

HCTDA Board Meeting Minutes
November 5, 2025
Gaines Auditorium, Lake Junaluska

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

Members Absent: Angie Frisbee, Amie Newsome, Hayley Printz

Guests Present: Katy Gould, Beth Gilmore, Jane Mauer, Andrew Marshall

1. **Call to Order** – Chair Jim Owens called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM
2. **Introductions** – The HCTDA Board members introduced themselves
3. **Adjustment of Agenda** – Corrina Ruffieux requested to add Ice Fest Weekend Budget Addition under Old Business.
4. **Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)**
 - Jane Mauer reported that the GSMNP will be open through January 1st using funding from partners, though staffing is lower due to furloughs.
 - Katy Gould explains that Spring registration for HCC's Tourism program is open for enrollment.
5. **Board Comments** – Dr. Shelley White announced that, thanks to a TDA connection, Our State Magazine interview HCC's lumberjack team and forestry program, resulting in a cover feature and inclusion in an 8-page spread in their latest publication.

Chad King thanked the TDA for their involvement in getting The Yellow House included in a recent Southern Living publication.
6. **Consent Agenda | VOTE**
 - Request approval of minutes – [September 24, 2025](#)

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

7. Finance Reports

- [September Financial Report](#) – Kristian Owen reviewed the financials as follows:
 - Total Checking/Savings - \$4,723,639.98
 - Total Assets - \$4,772,956.61
 - Total Liabilities - \$308,346.89
 - Change in Net Position - (\$269,767.81)
 - Total Occupancy Tax Revenue – September - \$345,125.98
 - Total Occupancy Tax Revenue – YTD - \$345,125.98
 - Total Income – September - \$371,932.09
 - Total Income – YTD - \$410,858.76
 - Total Expenses – September - \$262,812.52
 - Total Expenses – YTD - \$680,626.57
 - Change in Net Position – September - (\$109,119.57)
 - Change in Net Position – YTD - (\$269,767.81)

Kristian Owen reminded the Board that there is a 2-month delay in Occupancy Tax revenue reporting, so this is actually the amount collected for one month of this fiscal year. Kristian Owen also explained that the change in net position for YTD is normal for this time of year, and will eventually dwindle down to net 0.

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

Corrina Ruffieux presented the occupancy tax comparison, which shows that August is down 8% from last year. For the YOY comparison, collections are down 9.75%.

Ruffieux went on to explain that a local lodging property, Meadowlark Motel, has been taken to court by the county for delinquent occupancy tax collections spanning several years. Those recouped tax dollars, which currently amount to \$63,062.85, will affect the TDA's reporting numbers in the future as additional months of unpaid occupancy tax continue to be calculated.

Kristian Owen added that, normally, occupancy tax numbers are not public. This is an exception because it is included in a public court case.

Jim Owens underscored that occupancy tax remittance is not optional. Kristian Owen explained that these dollars are not paid by lodging owners but remitted by them—they are fiduciary trustees.

Mike Huber explained that every effort was made to allow the property owners to make their delinquent payments before it was elevated to the court. Corrina Ruffieux echoed his statement.

Jeff Hillis asked if there is a plan to start recouping delinquent tax dollars in the meantime while the case awaits further judgement. Corrina Ruffieux responded that the TDA will keep the board updated on the case's progress.

8. Old Business

- [Board Term Renewals](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that Mike Huber, Jeff Hillis, and Scot Blair's terms are set to end in December. Each of them has agreed to stay on the TDA Board for another 3 years pending reappointment by the Haywood County Commissioners.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the renewal of the terms of Mike Huber, Jeff Hillis, and Scot Blair. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Mike Huber, Jeff Hillis, and Scot Blair abstained from the vote. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Marketing Committee Seat](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that over the past two months, two Marketing Committee members have stepped down. The two vacancies represent the committee's county-level and Town of Waynesville seats. Lily Ferguson from Haywood Regional Medical Center has been recommended to fill the county level seat. Katy Gould from Haywood Community College's Tourism program has been recommended to fill the Waynesville seat.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to appoint Lily Ferguson and Katy Gould to the vacant seats on HCTDA Marketing Committee. Mike Huber seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Finance Policy Revisions](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that it's a best practice to review the finance policies annually. The recommended changes include allowing the Executive Director to approve contracts of up to \$50,000 assuming they're already in the approved budget and allowing the TDA to do sole-source contracting when necessary. Kristian Owen explained that the Board authorizes sole-source exceptions. The third revision allows the Executive Director to issue credit cards to staff with authorization from the Finance Committee. Finance Committee Chair, Mike Huber, added that the committee discussed this revision at length. Kristian Owen added that these changes are in line with County policy.

Mike Huber made a motion to approve the finance policy revisions. Jeff Hillis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- Ice Fest Weekend Budget Addition | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that Lake Junaluska has expressed interest in joining Ice Fest, which requires funds from Lake Junaluska's 1% account.

Dr. Shelley White made a motion to approve the Ice Fest Budget Addition up to \$9,800. Chad King seconded the motion. Mike Huber abstained from the vote. Motion passed unanimously.

9. Staff Reports/Announcements

- Fall Foliage FAM Tour – Visit Haywood hosted a group of journalists for Fall coverage. Ashley Rice reported that several articles have already come from this trip.
- SATW Site Visit – Members of the SATW Planning Board visited Haywood County to scout locations for the 2026 convention. Jim Owens emphasized that the SATW convention will be a massive opportunity for Haywood County. Corrina Ruffieux explained that this is the first time the convention has ever been hosted by a rural destination, making it a unique experience for the 200+ attendees expected.
- Open Haywood Summary – Corrina Ruffieux shared a preliminary report on the HCTDA's summer campaign, Open Haywood / Elk Bucks, which was developed in response to a soft summer travel outlook in early 2025. The campaign had 67 eligible stays, with 35 being for over 4 nights, 11 for 3 nights, and 22 for 2 nights. Of the 111 businesses who signed up to accept Elk Bucks, 23% were dining businesses, which took in 46% of the total spend.
- Elk Bucks Success – Corrina Ruffieux explained that the TDA repurposed Elk Bucks for a shop-local holiday campaign with a BOGO deal, which sold out in 4.5 days, resulting in over \$31,000 available to spend at Haywood County businesses. New rack cards have been printed to encourage people to give Elk Bucks cards as gifts this year.
- Ice Fest Update – Corrina Ruffieux reminded members that businesses can purchase custom ice sculptures to display during Ice Fest Weekend, through December 5. HCTDA is underwriting a portion of the cost to make sculptures more affordable this year, at \$250 for a one-block sculpture.
- Next Mountain Mornings is November 13, 2025, at 9 AM at Cataloochee Ranch.
- Next TDA Board meeting is December 3, 2025, at 10 AM at Springdale Resort

10. New Business

[Closed Session per GS 143-318.11(a)(1)] Occupancy Tax Waiver | **VOTE**

Jim Owens entertained a motion to go into a closed session per North Carolina General Statute 143-318.11(a)(1) to protect confidential or privileged information, with the information being kept confidential per NCGS 105-259. Chuck Dickson made the motion. Jeff Hillis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting went into closed session at 10:40AM.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to move out of closed session. Shelly White seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting back in open session.

11. Adjournment

Mike Huber made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Shelley White seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 10:49 AM.

12. Ten Minute Media Communication Session