



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

N.C. Travel & Tourism Board Meeting, February 19, 2025, 10:00 a.m.

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Rolf Blizzard, Chris Chung, Sen. Dave Craven, Dennis Edwards, Sen. Bobby Hanig, Kim Jochl, Lynn Minges, Steven Pasquantonio, Rep. Ray Pickett, Jessica Roberts, Greg Walter

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Sabrina Bengle, David Chapman, Arthur Fisher, Shannon Gilligan, Rep. Frank Iler, Sec. Lee Lilley, James Meacham, Lee Nettles

**LIAISONS, STAFF AND GUESTS PRESENT:** Katie Bailey, Amanda Baker, Amy Beam, Suzanne Brown, Erica Calderon, Chris Cavanaugh, Ashton English, Susan Fleetwood, Guy Gaster, Veda Gilbert, Scott Gilmore, Bryan Gupton, Josh Lambke, Brooks Luquire, André Nabors, Scott Peacock, Kathy Prickett, Kylee Sprengel, Marlise Taylor, Debbie Tullos, Wit Tuttell, Kara Weishaar

Chairperson Dennis Edward called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. The meeting was held remotely.

### **WELCOME/COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR**

Roll call was taken of board members present. Edwards reminded members of the Ethics Statement, in accordance with Executive Order No. 35. He asked for approval of the November 2024 meeting minutes. Rolf Blizzard made the motion to approve, seconded by Kim Jochl; the minutes were unanimously approved.

### **INDUSTRY PARTNER UPDATE**

Rolf Blizzard, NC Travel & Tourism Coalition – Annual retreat was held where legislative priorities were determined. Major focuses are regarding occupancy tax and school calendar, plus marketing funding for Visit NC due to recurring funding ending.

Lynn Minges, NC Restaurant & Lodging Assn. – Annual meeting and “Stars of the Industry” next week. Focused on occupancy tax and school calendar, too, in addition to prepared meals tax. Interested in ABC reform regarding access to spirits in NC. Concerned and carefully watching recovery in WNC; a number of restaurants and hotels are struggling, many hotels are still housing relief workers and those displaced, which affects occupancy tax collections.

NC Travel Industry Association – No report.

Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina – No report.

## **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Rep. Ray Pickett acknowledged they're still trying to find additional funding to help with targeted marketing to potential visitors. He noted there will be some businesses in WNC that will not survive so it's important to be able to help those struggling businesses that will; perhaps some form of grants may be an option. Legislature is starting to work on other things, such as going through HB 18B, seeing what's working and what isn't, as it needs to be modernized.

Sen. Dave Craven mirrored Sen. Pickett's comments, noting WNC assistance and ABC reform. His primary objective is to secure tourism funding; it's proven successful in the past so this has his priority.

Sen. Bobby Hanig said school calendar is being looked at again; he echoed ABC reform among a good list of things that need to be addressed. Conversations ongoing regarding 90-day limit for occupancy tax collection, plus short-term rental discussions. Acknowledged additional tourism funding for WNC is still needed.

## **EDPNC UPDATE**

Chris Chung noted EDPNC's observance of its 10th anniversary with event next week. Gov. Stein's administration is off to a great start, noting the selection of Lee Lilley as Sec. of Commerce, especially as the EDPNC has prior experience working with him.

## **SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

Wit Tuttell explained Visit NC's challenges doing a five-year strategic plan, due to industry disruptions and uncertain funding. So Visit NC worked with the Magellan Strategy Group to do a strategic plan.

Magellan Strategy Group's Chris Cavanaugh provided an overview of the Visit NC Strategic Plan. He noted specific objectives for the development of the plan, along with partner survey responses and partner focus groups. Cavanaugh looked at Plan Pillars, with Strategic Imperatives.

### *Visit NC's Plan Pillars*

- Share the stories of the people and places of North Carolina.
- Generate sustainable economic impact.
- Support local destination vibrancy and stewardship.
- Protect and strengthen North Carolina's competitive position in the marketplace.

### *Strategic Imperatives for Visit NC*

- Promote the North Carolina destination brand to global audiences, serving as the "top of the marketing funnel" to grow awareness and intent to visit for local destination partners.
- Grow and evolve Visit NC's storytelling capabilities.
- Broaden support for local destination development initiatives.

- Increase engagement with local partners.

Tuttell noted next steps depend on the next budget for Visit NC. In the meantime, Visit NC will implement what can be done at this time.

### **VISIT NC UPDATE**

Wit Tuttell announced 213 partners, represented 80 of the 100 NC counties, participated in Visit NC paid programming. He noted the importance of advertising, as it lifts interest and visitation.

Marlise Taylor shared lodging data, notably year-end and forecast for both commercial and vacation rental lodging. She also offered lodging data for the three sub-regions of the mountains. In addition, Taylor looked at social sentiment data related to NC due to Hurricane Helene, in addition to reviewing the preliminary results of the Advertising Effectiveness Study.

Scott Peacock reviewed the Holiday and Winter marketing campaigns, plus shared TV spots that will be in the spring campaign. He noted decrease in funding will affect fall campaign purchasing. In addition, Peacock highlighted PR media hits and activities. Also, he mentioned JPR will be Visit NC's PR agency starting March 1.

NC Film Office's Guy Gaster offered an update on direct in-state spend by productions. He noted current and newly wrapped productions, in addition to upcoming releases.

Tuttell provided updates for Outdoor NC, including its "It Comes Naturally" campaign; Sports NC, specifically esports; and international marketing. He also noted a grant program that will help sponsor qualifying partners with registration for the upcoming Visit NC Tourism Conference in Hickory.

### **COMMERCE UPDATE**

Susan Fleetwood noted two upcoming events: the NC Childcare Summit in Raleigh and the NC Main Street Conference in Mooresville; both events are in March.

### **WELCOME CENTER UPDATE**

Bryan Gupton noted good news for reopening the I-40 West NC Welcome Center, as plans call to have I-40 re-open at the NC/Tenn line in March. NC Welcome Centers will have representatives attending the Visit NC Tourism Conference.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

No additional business.

The next NC Travel & Tourism Board meeting is May 19, 2025.

### **CLOSING**

Meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m.