



## **NORTH CAROLINA TRAVEL & TOURISM BOARD**

### **MEETING MINUTES**

March 27, 2018

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Beatty, Rolf Blizzard, Chris Chung, Kevin Corbin, Mike Hawkins, Rick Moore, Tammy O'Kelley, Joel Griffin, Joe Pierce, Paula Wilber, Richard Geiger

**BOARD MEMEBERS ABSENT:** Sally Ashworth, Kevin Baker, Secretary Anthony Copeland, Robert Danos, Pat McElraft, Norman Sanderson, Ralph Hise, Mike Butts

**LIASONS, STAFF AND GUESTS PRESENT:** Jim Hobbs, Scott Gilmore, Bryan Gupton, Kay Hobart, Kara Weishaar, John White, Mark Shore, Eleanor Talley, Marlise Taylor, Wit Tuttell, Dana Grimstead, Andre Nabors, Peggy Brookhouse, Guy Gaster, Heidi Walters, Adam Glaser, Cyndi Tomblin

Tammy O'Kelley, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 10:04am.

#### **Welcome**

O'Kelley welcomed Board members and guests. O'Kelley read aloud the Ethics Statement in accordance with Executive Order No. 35.

#### **COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR**

O'Kelley began with a moment of silence for Christopher McKeaver, the manager of the I-77 North Welcome Center, who passed away Sunday. McKeaver, with the Welcome Center since 2000, will be greatly missed. O'Kelley called for approval of the December meeting minutes. Rich Geiger made a motion to approve, seconded by Rolf Blizzard; and the minutes were unanimously approved. O'Kelley asked for a ratified approval for the August meeting minutes. John Beatty made a motion to approve the August minutes and it was seconded by Rick Moore. O'Kelley stated that the board chair nominating committee will present a recommendation at the May meeting. With the Board's approval, the new chair will take over the meeting. O'Kelley reiterated the importance of educating legislators on the importance of the industry with the budget being cut one million dollars without additional funds.

#### **EDPNC UPDATE**

Chris Chung shared the release of the EDPNC annual report promising a digital link to board members. Chung encouraged the board to attend EDPNC Board meetings. He thanked Geiger for hosting the Visit NC 365 Conference in Winston Salem this year.

#### **VISIT NC UPDATE**

Wit Tuttell gave an overview of the new Visit NC marketing campaign, set to launch April 2. The Visit NC team goal is to produce a 25% increase in visitor spending over the next five years, and the new campaign will be integral in reaching that goal. Marlise Taylor reviewed the YTD lodging data. Taylor stated that the visitor spending numbers are released during Tourism Week and will be made available to members at the next board meeting.

Tuttell showcased the new campaign, which focuses on authenticity and providing travelers with memorable moments. Bellamy research identified the state's target market – medium affinity non-visitors. These travelers have never visited the state but have a good opinion of North Carolina. Once travelers have visited there is an 80% likelihood they'll return. The campaign focuses on experiences in NC, "firsts" which lead to unique, memorable moments. The new campaign includes an updated website that reflects the "Firsts that Last" platform. The campaign uses real people instead of professional actors. Chris and Andrea from Georgia had never seen a waterfall before; Zach and Tomo from New York had never tried moonshine; and Jazmene and Peyton from Ohio had never seen the ocean.

Tuttell presented the 60 second commercial which will be shown in target markets, as well as the two-minute videos on the website showcasing each travelers "firsts" in North Carolina. The commercial drives viewers to the website for the complete 2-minute story. The campaign launches with television and streaming ads in target markets DC, Nashville, Atlanta, Orlando, Columbus, and Philadelphia. Print, social, and digital ads will also be spread across these markets. Tuttell noted that one of the advantages to using real people is that they then return home as spokespeople for North Carolina. Media and digital influencers will all be encouraged to experience "firsts" in the state. The campaign is attainable for all communities across the state, no matter how small with its focus on experiences over place. Rolf Blizzard asked how the campaign will incorporate audio for radio and streaming such as Pandora. Tuttell replied that as the campaign gets traction the team will explore those possibilities. Richard Geiger asked about showing the campaign to legislators to make that emotional connection. John White noted this campaign relates to many legislators' rural backgrounds and is a powerful tool for communicating to them.

Mark Shore shared the new VisitNC.com website. With almost 70% of visitors accessing the site through a mobile device, the new site focuses on mobile first design. The database was completely overhauled to provide what the Google cannot. The website strategy inspires visitors by acting as a trusted insider for the richest experiences for vacations to North Carolina. The website was streamlined to include more video, as research shows video enhances engagement and length of site visit. The demographic focus shifted to mindset marketing with what the visitor would enjoy experiencing now serving as the preferred indicator over age, gender, or income.

