



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

Gaines Auditorium | Wednesday, March 25, 2026 | 9 AM

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Jim Owens, Mike Huber, Jeff Hillis, Terry Spalding, Gail Mull, Chad King, Scot Blair, Jeremy Boone, Chuck Dickson, Case Brown, Corrina Ruffieux, Ashley Rock, Hayley Printz, Alycin Ray, Amie Diehl, Mark Ferguson

Members Absent: Angie Frisbee, Hannah White, Kristian Owen, Bridget Shaughnessy

Guests Present: Jane Mauer, Andrew Marshall, Nate Vorbeck

1. **Call to Order** – Chair Jim Owens called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM
2. **Introductions** - None
3. **Adjustment of Agenda** - None
4. **Public Comment Session (12 minutes total, limit 3 minutes per person)**
 - Jane Mauer from Smokies Life announced January data for GSNMP. January's visitation was higher than last year with 4,500 recreation visits – being the 5th highest. 2378 overnight stays, with most being backcountry camping. She announced that the new Smokies Guide is out and noted the Ranger Activities – nothing at Cataloochee right now – but there are activities at Oconaluftee Visitor Center. She also stated that the Smokies Journal is out and they had 7 advertisers from Haywood County, including Visit Haywood, and there's a great article about wild boar.
5. **Board Comments** – None
6. **Consent Agenda | VOTE**
 - Request approval of minutes – [February 25, 2026](#)

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

7. **Finance Reports**
 - [February Financial Report](#) – *Mike Huber presented the February financials as follows:*
 - *Total Assets - \$5,298,958.32*
 - *Total Liabilities - \$274,167.20*
 - *Total Net Position - \$5,126,916.12*

Mike Huber stated that more money was transferred into the NCCMT accounts, at the direction of the Finance Committee. Mike also stated that nothing on the February financial report is out of the ordinary.

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

Corrina Ruffieux presented that January collections were down from last January. She reminded the Board that January was a difficult month from a travel and tourism perspective, with winter storm Fern and winter warnings and widespread closures during Ice Fest Weekend. Corrina showed the 5-year tracker, showing that January 2026 was down but was still not the lowest of the last 5 years.

8. Old Business

- [Resolution of Disposition](#) | VOTE

Corrina Ruffieux explained that Haywood Rec and Parks and Waynesville Park and Rec were approved last month to receive the fishing supplies, but they need fly fishing poles instead of children's poles. Trout Unlimited is a non-profit organization who can use the poles in partnership with Haywood Waterways, so the current Resolution of Disposition is to donate the supplies to them instead.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve the presented Resolution of Disposition. Jeremy Boone seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Lease Extension](#) | VOTE

Corrina Ruffieux stated that, per the lease, we can request to extend the lease up to 4 times. She stated that Lake Junaluska has agreed to hold the rent at the current price and Visit Haywood would like to extend the lease for another year.

Jeff Hillis made a motion to approve the Lease Extension request, as presented. Case Brown seconded the motion. Mike Huber abstained from the vote. Motion passed unanimously.

9. New Business

- [Marketing Committee Applications](#) | VOTE

Corrina Ruffieux reminded the Board that there is an opening on the Marketing Committee and we received 4 applications. Since there was not a March Marketing Committee Meeting, the Executive Committee reviewed applications and recommend Hannah Burnisky. She has been very involved with Visit Haywood by hosting journalists, is involved with Canton Merchants Partnership, and is working with the Town of Canton on development-related initiatives.

Chuck Dickson made a motion to approve Hannah Burnisky as the new Marketing Committee member. Chad King seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

- [Ice Fest 2027 Preliminary Direction and Budget](#) | VOTE

Corrina Ruffieux presented a recap of Ice Fest 2026. She reminded the Board that we had 4 days of events planned, 66 participating partners (up from 55 in 2025), some events sold out in advance, 6x more lodging pre-sale packages over 2025, and advance ticket sales for the Ice Extravaganza up 30% from 2025. Due to the weather impacts, we had 19 vendors pre-cancel, visitors requesting refunds, lodging cancellations, Winter Storm Warning, NCDOT travel warnings, and certain events cancelled, including the Ice Extravaganza.

To make things work, Ice Mill did two days of work in one to move most of the sculptures from Maggie Valley to Waynesville, Haywood County allowed use of the courthouse lawn, and partners showed up to help. The advertising showed a 134% increase in page views, making the Ice Fest page the second most visited on the website, behind the home page. We had significant earned media coverage from journalists who wrote about Ice Fest.

