



NORTH CAROLINA TRAVEL AND TOURISM BOARD

MEETING MINUTES

December 7, 2015

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Sabrina Bengel, Rolf Blizzard, Christopher Chung, Denny Edwards, Senator Ralph Hise, Chris Humphrey, Caleb Miles, Tammy O'Kelley, Vinay Patel, Jessica Roberts, Senator Norman Sanderson, Secretary John Skvarla, Kathy Sparrow, Chris Valauri, Lynn Wingate

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Sally Ashworth, Kevin Baker, Donna Carpenter, Randy Cobb, Randy Danos, Lew Ebert, Joel Griffin, Katherine Hopkins, Representative Charles Jeter, Representative Pat McElraft, Lynn Minges, Robert O'Halloran, Art Schools, Paula Wilber

LIAISONS, STAFF AND GUESTS PRESENT: Kevin Brafford, Robert Cox, Guy Gaster, Scott Gilmore, Bryan Gupton, Jim Hobbs, Ashlee Kirk, Ray Langen, Catherine Locke, Brooks Luquire, Andre Nabors, Scott Peacock, Mark Shore, Marlise Taylor, Jillian Totman, Wit Tuttell, Heidi Walters, Kara Weishaar, T. Jerry Williams

CALL TO ORDER/COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

Tammy O'Kelley, chairperson, called the meeting to order at 11:00am. O'Kelley welcomed attendees and thanked them for their attendance. O'Kelley then read aloud the Ethics Statement in accordance with Executive Order No. 35.

The minutes from the August meeting will be emailed to all Board members for approval following the meeting. O'Kelley then noted the change in legislation for the Travel and Tourism Board, which removed the Executive Director of the tourism office and added the Chief Executive Officer of the Economic Development Partnership to the membership. Christopher Chung was welcomed as an official board member.

COMMENTS FROM THE SECRETARY

NC Department of Commerce Secretary John Skvarla shared an update from his recent trip to China, including discussions on business development and tourism opportunities. Senator Ralph Hise also joined him on this trip and provided additional comments.

LEGISLATIVE AND INDUSTRY REPORTS

Bryan Gupton of NC Visitor Services noted that year-to-date traffic is up 3% at the welcome centers throughout the state. The center managers recently held their annual planning meeting in Cabarrus county and discussed a wide range of topics including the expansion of call center services, installation of wireless networks at all nine welcome centers and the rollout of the North Carolina brand.

Senator Ralph Hise and Senator Norman Sanderson provided updates from the General Assembly, noting the short turnaround time due to the extended long session. Committees have been meeting and will continue to meet leading up to the primary in March and the start of the short session in April. Budget modifications will need to be in place quickly, including any possible increases to the overall tourism marketing budget.

Guy Gaster of the NC Film Office reported on the changes in the Film and Entertainment grant, which has been increased to \$30 million per fiscal year for 2015-16 and 2016-17. These changes have been well-received by the industry as evidenced by a recent sales mission to Los Angeles and increases in both incoming calls and projects created.

Board Member Caleb Miles of NC Travel Industry Association (NCTIA) reported that the merger between DMANC and NCTIA has been approved and will take place through the work of various committees with the hopes to be consolidated by July 2016. The Tourism Leadership Conference was very successful and included sessions highlighting occupancy tax and a Longwoods research study.

Board member Denny Edwards of the Destination Marketing Association of North Carolina (DMANC) noted that although the merger is taking place, both organizations will continue to have their own identity, as two sub-organizations under one umbrella organization.

Board member Vinay Patel of NC Restaurant and Lodging Association (NCRLA) reported that airbnb began collection of occupancy taxes and the initial numbers were strong. In regards to legislative matters, occupancy tax and school calendar laws will need to continue to be closely monitored and the jet fuel tax was extended and expanded. Their North Carolina PAC raised more than \$50,000 and \$100,000 was raised for the National PAC. The North Carolina Restaurant & Lodging Expo was very successful and plans have been put in place for 2016's event, which will be held August 29-30th. Other upcoming events include the Taste of North Carolina and Stars of the Industry Awards on January 25th and Legislative Day and Rally in Raleigh on May 11th. Board member Joel Griffin has been elected to the Board of Directors for the American Hotel & Lodging Association.

