



# NORTH CAROLINA TRAVEL AND TOURISM BOARD

## MEETING MINUTES

August 6, 2013

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Rolf Blizzard, Donna Carpenter, Randy Cobb, Secretary Sharon Allred Decker, S. Lewis Ebert, Kim Hufham, Chris Humphrey, Randy Kolls, Lynn Lewis, Rep. Pat McElraft, Robert O'Halloran, Tammy O'Kelley, Vinay Patel, Jessica I. Roberts, Sen. Norman Sanderson, Art Schools, Paula Wilber, Mitzi York

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** Kevin Baker, Sabrina Bengel, Robert Danos, Denny Edwards, Rep. Susi Hamilton, Sen. Ralph Hise, Leonard Rigsbee, Jamie Reibel, Steve Thanhauser, Chris Valauri

**LIAISONS, STAFF AND GUESTS PRESENT:** Mike Butts, Theresa Carter, Whitney Christensen, Karin Cochran, Robert Cox, Kristi Driver, Steve Dunkley, Scott Gilmore, Bryan Gupton, Sandra Homes, Nicolle Jones, Secretary Susan Kluttz, Ashlee Kirk, Margo Metzger, Caleb Miles, André Nabors, Dan Spuller, Aaron Syrett, Eleanor Talley, Marlise Taylor, Wit Tuttell, Kara Weishaar

## CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Rolf Blizzard called the meeting to order at 11:53am

## COMMENTS AND INTRODUCTIONS FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Rolf Blizzard welcomed and thanked everyone for attending. All attendees gave brief introductions. Sen. Norman Sanderson and Rep. Pat McElraft were recognized for their work during the legislative session. Blizzard noted an additional \$1 million was allocated for tourism marketing.

## MINUTES APPROVED

Art Schools motioned to approve the May 14, 2013 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Randy Kolls and unanimously approved.

Blizzard then read aloud the Ethics Statement in accordance with Executive Order No. 35.

## LEGISLATIVE AND INDUSTRY REPORTS

Rolf Blizzard representing the Travel and Tourism Coalition reported that they were happy with the progress made (\$1 million) in their ultimate goal of a \$5 million increase of the tourism marketing budget. Also noted were the concerns regarding the partnership and how that will affect tourism. The Coalition will be having their retreat in November to review their agenda and make plans for the next legislative session.

## PRESENTATION BY SECRETARY DECKER

Secretary Decker was present to discuss the current plans for the formation of the Public Private Partnership. Although Senate Bill 127 did not pass during the legislative session, a budget provision was included that allowed the Public Private Partnership to move forward. Additionally, the sports division will be fully staffed with the new organizational structure.

Interviews are being conducted for the CEO of the new partnership, as well as the Director of Tourism. A rural division is being created with an Assistant Secretary, which will be named within the next 2 weeks. The Rural Division will be on the public side of Commerce.

In response to a question about the organizational structure, Secretary Decker stated that there will be a CEO of the partnership, a President of the Business Development Division and a President of the Tourism Division. Under that, a lead in each section (Tourism, Film and Sports) will be in place. There will be a marketing division in the partnership, as the branding is done for North Carolina across the board. There is also awareness that the message used to attract businesses to the state would vary from the message for travelers, but an umbrella brand is needed to bring together a

more uniform effort. The partnership is to gain efficiencies and more effectively recruit and develop businesses within the state. From a funds development standpoint, the Friends of North Carolina structure will be used.

Secretary Decker also announced that she and Tony Almeida will go across the state to hold meetings with local representatives to discuss the needs of each community to develop a 10-year Economic Development Plan for the state.

There are not any major anticipated changes to the current co-op opportunities for local partners. The North Carolina brand is planned to be unveiled at the US Open next year.

#### **LEGISLATIVE AND INDUSTRY REPORTS CONTINUED**

Randy Kolls of the North Carolina Restaurant and Lodging Association gave a report of the recent legislative activities involving the hospitality industry: NCRLA was officially neutral on House Bill 937, which passed to amend the concealed carry laws; HB 683 was filed prohibiting obesity related lawsuits against NC restaurants; H.B. 809 involving casino nights for non-profit organizations did not pass through committee; H.B. 74 (Regulatory Reform Act) passed allowing Bed & Breakfasts to serve three meals per day, requiring carbon monoxide detectors in lodging establishments, and requiring the clarification of the enclosed area definition in the smoking ban.

Lynn Lewis of the North Carolina Travel Industry Association reported that the Tourism Leadership Conference will be held October 2-4 at Southern Pines.

Donna Carpenter of the Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina thanked the Division for having Eleanor Talley attend the DMANC meeting.

