



Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority  
A Joint Meeting of the Public Authority and Nonprofit Corporation

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Explore Asheville – 27 College Place, Asheville

Board Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, October 30, 2024

- Present (Voting):** Brenda Durden, Chair; HP Patel, Michael Lusick, Lucious Wilson, Elizabeth Putnam, Himanshu Karvir, Larry Crosby, Tim Rosebrock
- Absent (Voting):** Matthew Lehman, Vice Chair
- Present (Ex-Officio):** Asheville Vice Mayor Sandra Kilgore, Buncombe County Commissioner Terri Wells
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** None
- Staff:** Vic Isley, Jennifer Kass-Green, Dodie Stephens, Tiffany Thacker, Julia Simpson, Ashley Greenstein, Josh Jones, Holly Watts, Kimberly Puryear, Sarajane Case, Mike Kryzanek, Luisa Yen, Shawn Boone, Cristina Fernandez, Cass Herrington
- BC Finance:** Melissa Moore
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bissette
- In-Person Attendees:** Rick Bell, Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association  
Randy Claybrook, Asheville Bed & Breakfast Association  
Roy Harris, Community Member  
Dave Nutter, Connect Buncombe  
Pat Moran, Mountain Xpress  
Lindsay Drillings, Miranda Escalante; Asheville Food & Beverage United  
Meghan Rogers, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association  
Peter Pollay, Posana  
Chris Corl, City of Asheville  
John Ellis, Prior BCTDA Board Member
- Online Attendees:** Sha'Linda Pruitt, Nick Kepley, Kathryn Dewey, Emily Crosby, McKenzie Provost, Shelby Pearsall, Khal Khoury, Emilie Soffe; Explore Asheville  
Chip Craig, Caleb Hofheins; Greybeard Realty and Rentals  
Martha Goss, RiverLink  
Kit Cramer, Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce  
Madison Davis, Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission  
Jim Muth, TPDF Committee  
Will Hofmann, Asheville Citizen Times  
Daniel Walton, The Assembly

Laura Hackett, Stephanie Rogers, Helen Chickering; Blue Ridge Public Radio  
Scott Kerchner, Virtelle Hospitality  
Drake Fowler, Valerie Wiseman, The North Carolina Arboretum  
Edgar Ramírez, Limones  
Diane Rogers, Pinecrest Bed & Breakfast  
Jamie Parlier, WCU student  
Kate Edge, The Market Place Restaurant  
Jaime Matthews, City of Asheville  
Megan Thorp, Tanger Asheville  
Jamie Tudico, McKibbon Hospitality  
Cindy Pearce, Naventure  
Brad Durden, Asheville Hotel Group  
Kat Kearney, Cucina 24  
Alyssa Smith, Travel Guides Asheville  
Megan Shields, Emily Ditto, Lucy Dozier, Kim Lenox; MMGY  
John Parrino

### **Executive Summary of Meeting Minutes**

- Durden called to order the joint regular meeting of the BCTDA, Public Authority, and BCTDA, Nonprofit Corporation, at 9:03 a.m. Durden reflected on the Hurricane Helene disaster. Introductions were made around the room.
- Minutes from the September 25, 2024, BCTDA meeting were approved with an 8-0 vote.
- September 2024 financials were approved with an 8-0 vote.
- A recommendation to waive Helene-related occupancy tax penalties for September-December was approved with an 8-0 vote; decision will be made by Buncombe County Commissioners.
- A revised lodging tax revenue forecast was presented; with an 8-0 vote, staff was directed to meet with the Finance Committee and provide an update regarding the FY25 budget.
- Vic Isley provided the President & CEO's report.
- Staff provided information on Hurricane Helene response and recovery initiatives.
- With an 8-0 vote, staff was directed to convene Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) and Legacy Investment from Tourism (LIFT) Fund Committees to assess status of all projects.
- Brief updates from Vice Mayor Sandra Kilgore and Commissioner Terri Wells were heard.
- Miscellaneous business and public comments were heard.
- With an 8-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 11:04 a.m.

### **Call to Order of the Joint BCTDA Meeting**

Durden called to order the joint regular meeting of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (BCTDA), a Public Authority, and BCTDA, a Nonprofit Corporation, at 9:03 a.m.

Durden reflected on Hurricane Helene and affirmed a commitment to supporting the community.

Information was provided about the meeting livestream and document access on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

Introductions were made around the room.

### **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Lusick made a motion to approve September 25, 2024, regular meeting minutes. Crosby seconded the motion. There was no discussion. A vote was taken; the motion carried 8-0.

## **Financial Reports**

### **September 2024 Financials**

Melissa Moore, BCTDA Fiscal Agent, presented September 2024 financials. She reviewed operating and earned revenue funds, project funds, and year-to-date lodging sales trends by month and lodging type.

Karvir motioned to approve the September 2024 financial reports as presented. Crosby seconded the motion. A vote was taken; the motion carried 8-0.

### **Penalty Waivers Related to Hurricane Helene Recovery**

Melissa Moore, BCTDA Fiscal Agent, explained penalty waivers are a two-step process with the Buncombe County Commission having final approval. She provided background that penalty waiver requests have been recommended previously due to unforeseen circumstances, including the first months of the pandemic.

Since many systems were offline during widespread power outages following Hurricane Helene, the recommendation is to proactively waive Helene-related occupancy tax penalties for September, October, November, and December 2024 understanding delays may be unavoidable. Isley noted this would not waive payments of occupancy taxes only fees that would result from late filing or payment.

Moore and Isley fielded questions. It was clarified that interest could be included in the waiver based on the resolution wording. In response to whether waiving occupancy tax collections was in discussion and whether the BCTDA should be engaged, it was noted that changes to the occupancy tax are not in the purview of the authority and are legislated by the state.

