



NORTH CAROLINA TRAVEL & TOURISM BOARD MEETING MINUTES

N.C. Travel & Tourism Board Meeting, March 13, 2024, 10:00 a.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Chris Chung, Sen. Dave Craven, Arthur Fisher, Shannon Gilligan, Sen. Bobby Hanig, James Meacham, Lynn Minges, Lee Nettles, Steven Pasquantonio, Rep. Ray Pickett, Jessica Roberts, Greg Walter

MEMBERS ABSENT: Kimberly Albritton, Rolf Blizzard, Denny Edwards, Rep. Charles Miller, Sec. Mabelle Sanders, Vivek Tandon

LIAISONS, STAFF AND GUESTS PRESENT: Christy Agner, Michael Ebert, Ashton English, Guy Gaster, Scott Gilmore, Bryan Gupton, Shanta Morton, Scott Peacock, Kathy Prickett, Austin Rouse, Kylee Sprengel, Marlise Taylor, Wit Tuttell, Heidi Walters, Kara Weishaar

Lee Nettles, acting as chairperson, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. The meeting was held in-person and remotely.

WELCOME/COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

Roll call was taken of board members present. Nettles reminded members of the Ethics Statement, in accordance with Executive Order No. 35. He asked for approval of the November 2023 meeting minutes. James Meacham made the motion to approve, seconded by Greg Walter; the minutes were unanimously approved.

Nettles noted the new format for the meeting. As the Visit NC Update was shared with the board prior to the meeting, the meeting would progress without going through that presentation. Nettles wanted to have a “deeper dive” into the EDPNC and Visit NC through this and upcoming meetings to provide more nuanced insights into both operations.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Chris Chung provided an update on the EDPNC before introducing three members of the EDPNC: COO Michael Ebert, Director of Marketing Shanta Morton and Director of Business Recruitment Austin Rouse. Each provided an overview of the work being done within their areas, noting the teams of Business Recruitment, International Trade, Existing Industry & Expansions and Small Business Advisors, in addition to Visit NC’s Travel & Tourism. Wit Tuttell wrapped up the segment with the programs Visit NC oversees, plus working with N.C. Commerce’s Visitor Services. He added a look at 2023 Year-End Lodging Data, plus gave the results of its Advertising Effectiveness Study. Topline Study results cited that every \$1 of ad spend generated \$310 in incremental visitor spending and \$168 million in State tax revenue (a \$28 tax return on the advertising investment).

INDUSTRY PARTNER UPDATE

NC Travel & Tourism Coalition – No report provided.

Lynn Minges, NC Restaurant & Lodging Assn. – Continuing work on recurring issues, such as supporting Visit NC, school calendar and occupancy tax issues. Minges provided an update on NCRLA’s “Serving Careers” campaign, which has been “going exceptionally well.” While funding for the campaign ends in May, the website will be available for another year, even though there is no additional funding to drive the campaign. Received federal funding for training and certifications within the industry.

Jessica Roberts, NC Travel Industry Association – Delivered presentations in Black Mountain and Wilmington to explain any statewide changes to occupancy tax guidelines, held for DMOs, local elected officials and others. Roberts added these meetings will continue. NCTIA is doing a podcast “Do Politics Better,” which Roberts recommended, especially the Jan. 19 episode. There are also active discussions with parents and school districts regarding school calendar.

James Meacham, Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina – Call with leadership at NC Dept. of Revenue re: Booking.com, as tax remittance isn’t handled the same as other booking platforms such as VRBO. A discussion followed about best practices to get consistency across the board in N.C. for short-term vacation rentals.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Sen. Dave Craven noted April 22 starts the short session for the NC General Assembly. The last budget anticipated revenue projection but there are no expectations for a surplus within the upcoming budget. Rep. Bobby Hanig is advocating for travel & tourism, as it consistently exceeds expectations at the General Assembly. He also commended advertising being done for more tourism opportunities outside of the beaches, as mainland areas have offerings, too. Hanig agreed there is a need for a level playing field. Rep. Ray Pickett noted warm weather affected tourism in his area. He also said short-term vacation rentals are a hot topic in his area and the issue needs to be examined so it’s consistent and fair to all.

COMMERCE UPDATE

No report provided.

WELCOME CENTER UPDATE

Bryan Gupton said the new site for the I-95 South center is expected to be open by June. Traffic overall last year was flat, which is actually outstanding since I-95 South was “essentially closed” (in a temporary location) and I-85 North was closed intermittently for extensive landscaping work. Outbound mail (NC Travel Guides, NC highway maps) was up significantly. Weather led to the reduction of calls to 511.

OTHER BUSINESS

Nettles reminded everyone that the Visit NC Tourism Conference starts in Greenville this Sunday (March 17).

The next NC Travel & Tourism Board meeting is Wednesday, May 22.

CLOSING

Lynn Minges made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Sen. Craven; the motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 11:13 a.m.