



**NORTH CAROLINA TRAVEL & TOURISM BOARD**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
February 23, 2021

Travel and Tourism Board Meeting February 23, 10:30 a.m.

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Sally Ashworth, Jim Beley, Rolf Blizzard, Christopher Chung, Tamara Daniels, Dennis Edwards, Rep. Bobby Hanig, Lynn Minges, Lee Nettles, Steven Pasquantonio, Rep. Ray Pickett, Sharon Sexton,

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Mike Butts, Senator Chuck Edwards, Jonathan Fussell, Secretary Mabelle Sanders, Senator Bob Steinburg

**LIAISONS, STAFF AND GUESTS PRESENT:** Christy Agner, Bonnie Bernat, Suzanne Brown, Hill Carrow, Skye David, Guy Gaster, Scott Gilmore, Bryan Gupton, Erin Healy, Meg Jokinen, Kathy Prickett, Adam Sacks, Allison Schult, Kaytee Smith, Edward Stiles (Sen. Steinburg's office), Hayley Tate, Marlise Taylor, Cyndi Tomblin, Wit Tuttell, Heidi Walters, Kara Weishaar

Steven Pasquantonio introduced himself. He is a new member of the board appointed by the Governor about 2 months ago. He and his brother own a restaurant in Topsail.

Rolf Blizzard, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 10:30 am. Due to COVID-19 the meeting was done remotely.

**WELCOME/COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR**

Rolf read aloud the Ethics Statement in accordance with Executive Order No. 35. Roll call was taken of board members present; quorum was met. Rolf asked for approval of the November meeting minutes. Lee Nettles made the motion to approve, seconded by Dennis Edwards; and the minutes were unanimously approved.

**TOURISM INDUSTRY UPDATE**

Rolf introduced Adam Sacks, Founder and President of Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics company dedicated to understanding the relationship between travel and the economy. Adam presented on planning for the recovery of tourism. Adam answered questions from Jim on employment, Dennis on corporations return to business and Rolf on how forecast have changed since the EDPNC board meeting last year.

**EDPNC UPDATE**

Chris Chung had a media interview that conflicted with the board meeting. Wit Tuttell provided an update on his behalf. Annual report for EDPNC has been released. This year North Carolina had the best year in capital investment in NC in the last decade. Business recruitment team

closed 147 corporate relocation and expansion projects which resulted in more than 20,000 jobs. EDPNC is trying to establish a fund to do business development marketing. Rolf asked about the marketing tourism funds. Wit clarified that the tourism marketing expenditures that were paused during last year due to COVID-19 are available to use for this fiscal year. It equates to about 1 million dollars of savings. Chris was able to join later in the meeting and additional details to Wit's earlier report.

### **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Rep. Pickett co-sponsored a bill that was passed in the house to assist those businesses impacted by COVID-19 with their property tax. It will be sent to the Senate for vote. Rolf thanked Rep. Pickett for his service.

Rep. Hanig texted Rolf that he had to sign off. He needed to vote on a bill with the Health Committee.

### **VISIT NC UPDATE**

Wit Tuttell, VNC, shared research update including travel spending and tax revenue loss, 2020-year end lodging, and lodging demand performance by region. Highlighted the Count On Me NC safety campaign, partner credit co-op program, CARES Act Tourism Grant Program with NCTIA, Outdoor NC, and Visit NC campaign evolution including the our new Drive Thru Vacations campaign. Discussed the budget allocation before and after moving to EDPNC.

Guy Gaster, VNC, shared a Film NC update including a review of 2020 and current direct in-state spending. NC was one of the earlier states to get production restarted. Looking at work force development programs to get next generation film professionals ready for the increase in production in NC.

Rolf commended the team for their work over the last year.

### **INDUSTRY PARTNER UPDATE**

Dennis Edwards, NC Travel and Tourism Coalition, the coalition discussed many issues in their meeting including school calendar and hotel occupancy tax collection. The coalition sent a letter to the Governor's office regarding the executive order expiring at the end of the week, making three requested changes. Another request was also made regarding assistance with the lifting of the boycott Washington, Minnesota, New York, and California have in place banning state employees traveling to NC.

Lynn Minges, NC Restaurant and Lodging Association, spoke to being a proud partner in Count On Me initiative. Discussed restaurant work force and the hotel and restaurant numbers being a larger subset of travel in relationship to the data Adam Sacks shared. Recently released the Blueprint for recovery for the hospitality industry. Blueprint can be found at [ncrla.org](http://ncrla.org).

Addressed support for the property tax bill co-sponsored by Rep. Pickett and noted a request NCRLA has put forth for a hospitality stimulus program.

Lee Nettles, NC Travel Industry Association, commended Visit NC and their efforts with the grant program. NCTIA recognized that many destination marketing organizations were prevented from receiving first round of PPP funding due to conflict with the state constitution which prevents quasi government entities from incurring debt. NCTIA is working with lobbyist have been working Senator Newton and House Finance Chair Julia Howard to close that loophole. Recently, NCTIA has offered limited support of HB82 which involves school calendar.

Bonny Bernat, North Carolina Sports Association, provided background on NCSA and discussed the newly formed North Carolina Sports Leadership Council. The NC Sports Leadership Council echoed the NC Travel Coalition and NCRLA in their letter to the Governor's office regarding the changes to the Governor's executive order to support sports events.

### **WELCOME CENTER UPDATE**

Rolf asked Bryan to convey the boards thanks to Secretary Machel Sanders for taking on the role and look forward to working with her.

Bryan Gupton, NC Commerce, provided an update on welcome centers and visitors services. All welcome centers are currently open, they have had COVID-19 related closures. 1-85 will be closed for three months for renovation. Traffic was down last year to welcome centers and is currently down about 25%. Call center calls are up about 35% likely due to DOT customer service and now taking 211 calls.

### **Other Business**

Hill Carrow, Triangle Sports Commission, presented on the World University Games opportunity and North Carolina's bid on the event.

Rolf asked Hill to keep VNC and the board advised on its progress.

### **CLOSING**

The next board meeting is scheduled for May 25. The meeting was adjourned at 12:27 PM.