ended up down 10.33%, which was expected after looking at the projections post-Helene.

8. Old Business – None

9. New Business

- [2026 Visitor Guide Contract](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that we issued a RFP for visitor guide development and received 4 bids. We worked with Lure Creative for the last few years, did a great job, and they were the least expensive. Dr. Shelley White made a motion to approve the Lure contact and authorize Corrina Ruffieux to sign the contract. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

10. Staff Reports/Announcements

- Tourism Economic Impact 2024
 - Corrina Ruffieux informed the Board that the data is embargoed until Visit NC releases the information later in the day. The 2024 data shows that visitors spent \$357 million at Haywood County businesses, a 2% increase over 2023. Visitors supported payroll income exceeding \$92 million, a 4.5% increase over 2023. Traveler spending supported 2,223 full-time jobs and offset over \$900 in state and local taxes per household, reducing the tax burden on Haywood residents.
- Datafy
 - Corrina Ruffieux explained that we have a new data tool called Datafy and that we are still finalizing the setup and learning about it. Interesting features noted so far include the ability to aggregate geolocation data so we can see the trends within segments of our lodging inventory such as short-term vacation rentals and B&Bs. Corrina informed the Board that lodging spend data will skew lower than our actuals since many visitors book on online platforms including AirDNA, VRBO, Expedia etc. Online sales do not show as a sale in Haywood.
- Ice Fest Award
 - Corrina Ruffieux announced that the Visit Haywood Ice Fest is one of 13 events in North Carolina that was awarded the “Signature Event of the Southeast” through Southeast Tourism Society. Corrina also informed the Board that we are looking for volunteers to help with the events.
 - Jim Owens announced that his son, Jeff, will help manage volunteers with Tim Wise’s assistance.
- Open Haywood Campaign

- Corrina Ruffieux gave a mid-campaign update for Open Haywood. She noted a drop in bookings from ad clicks, so revisions were made to the ads to make it simpler for consumers to understand Elk Bucks.
 - We have sent \$7,150 in Elk Bucks to 52 parties so far. 51.9% booked 4+ nights. 51% of spending has been at restaurants.
 - Corrina Ruffieux showed data from AirDNA on future pacing, reiterating the reason that the Open Haywood campaign was conceptualized. For the month of July, Haywood County saw an improvement of 20.1% and paced ahead of Western NC by almost 4%.
 - Chad King added that at the Yellow House, most of their year-round stays are one night, and guests have been changing their reservations and extending their trips in order to take advantage of the Elk Bucks offer.
- Grant Program Update
 - Corrina Ruffieux announced that second round grant funding is now open, and showed the timeline. She reminded the Board that capital grants will be voted on at the September meeting.
 - Outdoor Writers Association of America Conference
 - Corrina Ruffieux announced that she, Ashley Rice, and Amie Newsome attended the OWAA conference and engaged with 220+ outdoor writers, and already had a writer reach out wanting to write about Haywood County.
 - Community Presentations – *Ashley Rice, Amie Newsome*
 - Ashley Rice told the Board she was a presenter at the Haywood Chamber Women in Business luncheon. She gave a background of who the TDA is and our upcoming campaigns.
 - Amie Newsome said she spoke to the Rotary Club and the Kiwanis Club, and those presentations will help her complete her Travel Marketing Professional (TMP) certification.
 - Looking Ahead
 - Corrina Ruffieux announced that Explore Asheville is taking the lead on a 3-day remembrance of Helene and the HCTDA will be taking part. Everyone will be collaborating to talk about the good, positive, and rebuilding to help combat the ongoing negative perception of Western NC that is portrayed in the media.
 - The next Mountain Mornings meeting is November 13th at 8:30 AM at Cataloochee Ranch.
 - New Visit Haywood Video
 - Corrina Ruffieux played the new video for the Board.
 - Next TDA Board meeting is September 24, 2025 at 9 AM – Hemlock #1509
 - Adjournment – Chad King made a motion to adjourn. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Motion Passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 9:47 AM.

11. Ten Minute Media Communication Session