Corrina reminded the Board that the 2025 event supported 138 jobs and drove over \$566,000 in business sales. She stated that Ice Fest Weekend was never designed to be a revenue-generating event, its purpose is to drive visitation during the off-season.

Corrina presented the financials for the event, showing \$115,000 on event production, almost \$36,000 on advertising, and roughly \$4,600 on merchandise. The actual revenues were much lower than anticipated due to refunding vendor fees, ticket sales and pre-sale merchandise purchases.

Corrina presented post-event survey results, showing overall very positive support for this January event.

Corrina stated that we are considering evolving the event for Ice Fest 2027 to include more elements that are less weather-dependent and items that can be re-purposed year after year. She said the goal is to ensure that each town has something that is unique to them. She gave examples of ideas that staff, Ice Fest Committee, and our agencies brainstormed: a, “Anything But Snow” Snowman Contest in Canton, a life-sized snow globe trail in Maggie Valley, an ice lantern trail or scavenger hunt at HCC, expanding the light garden at Lake Junaluska, and continuing the Ice Block Party in Downtown Waynesville (to possibly hold on Saturday with extended hours).

Corrina said we are recommending moving forward with Ice Fest 2027 for January 28-31 and are requesting approval to spend up to \$155,000 on event production, advertising and other expenses.

Scot Blair made a motion to approve the preliminary direction and budget. Chuck Dickson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

10. Staff Reports/Announcements

○ Visit NC Conference

Ashley Rock stated that Amie, Alycin and Ashley attended the Visit NC Conference in Asheville last week. Amie attended the media connections to pitch Haywood County to 4 journalists. They also had a chance to attend sessions and gain insights into emerging content trends. They also heard from the Governor about recovery efforts in WNC.

○ Annual T-Shirt Contest

Alycin Ray announced that the submission period closed yesterday and we have 12 designs from 8 artists this year. The round one voting will open Friday to determine the top 5 that will move to round two of voting. Corrina reminded the Board that the winning design will be printed on a T-shirt and sold in the Visit Haywood Welcome Center and in Mast General Store.

○ [2025 Annual Report](#)

Corrina Ruffieux presented the 2025 Annual Report, explaining that the last year was shaped by Hurricane Helene. Visit Haywood aligned their brand, strategy, partnerships, and role as an organization. She highlighted some of the following:

- Welcome Center and Marketing staff worked to reinvigorate the Welcome Center this year to support local artists and businesses by showcasing their products.
- 2025 was the first year in Visit Haywood’s history that we have had one brand and one message. Corrina stated that this has had significant results – we had a 99% increase in total visits to the website, a 107% increase in new website users, and a 129% increase in social media impressions.
- Fat Burger Month was launched in 2025 – it was used as a tool to remind people that Haywood County is open after Helene. There was a 192% increase in social media impressions and 100% of participants tried a new restaurant.
- In 2025, Visit Haywood hosted 16 different journalists, had a satellite media tour with Jeanenne Tornatore, attended IMM in NYC to speak with journalists. Overall, we secured 113 different media placements, 204 million media impressions, and almost \$4M in advertising equivalency.
- Haywood County received numerous accolades and awards in 2025.

Corrina thanked the Board of Directors for their continued support and leadership and encouraged them to mark their calendars for upcoming projects and events. Scot Blair thanked the team for their hard work.

○ Awards and Recognitions

Corrina Ruffieux announced that Amie Diehl applied and was selected for Destination International’s 30 Under 30 program. The leaders chosen for this program are usually from urban destinations, so it is great to see a smaller destination represented.

Corrina also announced that Visit Haywood won several American Advertising awards. We won a gold award for cross-platform Integrated Campaign and the Visit Haywood video won two awards: Gold and Best of Show. Corrina played the video for the Board, and played a video with the judge's comments and congratulations.

- Mountain Mornings for National Travel & Tourism Week May 7, 2026 at 8:30 AM – Warren Center

The Board was reminded to mark their calendars for the special Mountain Mornings to celebrate National Travel and Tourism Week.

- Next Meeting: April 22, 2026 at 9 AM – Gaines Auditorium

11. Adjournment

Mike Huber made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jeff Hillis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 9:58 AM.

12. Ten Minute Media Communication Session