



**Haywood County Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting**

Gaines Auditorium | Wednesday, January 28, 2026 | 9 AM

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Jim Owens, Mike Huber, Jeff Hillis, Jennifer Best, Chad King, Scot Blair, Chuck Dickson, Angie Frisbee, Bridget Shaughnessy, Kristian Owen, Gail Mull, Case Brown, Jeremy Boone, Corrina Ruffieux, Ashley Rock, Hayley Printz, Alycin Ray, Amie Diehl

Members Absent: Hannah White

Guests Present: Jane Mauer, Andrew Marshall, Sam Cullen, Mark Ferguson

1. **Call to Order** – Chair Jim Owens called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.
2. **Introductions** – Jim welcomed Case as a new Board member and all Board members introduced themselves
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 winter version of the Smokies Guide is published. She stated that the hazardous tree removal group is working to clean up the park after the storms. Total visitation in the GSMNP was down 5.4% and camping was down 10% from last year. This is the lowest total since 2018.
 - Sam Cullen said that the Board of Aldermen in Maggie Valley recently adopted a strategic plan. One of the focus points is tourism and economic development within Maggie Valley. They are looking into incentive programs for the business owners and revitalization of the Festival Grounds. He would like to present an update to the HCTDA Board of Directors sometime later this calendar year.
5. **Board Comments** - None
6. **Consent Agenda | VOTE**
 - Request approval of minutes – [December 3, 2025](#)

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

7. Finance Reports

- [December Financial Report](#) – Kristian Owen presented December financials as follows:
 - Total Checking/Savings - \$5,236,663.98
 - Total Assets - \$5,289,576.65
 - Total Liabilities - \$270,922.65
 - December Occupancy Tax Revenue - \$404,943.23
 - YTD Occupancy Tax Revenue - \$1,339,436.93
 - December Income - \$430,715.80
 - YTD Income - \$1,483,817.95
 - December Expenses - \$181,077.38
 - YTD Expenses - \$1,242,934.01

- December Change in Net Position - \$249,638.42
- YTD Change in Net Position - \$240,883.94
- [Occupancy Tax & Lodging Data](#) – Corrina Ruffieux presented the occupancy tax and lodging data, showing that October was up 77% from last year, and November was up 10%. However, those comparisons are against last year when travel was depressed due to Helene. It is worth noting that October and November 2025 were our best months ever for occupancy tax collections – a positive trend.

8. Old Business - None

9. New Business

- FY 24-25 Audit update
 - a. [Issued Audit](#)

Corrina Ruffieux announced that the audit was submitted to the LGC on 12/31/2026 and accepted. We will have printed copies available at the next Board meeting and Travis Keverer will present the audit to the Board.

- b. [Budget Amendment from audit adjustments](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina explained that, historically, we have processed July 4 grants in the previous fiscal year to align with our grant calendar. The auditors noted that July expenses need to be booked against the fiscal year in which the funds are spent and so required three journal adjustments to accommodate. We therefore need a budget amendment aligning the budget to match with required audit general journal adjustments shifting July 4 2025 grant reimbursements from FY24-25 to FY25-26.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to pass the budget amendment, as presented. Angie Frisbee seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- SATW 2026 Annual Convention

Corrina Ruffieux reminded the Board that we took a chance and bid on the opportunity to host the Society of American Travel Writers 2026 Annual Convention. She reiterated that this Convention has never been held in a rural destination in the last 70 years of operation. She said we have been able to secure space for all of the main events and gave a brief overview of each event and participating partners.

- a. Preliminary Budget
 - i. [Budget Amendment 1](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux stated that this budget amendment will create a SATW revenues and expenses code so we can track all of the expenses related to the convention.

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

- ii. [Budget Amendment 2](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux explained that this budget amendment will shift funds from the Fund Balance to utilize funds that were not spent on advertising during Helene. With both budget amendments, this would give the TDA \$500,000 to invest in the convention. She reiterated that most of these funds will be spent within Haywood County.

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

- b. Primary Contracts
 - i. [Annual Convention Services Agreement](#) | **VOTE**

Chad King made a motion to authorize the Executive Director to sign the contract not to exceed \$500,000. Jeff Hillis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

ii. [Lake Junaluska Conference & Retreat Center Agreement](#) | **VOTE**

Corrina Ruffieux presented the agreement with Lake Junaluska. She stated that the \$270,000 is included within the previously approved \$500,000.

Jeremy Boone made a motion to authorize the Executive Director to sign the contract, not to exceed \$270,000. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Mike Huber recused himself from the vote. Motion passed unanimously.

10. Staff Reports/Announcements

- Ice Fest Update
 - Corrina Ruffieux updated that we secured two additional walled tents and are still looking for more propane tanks and space heaters. Corrina said we are not as concerned about the temperatures at the Ice Block Party because attendees can go into businesses to warm up. The ice rink in Canton is still happening. The Frosty 5K is cancelled due to potential ice on the campus. The Ice Extravaganza event was shifted from 4-9 PM to 3-8 PM.
 - Chuck Dickson added that this is the first social district in Waynesville and the team did a great job to make sure that everyone is aware of the rules.
 - Corrina presented the packing list that Amie created to encourage people to dress warmly. She reminded the Board that festivals like this happen all over the country in colder temperatures. Corrina showed the ticket sales year over year, showing that we have sold more adult tickets this year than children.
 - Jim Owens added that the Ice Fest team has done a great job with planning the event. He said that the first event was hard to get off the ground, and this is the first year that we will have Ice Fest weather. We have gone above and beyond to keep the staff and volunteers comfortable. He thanked the whole staff.
- Winter Photo/ Video Shoot
 - Corrina Ruffieux announced that we will be working on a winter photo/video shoot this Saturday, Sunday, Monday so we will have great photos to promote winter and Ice Fest next year.
- Fat Burger Month coming March 1-31, 2026
 - Corrina Ruffieux announced that Fat Burger Month is coming back this year for a full month. She said rack cards are available and encouraged board members to take them to distribute. This year we will have tiered prizes for participants.
- The next Mountain Mornings will be February 12th at the Scotsman.
- Next Meeting: February 25, 2026 at 9 AM – Gaines Auditorium

11. Adjournment

Chuck Dickson made a motion to adjourn. Angie Frisbee seconded the motion. Motion passed. Meeting adjourned at 9:37 AM.

12. Ten Minute Media Communication Session