Board member Rolf Blizzard of the NC Travel and Tourism Coalition reported that they had a productive retreat in Tryon, where they updated their legislative priorities for 2016. Items of note include the occupancy tax guidelines, tourism marketing budget and a renewed examination of the school calendar law. Blizzard also reported that the Coalition's recommendation for the opening on the EDPNC Board is Mark Bellissimo of the Tryon International Equestrian Center.

WORKING LUNCH

EDPNC/Visit NC UPDATE

Christopher Chung, Chief Executive Officer of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) provided an overview of the functions and roles of the organization which include travel and tourism promotion, business recruitment, existing industry support, international trade/export and small business counseling. Also noted was the emphasis on coordinating these various functions to better leverage the EDPNC's resources both nationally and globally.

Wit Tuttell, Executive Director, presented an update on the recent accomplishments and results as well as the future goals and strategies for Visit North Carolina.

HSMAI Adrian Awards – The Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMAI) will honor Visit North Carolina with a Silver Adrian Award for Print Media (brand campaign) and a Bronze for Social Media Campaign (Mary Chesnut Project). The HSMAI Adrian Awards is the largest and most prestigious global travel marketing competition.

Listening Tours – 18 listening tours (reaching 126 partners in nearly 60 counties) were held throughout the state and replaced the Mid-Year Marketing Updates. This provided the opportunity to talk directly with program directors in Marketing, Film, Public Relations, and Domestic and International Trade Relations. Partners were able to provide feedback, which has helped in shaping Visit NC's future programming.

Research – Statewide lodging results year-to-date through October shows increases in all categories. International numbers for 2014 show Canada ranking first in terms in volume of international visitors to North Carolina. In terms of total spending in North Carolina, China/Hong Kong ranks second with an estimated \$33.9 million in total spending; Chinese visitors are less than half of the volume of UK visitors, yet they spend two percent more.

Travel South International Showcase – Visit NC hosted the 2015 Travel South International Showcase with Visit Charlotte and met with 87 tour operators from 17 countries along 6 continents. Familiarization tours were held following the showcase, bringing tour operators to the mountain and coastal regions.

International – Visit NC exhibited at World Travel Market, the largest travel trade show in England, teaming up with Travel South USA for a larger presence among the U.S. destinations. Additionally, a trip to Germany allowed for meetings with key tour operators. Delta has announced a new flight from Paris to RDU, beginning May 12th.

International Familiarization tours – Visit NC hosted German tour operator CANUSA in the Outer Banks, Raleigh and Charlotte. Canadian Automobile Association sent agents to the state and experienced the Piedmont region including Alamance county, Lexington, Randolph county and Durham.

Public Relations – The in-state media mission took place in September in Charlotte with the help of 34 partners and was held at the NASCAR Hall of Fame. The New York media mission is scheduled for January 26th at the new Kimpton hotel.

Public Relations Familiarization tours – In September, the PR team partnered with the Greater Mount Airy Chamber of Commerce and Visit Winston-Salem on a Yadkin Valley media tour that featured visits to wineries in Surry, Wilkes and Yadkin counties. In October, Visit NC partnered with Travel South to bring French journalists to the coastal region and in November, a press trip was hosted focusing on sports and craft beer in the state.

Public Relations Coverage – As a result of the Atlanta Media Mission, North Carolina was featured with two full pages in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and five articles on AJC.com. The Yadkin Valley fam trip has resulted in a combined coverage value topping \$45,000. Spiegel, a German online news outlet, featured an article on “Hunger Games” film locations and USA Today writer Larry Bleiberg’s article highlighting places to enjoy the Appalachian Trail has been picked up by several print outlets.

Domestic Group Marketing – This year’s annual sales mission was held in September in the Greater Milwaukee and Chicago areas and the American Bus Association marketplace will be in Louisville in January. Travel South Domestic Showcase is taking place in Winston-Salem with three familiarization tours taking operators around the state prior to the conference.

