



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

Explore Asheville – 27 College Place, Asheville

Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, November 21, 2024

- Present (Voting):** Brenda Durden, Chair; Matthew Lehman, Vice Chair; HP Patel, Larry Crosby, Michael Lusick, Lucious Wilson, Elizabeth Putnam, Himanshu Karvir, Tim Rosebrock
- Absent (Voting):** None
- Present (Ex-Officio):** None
- Absent (Ex-Officio):** Asheville Vice Mayor Sandra Kilgore, Buncombe County Commissioner Terri Wells
- Staff:** Vic Isley, Dodie Stephens, Tiffany Thacker, Julia Simpson, Ashley Greenstein, Josh Jones, Mike Kryzaneck, Jennifer Kass-Green, Holly Watts, Kimberly Puryear, Kathryn Dewey
- BC Finance:** Melissa Moore
- Legal Counsel:** Sabrina Rockoff, McGuire, Wood & Bissette
- In-Person Attendees:** Scott Peacock, Visit NC
Sarah Myers
Miranda Escalante, Sarah Fiori; Asheville Food & Beverage United
Randy Claybrook, Asheville Bed & Breakfast Association
Rick Bell, Asheville Buncombe Hotel Association
John Ellis, Prior BCTDA Board Member
Jim Muth, TPDF Committee
Dave Nutter, Connect Buncombe
Olivia Ward, OnWard Digital Media
Teresa DeCastro, Navitat Canopy Adventures
Meghan Rogers, Asheville Independent Restaurant Association
- Online Attendees:** Shelby Pearsall, Sarajane Case, Emily Crosby, Emilie Soffe, McKenzie Provost; Explore Asheville
Felicia Sonmez, Blue Ridge Public Radio
Madison Davis, Chris Smith; Asheville Buncombe Regional Sports Commission
Sharon Trammel, Windswept Studio
Meredith Moran, National Association of Counties
Emily Baker, Greybeard Rentals
Lucy Dozier, Megan Shields, Emily Ditto; MMGY Global
Diane Rogers, Pinecrest Bed & Breakfast
Will Hofmann, Asheville Citizen Times
Kyle Highberg, Biltmore Farms
Megan Thorp, Summer Casiano, Miranda Bowman; Tanger Asheville
Ray Anderson; Asheville Hotel Group

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. Introductions were made around the room.
- Minutes from the October 30, 2024, BCTDA meeting were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- October 2024 financials were approved with a 9-0 vote.
- The board was informed that their Helene-related penalty waiver recommendation to County Commissioners was approved and that the FY24 audit was delayed.
- HP Patel reported on behalf of the Finance Committee regarding the FY25 budget.
- Vic Isley provided the President & CEO's report.
- Tiffany Thacker shared the status of the organization's grant programs.
- Dodie Stephens and Scott Peacock presented on Explore Asheville and Visit NC marketing efforts.
- Vice Mayor Sandra Kilgore's ex-officio service to the board was recognized despite her absence.
- Durden shared comments on behalf of Commissioner Terri Wells, who could not attend.
- Public comments were heard.
- With a 9-0 vote, the BCTDA meeting adjourned at 10:45 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 took a moment to express gratitude to staff and all others that support the BCTDA.

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

Karvir made a motion to approve the October 30, 2024, regular meeting minutes. Lusick seconded the motion. There was no discussion. A vote was taken; the motion carried 9-0.

Financial Updates

October 2024 Financial Reports

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

BCTDA Fiscal Agent was asked for clarification regarding collection fee in the October 2024 financials and for an estimate of percentage of lodging properties that have not yet reported.

Patel motioned to approve the October 2024 financial reports as presented. Crosby seconded the motion. A vote was taken; the motion carried 9-0.

Helene-Related Penalty Waivers Update

Moore notified the board that Buncombe County Commissioners approved the BCTDA's recommendation; Helene-related occupancy tax penalties for September, October, November, December 2024 are waived until June 2025.