Shore highlighted the new database, which has been scaled back in size and scope for visitors and partners. The database search functionality increased to provide an easier, more efficient way for visitors to pull information. Visit NC is moving away from banner advertising focusing on blending advertisements into the site to create a more natural feel. The website overhaul helped drive a record investment in Visit NC co-op marketing programs at the VNC 365 Conference, with well over a million dollars committed by partners. New co-ops include advertising with the streaming service Hulu, Oxford American, Modern Luxury, and Atlas Obscura.

#### **FILM**

Guy Gaster, NC Film Director, provided an update on film in North Carolina. The main objective of the film office is to remind the industry that North Carolina is open for productions with a 25% rebate available. The incentive works well for television shows, but there is currently a resurgence in feature films, which should help raise the NC profile in the film community.

The Secretary of Commerce signed off on three new projects, with two feature films. The film grant receiving recurring funds in addition to unused funds being rolled over has been noted by the industry. Gaster emphasized that stability in the incentive especially for the bigger studios is vital when they consider North Carolina for projects. A recent feature that used the grant program, “American Animals”, debuted at Sundance Film Festival and will have an in-state screening at the River Run Film Festival in Winston-Salem.

### **WELCOME CENTERS**

Tuttell shared that there will be a new sweepstakes commemorating North Carolina Welcome Centers 50 years of service to the state’s visitors. These will run from May through the observation of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in August.

### **2018 WORLD EQUESTRIAN GAMES**

Tuttell highlighted excitement for the upcoming 2018 World Equestrian Games to be held at the Tryon Equestrian Center September 11–23. Attendees, expected to be around 500,000, will include many visiting NC for the first time. Providing area partners exposure to these visitors will be a primary objective. Visit NC PR will highlight horse-related activities across the state to the estimated 2,000 media in attendance.

A World Equestrian Games packet included in board folders described three levels of sponsorship opportunity. Tuttell explained that he would like direction from the board for a sponsorship commitment to the games. Geiger asked if this would be a sponsorship co-op with Commerce. Tuttell replied that Commerce plans to sub-sponsor. O’Kelley inquired when a decision would be needed for the sponsorship. Tuttell indicated a quick response was desired to take full advantage of the sponsorships offered.

Geiger asked for the staff recommendation. Tuttell responded that they were interested a sponsorship dependent on budget. A budget reduction would impact the decision. O’Kelley stated Board supports pursuit of options for a sponsorship. Richard Moore introduced the motion to give staff and the agency authority to proceed with what’s in best interest of the program. The motion was seconded by Paula Wilbur.

### **LEGISLATIVE AND INDUSTRY REPORTS**

Rep. Corbin shared the legislature would return to session May 16<sup>th</sup>, and he would be happy to speak to Speaker Moore concerning funding. Rep. Corbin offered to share the new campaign with his fellow legislators via email.

Paula Wilbur spoke on behalf of NCRLA citing workforce development as a key issue thanks to record low unemployment levels. NCRLA’s Government Affairs Committee recently assembled an ABC Task Force to explore mechanisms for bringing greater flexibility to current ABC laws. Issues such as occupancy taxes, meals taxes, tourism promotion funding, and the school calendar remain 2018 NCRLA legislative priorities.

John Beatty shared the T&T Coalition legislative priorities for 2018, which remain the same as 2017. School calendar law remains at the forefront for the Coalition as well.

Bryan Gupton with NC Visitor Services highlighted 2017 visitor traffic increased by 1%. Visitor traffic for 2018 through February is down 2.4% overall, largely due to closures including I-85N. Call center traffic for 2017 increased by 28%.

Jim Hobbs with the NC Hospitality Alliance update stated they are optimistic for the upcoming short session. The school calendar law is at the forefront for the NC Hospitality Alliance as well. Hobbs said the Alliance is focusing on the long session that will convene in 2019.

#### **CURRITUCK OCCUPANCY TAX UPDATE**

Rolf Blizzard shared a letter written by an Outer Banks homeowner's association. Kay Hobart with Parker Poe provided a brief overview. Hobart represents the association regarding concerns about Currituck County occupancy tax spending. A public records request sent to Currituck County in January had yet to receive reply or acknowledgement as of the meeting from the county.

Blizzard asked Hobart her goal in presenting this to the T&T Board. Hobart replied that a meeting with the T&T Coalition may help, but ultimately step one is receiving an acknowledgement or reply to the public records request. O'Kelley stated this is a matter for the Travel and Tourism Coalition with the Board providing support and assistance. The letter serves as a reminder that can be consequences to non-compliant usage of occupancy tax. Wilbur noted that this is a constant struggle and to that fellow tourism authorities can be a great resource. Blizzard worried the county is not compliant with clear legislative intent. The question of enforcing the tax legislation may ultimately require some oversight or action. O'Kelley advised Hobart to make the legislative delegation aware of the issue and to follow up with the Board at the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned by O'Kelley.