



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

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

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Rolf Blizzard, David Chapman, Chris Chung, Dennis Edwards, Rep. Frank Iler, Shannon Gilligan, Sen. Bobby Hanig, Kimberley Jochl, James Meacham, Lynn Minges, Lee Nettles, Rep. Ray Pickett, Jessica Roberts,

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Sen. Dave Craven, Arthur Fisher, Steven Pasquantonio, Sec. Machel Sanders, Greg Walter

**LIAISONS, STAFF AND GUESTS PRESENT:** Amy Beam, Suzanne Brown, Ashton English, Guy Gaster, Veda Gilbert, Scott Gilmore, Dana Grimstead, Bryan Gupton, Brandon Kingdollar, Scott Peacock, Kathy Prickett, Kylee Sprengel, Marlise Taylor, Wit Tuttell, Heidi Walters

Chairperson Lee Nettles 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 August 2024 meeting minutes. James Meacham made the motion to approve, seconded by Dennis Edwards; the minutes were unanimously approved.

### **INDUSTRY PARTNER UPDATE**

Dennis Edwards, NC Travel & Tourism Coalition – Upcoming retreat Nov. 18 for annual retreat, which will include legislative discussions. Also expected to be discussed is additional funding for Visit NC, school calendar and hospitality tax guidelines; plus monitoring sports wagering and distribution of funds.

Lynn Minges, NC Restaurant & Lodging Assn. – A lot of efforts have centered around Western NC due to Hurricane Helene, especially trying to find possible grants and not loans, due to many businesses are still dealing with loans taken due to COVID. Trying to help clear hurdles regarding working with the NC Department of Health & Human Services in addition to the federal government.

Jessica Roberts, NC Travel Industry Association – Annual conference Dec. 4-5 in Durham Visit NC will provide a marketing update for Western NC; post-election results will be reviewed, along with a likely priority shift in legislative policy. In addition is the annual policy dinner, where Legislators of the Year will be recognized.

James Meacham, Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina – Expressed marketing concerns due to Hurricane Helene: many of the smaller Western NC DMOs' marketing budgets are generated by October occupancy tax collections. The impact is the DMOs will likely experience a residual impact that we don't know yet; this will hamper the ability of these local organizations having the marketing dollars to support the recovery of the places.

Dennis Edward added this is a case study for the importance of guidelines regarding occupancy tax legislation, how it's important to have those marketing dollars.

### **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Sen. Bobby Hanig said he was glad to see \$5 million allotted by the General Assembly for marketing and is interested to see how that helps, especially for future funding requests. He offered assistance to businesses for working with the federal government.

Rep. Frank Iler said General Assembly is preparing new bill that might make it easier for the SBA.

Rep. Ray Pickett suggested there has to be some way to help businesses, as many are still dealing with loans taken out due to COVID. He's prepared to travel to Washington, DC, for meetings to discuss. Perhaps requesting replenishment of SBA funding, as several businesses have been approved for funding but there's no money to give them. Plus, there are concerns some small towns don't have the funding for infrastructure problems. He knows that FEMA doesn't financially help businesses but perhaps the Corps of Engineers; he's continuing to look into that.

### **EDPNC UPDATE**

Chris Chung noted EDPNC paused its business marketing after Hurricane Helene; it's now discussing how best to restart and the appropriate messaging. Tasked by the Legislature to do a business loss assessment program. He's on the Commerce Committee for the incoming governor's transition team.

### **VISIT NC UPDATE**

Wit Tuttell gave a brief overview of how, on the Saturday following Hurricane Helene, Visit NC staff was working to contact Western NC DMO partners to see how they fared and how they were doing. In addition, Visit NC has been holding weekly calls with DMOs to learn and discuss challenges partners are having.

Marlise Taylor explained Visit NC has been working on research due to the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. She presented the findings of the Preliminary Perception Research, noting a drop in October is concerning but there are a lot of misperceptions by market. She also provided YTD updates.

Scott Peacock reviewed the Southern Marketing Campaign, a limited campaign to promote those areas of the Great Smoky Mountains that weren't heavily affected by Hurricane Helene. He also showed the Western NC Recovery Campaign, including a dedicated landing page. He agreed Visit NC would share campaign materials with DMOs for their use and to share. In addition, he showed the Piedmont & Coast Recovery Campaign.

NC Film Office's Guy Gaster reported an update on direct in-state spend by productions along with job opportunity numbers. He noted current and newly wrapped productions, in addition to upcoming releases. Gaster also noted Dark Horse Stages is having the grand opening for its stage expansion this week.

Heidi Walters provided updates for Outdoor NC, including the digital Trail Town Guide; Sports NC, including Cycle NC's Mountains to Coast Ride; the NC Civil Rights Trail; Destination Immersion; and upcoming consumer shows. Retire NC welcomed a new Certified Retirement Community with Vance County. She noted international marketing efforts with notable events/promotions and upcoming shows/missions.

**COMMERCE UPDATE** – No report.

#### **WELCOME CENTER UPDATE**

Bryan Gupton noted the reopening of I-95 South NC Welcome Center in Rowland. Most activities have focused on Hurricane Helene. The I-40 site is likely closed until January but no Welcome Center had any damage from the storm.

#### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Lee Nettles noted he is leaving the NC Travel & Tourism Board, as he's rotating off the EDPNC Board. He explained the need to elect a new chair and motioned the nomination of Dennis Edwards; James Meacham seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The next NC Travel & Tourism Board meeting is TBD.

#### **CLOSING**

James Meacham made the motion to adjourn, seconded by Dennis Edwards; the motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 11:46 a.m.