Sports Marketing – The SportsNC team attended Connect Sports Marketplace in Pittsburgh in August, which brought together 300+ rights holders and sports planners. In November, the state was represented at TEAMS in Las Vegas, with 52 pre-scheduled appointments and a well-attended networking event with potential clients. During TEAMS, the 2015 U.S. Figure Skating Championships (Greensboro) won two awards: Event of the Year and Best Event in the Amateur and Multi-Sport/Multi-Discipline category.

Retire NC – Laurinburg and Reidsville were recently added, bringing the total of communities to 14. Andre Nabors spoke on a panel during the American Association of Retirement Communities Conference.

Community Relations – TRAC was recently in Blowing Rock, Swan Quarter and Ocracoke. Partner feedback reinforces the need for this program, which takes the tourism staff to communities across the state to educate them on how to work with Visit North Carolina. Visit NC also participated as a host of a rest stop in Pinehurst during the Cycle NC route.

Film – Year-End projections for 2014: More than \$70 million in spending, 20 productions, 4,500 job opportunities over course of 1,700 production days. Funds from the initial \$10 million allocation were reallocated to Under the Dome, Love It or List It, Good Behavior (TNT) and Legacy of the Whitetail Deer Hunter. The Choice will be in theaters in February, The Disappointments Room will be released in early spring and Masterminds is scheduled for September. The film office is preparing for Sundance Film Festival in January and AFCEI Locations Tradeshow in April. Locally, Film NC is involved with the Cucalorus Film Festival.

Travel Guide – The 2016 Travel Guide features two covers, Mount Mitchell State Park and Jockey’s Ridge State Park, to highlight the 100th anniversary. This publication is completely supported by advertisers with a partner investment of \$1 million. Ray Langen from Journal Communications provided an overview of their company and what they do within North Carolina.

National & State Parks Centennial – Visit NC is partnering with National and State Parks to develop a special program to promote their attractions and resources around the Centennial Celebration in 2016.

Fall campaign – In partnership with National and State Parks and the Division of Marine Fisheries, fall reports were placed on the site for visitors to access, and received more than 92,000 page views. Visit NC’s user-generated content campaign with the hashtag NCFallofFame was very well-received over various social media platforms.

VisitNC.com Performance – Visit NC’s consumer site, VisitNC.com, continues to perform at record levels with more than 5.7 million visits through the end of November with downstream traffic increasing by more than 9% over last year’s record number. New content is continuously being developed for the site with the help of partners throughout the state.

Social media – Engagement across North Carolina’s consumer accounts is high, as evidenced by Cortex, a social media marketing and measurement tool.

NC Ski – Visit North Carolina has partnered with the NC Ski Association to conduct a campaign in target markets for the promotion of skiing in the North Carolina Mountains. The economic impact of the North Carolina ski industry was recently released, and amounted to \$197.2 million during the 2014-2015 winter season.

Marketing Calendar Timeline – The 2016 Travel guide is being released this month, Visit NC 365 Conference is being held in March at Harrah’s in Cherokee, the 2016 Target Market Campaign will run early spring through June, and the 2016-2017 fiscal year will begin in July with the new partner programs that will be introduced at Visit NC 365. Peter Yesawich and Doug Lansky are the keynote speakers for this year’s conference.

North Carolina Brand – Consumer facing media will be changed in January and is shown in the new travel guide.

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

O’Kelley recognized Denny Edwards and Sally Ashworth from DMANC and Bob O’Halloran from NCRLA as outgoing Board members and thanked them for their service.

Legislative Priorities were presented to the Board for approval as a recommendation from the Executive Committee. Motion to approve made by Chris Valauri; Second by Sabrina Bengel. Motion carried unanimously.

The Nominating Committee for 2016 Chair was selected by the Executive Committee and consists of Rolf Blizzard, Vinay Patel, Secretary John Skvarla, Sabrina Bengel, Wit Tuttell and Ashlee Kirk. Their recommendation will be presented at the February meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Next meeting is planned for February 23rd with the location to be determined. Meeting adjourned at 1:30pm.