FY24 Audit Update

Moore informed the board that progress on the audit from the prior fiscal year was delayed by Hurricane Helene; she outlined the next steps and said the audit presentation will be in early 2025.

FY25 Budget Update

Finance Committee Chair, HP Patel, reported that staff convened the Finance Committee in November to review information about the FY25 budget as the board directed in last month's meeting. The committee's recommendation was to maintain the current FY25 budget, and revisit budget amendment discussions in the next meeting.

President & CEO Report

Vic Isley presented October occupancy and demand, commenting on how historically low these metrics were. Isley said lodging tax revenue projections were revised and showed updated charts of anticipated year-over-year reductions. She acknowledged that factors such as system outages and delayed payments may be skewing the reports and additional months of data could offer more clarity. Isley spoke about the broader impacts to the local economy. Isley shared ways Explore Asheville is supporting the community through the holidays and looking ahead to plans in the first quarter of 2025.

Grant Program Updates

Tiffany Thacker, vice president of partnership & destination management for Explore Asheville, shared the status of the organization's grant programs.

Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) & Legacy Investment from Tourism (LIFT) Fund

TPDF and LIFT Fund project assessments were collected following Hurricane Helene and damage varied. Both committees agreed to reserve resources until there is a better understanding of repair needs. The current TPDF cycle was terminated. The LIFT Fund cycle was postponed. A revised timeline and estimate of anticipated funds were shared. Moving forward, grant cycles will alternate years; this change will improve the process for partners and staff and allow for more significant investments.

Festivals & Cultural Events Grant Support Fund

Festivals & Cultural Events Grant Support Fund applications are postponed until January 2025 and will provide funding for events scheduled between March and December 2025. It was noted that hosts of events scheduled before March 2025 could apply for Explore Asheville's Event Sponsorship program.

Always Asheville Fund

The Always Asheville Fund was established to respond to partners' urgent needs; the entire grant process was executed on a 3-week turnaround. Based on the staff's preliminary review, 392 of 620 applicants met eligibility requirements with a combined request of \$3.7 million. Funding confirmations will be sent November 22 after the review committee decides how to allocate the \$1.03 million available.

Marketing Updates

Dodie Stephens, vice president of marketing for Explore Asheville, explained efforts to drive business and the current messaging inviting visitors back. Stephens showed a new commercial spot and landing page then announced some upcoming activations. She said Explore Asheville is collaborating closely with Visit NC and Biltmore in its targeted efforts.

Scott Peacock, director of marketing and communications for Visit NC, spoke about the approach of the statewide tourism agency to communicate status of travel in North Carolina with an interactive map. Peacock shared insights from perceptions research conducted. He expanded upon Stephens' presentation showing additional examples of creative execution from the current recovery campaign. Peacock said plans are in place to continue promoting the region through all four seasons.

Stephens and Peacock fielded questions and heard suggestions on marketing strategies and ideas for managing local sentiment.

Asheville City Council Update

Vice Mayor Sandra Kilgore was absent, so no city-related business was presented at this meeting.

Durden expressed gratitude for Kilgore's ex-officio service to the BCTDA and noted a token of appreciation would be delivered to Kilgore on behalf of the board.

Buncombe County Commission Update

Durden read comments provided by Commissioner Wells, who was absent. Commissioner Wells noted the county's \$1.5 million for Hurricane Helene relief will be administered by Mountain BizWorks; she pointed to BuncombeCounty.org for updates and additional information on county programs.

Miscellaneous Business

There was no miscellaneous business presented at this meeting.

Comments from the General Public

Miranda Escalante advocated for support of local hospitality workers on behalf of the Asheville Food & Beverage United (AFBU) organization and cited challenges this specific community has faced recently.

Adjournment

The PowerPoint presentation and relevant documents are on file with Explore Asheville and are posted on AshevilleCVB.com.

The next joint BCTDA meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 29, 2025, 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 Lehman seconded the motion. With all in favor, the motion carried 9-0. The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Julia Simpson, Manager, Executive & Strategy