Putnam then made a motion to waive Helene-related occupancy tax penalties for September, October, November and December lodging until June 2025. Lusick seconded the motion. There was no additional discussion. A vote was taken; the motion carried 8-0.

### **Reforecasting FY25 Revenue Projections**

Jennifer Kass-Green, vice president of culture and business affairs, acknowledged the significant impact of Hurricane Helene. She showed a week-by-week percent change in hotel revenue reported from early September through early October. She also reviewed percentage change projections for monthly occupancy tax revenue, which were developed with support from Tourism Economics; these indicated year-over-year declines of -30% to -45% through the remainder of the fiscal year.

A revised net lodging tax revenue forecast of \$24.2 million (\$10.1 million less than budgeted) for FY25 was presented and compared to prior years.

Kass-Green outlined how initial expense reductions, as well as an increased fund balance designation, would maintain a balanced operating budget and uphold the authority's financial management policy. She also shared implications to TPDF and LIFT Funds.

Isley clarified that no budgetary action was expected today; staff wanted to present information available for the board's consideration and direction. Detailed discussion followed. Clarifications were made about fund balance utilization and financial management best practices, as well as factors involved with the revenue projections. Some individual perspectives regarding Explore Asheville's role in the community's economic recovery were shared. It was noted that supplemental information and any budget amendments could be reviewed at the next meeting. A suggestion to reconvene the board before the regularly scheduled November 21 meeting was tabled to be discussed later.

Durden then asked for a motion to request staff meet with the Finance Committee and provide an update at a future meeting— either regularly scheduled or emergency meeting. Lusick made a motion, and Crosby seconded. There was no additional discussion. A vote was taken; the motion carried 8-0.

### **President & CEO Report**

Vic Isley shared information about post-hurricane visitor spending recovery trends from Tourism Economics, noting the unique circumstances of the water outage and regional topography. She spoke about past experiences, anticipations, and strategies to stimulate the economy following the disaster.

She briefly reviewed September occupancy and demand, as well as fiscal-year-to-date combined roomnight demand for hotel and vacation rentals.

Isley noted that the first quarter highlights report was available on [AshevilleCVB.com](http://AshevilleCVB.com).

### **Helene Response and Recovery Updates**

Isley shifted focus to Hurricane Helene response and recovery initiatives, showing a timeline detailing Explore Asheville's response to Hurricane Helene since the onset of the storm. She invited Dodie Stephens, vice president of marketing for Explore Asheville, and Tiffany Thacker, director of grants, to assist with updates on the organization's efforts.

Information was provided about [Love Asheville from Afar](#), [Always Asheville Fund](#), [Concert for Carolina](#) sponsorship, the use of [Always.ExploreAsheville.com](http://Always.ExploreAsheville.com) as a hub for recovery and reopening messaging, the new [ExploreAsheville.com](http://ExploreAsheville.com) launch and site features, and benefit efforts like [Cooks for Carolina](#) and [Soulshine](#). A list of funding resources available to businesses and individuals was also provided.

### **Tourism Product Development Fund and Legacy Investment from Tourism Fund Updates**

Tiffany Thacker, director of grants for Explore Asheville, explained the TPDF committee meeting was postponed, and LIFT Fund grant cycle was temporarily postponed due to Hurricane Helene. She demonstrated varied impacts the storm had on TPDF and LIFT Fund investments with imagery of damage to a few grant-supported projects. She indicated further assessment of all projects was needed before grant cycles resumed.

Crosby made a motion to direct staff to have TPDF and LIFT Fund Committees review all projects and report back on project feasibility and fund status accordingly. Lusick seconded the motion. A vote was taken; the motion carried 8-0.

### **Asheville City Council Update**

Vice Mayor Kilgore expressed gratitude for the presentation and efforts. She acknowledged recovery would be challenging and said she hopes for continued collaboration with neighboring communities. She shared that the city planned to make \$4 million available with a community relief grant program.

### **Buncombe County Commission Update**

Commissioner Wells echoed appreciation for the dedication to recovery. She said Commissioners would hold a special meeting this Friday to approve funding for individual and business grants. Wells encouraged participation in the county's damage survey to help them advocate for quick state and federal assistance. She also provided the latest operational updates from various county departments.

### **Miscellaneous Business**

Putnam shared information about the NC Realtor Disaster Fund.

Board members expressed appreciation and applauded Isley's leadership and staff's hard work following Hurricane Helene.

Wilson recognized that limited access to green space could be detrimental to community health and would like to see those areas restored for the purpose of wellness and respite.

### **Comments from the General Public**

Roy Harris shared personal anecdotes and recent observations he's made as a resident. He gave thanks for the organization's work and asked that it continue to support grassroots initiatives knowing that there may be more strain on certain communities following the storm.

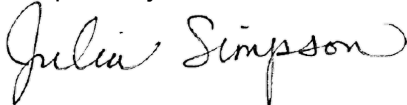
### **Adjournment**

The PowerPoint presentation and relevant documents are on file with Explore Asheville and are posted on [AshevilleCVB.com](https://www.ashevillecvb.com).

The next joint BCTDA meeting will be held on Thursday, November 21, 2024, beginning at 9:00 a.m., in the Explore Asheville Board Room, located at 27 College Place.

Lusick made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Putnam seconded the motion. The earlier question of whether the board needed to reconvene before November 21 was revisited; it was noted that a decision wasn't required today to set an emergency meeting. A vote was then taken on the motion to adjourn; the motion carried 8-0. The meeting was adjourned at 11:04 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Julia Simpson, Manager, Executive & Strategy