#### **DIVISION UPDATE BY WIT TUTTELL**

Wit Tuttell, the Division's Director of Tourism Marketing, reported on the mid-year lodging report numbers showing increases across the board in occupancy, room rates, RevPAR, revenues, demand, and supply.

Some other success stories include new attendance record over Memorial Day weekend at the North Carolina Zoo in Asheville, Wake County hotel occupancy tax collections recorded the best April on record, and increased visitation at the Great Smoky National Park.

Charley Boorman's Extreme Frontiers filmed adventures in many locations across North Carolina in July. When complete, the show will air in the US, UK, Germany, Canada and beyond with total viewership of 100 million. The show is sponsored by Brand USA, the tourism marketing organization of the US Department of Commerce.

The Division of Tourism recently completed the 2012 analysis of overseas (*including Mexico*) and Canadian visitation to the state. The analyses concluded that in 2012, more than 1.7 million international visitors spent time in North Carolina spending more than \$456 million. The Division has contracted with a new UK rep firm – Travel & Tourism Marketing. The Division will also participate in a UK Sales Mission in September, Canada Sales Mission in October, and the 2015 Travel South International Showcase will be held in Charlotte.

The Division annually attends several group travel trade conventions including ABA (American Bus Association) Marketplace, NTA (National Tour Association) Travel Exchange, Travel South Showcase, SYTA (Student Youth Travel Association) Conference, and North Carolina and Virginia Motorcoach Associations Annual Marketplace.

The Division's PR team was able to land stories in multiple outlets recently including the New York Post, Candis, Parents Magazine, Endless Vacation, and more. The in-state media mission in Charlotte at the NASCAR Hall of Fame will be held on August 13<sup>th</sup>.

The Film Office's mid-year figures for 2013 show over 35 productions filed "Intent to Film" forms with the state office, \$250 million in direct in-state spending, 25,000+ job opportunities: 3,000 crew positions for the state's film

professionals; 1,000 well-paying talent offerings; 21,000 background talent openings, and more than 4,300 production days.

The Civil War Trails program is developing an updated Civil War Trails guide for the continuing 150<sup>th</sup> commemoration activities; NC now has 236 sites in 79 counties. Successful TRAC programs were held in Fayetteville and at the Outer Banks summit, making connections with tourism partners within the regions to discuss ways to work with the Division. The next TRAC will be held in Pinehurst on September 5<sup>th</sup>.

North Carolina's Welcome Centers mark 45 years of service, both to the state's thousands of small tourism-related businesses and to millions of visitors each year. There are nine Welcome Centers located on interstate highways just inside the state line with an emphasis on information for visitors traveling a particular interstate corridor.

The Division has made a concerted effort to focus more on digital initiatives and driving traffic to relevant content on VisitNC.com. The spring display ran from March 11 – June 21, 2013 with publishers such as RocketFuel, Quantcast, Choice Stream, Specific, Scripps, World Fishing Network, Blue Ridge Outdoors, Pandora and Evolve. This campaign drove 113,000 clicks to VisitNC.com and pushed 4,753 visitors to partner sites, reflecting a 2% improvement from our successful fall campaign.

At Governor's Conference in March, we previewed the new logo and "Beauty Amplified" tagline, and it officially began appearing on collateral with the launch of our 2013-2014 media plan this summer. With the launch of the new logo and "Beauty Amplified" tagline, we updated our brand print creative to feature a new layout more in line with the refreshed look.

The core strategy for the new VisitNC is to create an experience that engages travelers and intrigues them to want to learn more about North Carolina. The content first strategy is based on findings from an audit of the existing site, survey of site users, industry partner input and exploratory discussions. It has resulted in more focused, useful, actionable, compelling and shareable content presented in varied types and paths to help connect and drive even more downstream traffic to our industry partners' sites. With an increased focus on imagery on the site, we have seen an increase in the Pinterest pins per day go from 9 to nearly 50 per day. The new site employs best practices in web development including responsive design. It is a central feature of the redesign and to delivering a consistent brand presentation to all visitors across all devices. Responsive web design minimizes the need for and investment in development of apps for niche messaging.

The Beauty Amplified Sweepstakes was July 9 -31 in conjunction with the official site launch. To enter the sweepstakes, a traveler had to upload a photo of North Carolina that represented "beauty amplified." Photos with 20 or more "votes" qualified the person who entered it for a drawing to win one of three grand prizes. The Division of Tourism leveraged the reach of multiple social media platforms to increase awareness and interest in North Carolina and the new VisitNC.com with over 73,000 visits and 559 entries submitted in just over 3 weeks of the sweepstakes being live.

The Division's fall campaign is running August – October. In addition, we will be producing a number of branded skins to be featured on sites such as Travel Channel, All Trails and Weatherbug.

Meeting adjourned at 1:33 pm.