

The regular monthly meeting of the Winchester-Frederick County Tourism Board was held Thursday, April 18, 2019. The meeting began at 8:04 a.m. and was held at the Winchester-Frederick County Visitors Center.

Board Members Present: Lani Pendleton, Shannon Moeck, Andy Gyurisin, Karen Helm, Kristen Laise, Eddie Richard, Sharon Farinholt

Board Members Absent: Priya Patel

Staff: Justin Kerns, Renee Bayliss

Non-Voting Board Members, Guests & Media: Blaine Dunn, Frederick County Board of Supervisors; Jennifer Bell, Winchester Downtown Manager; Brian Brehm, Winchester Star, John Hill, Winchester City Council

Call To Order: Kristen Laise, Chairman, called the meeting to order.

Roll Call: Renee Bayliss

Approval of Minutes

The February minutes were approved on a motion by Eddie Richard, seconded by Shannon Moeck.

Executive Director's Report

Mr. Kerns gave an overview of the activities of the tourism office in the past month, including providing support for the Winchester Wings and Wheels event, an upcoming travel writer FAM tour and visits from other travel writers, a meeting with wedding professionals regarding a new event, and a site visit to a potential location for a B&B/Campground on North Mountain. Mr. Kerns also conducted the spring Tourism Ambassador Training and hosted the City of Winchester's Insight Citizens Academy to learn about the tourism department. The Blue Ridge Parkway Association FAM tour also visited the area on their annual trip, and Mr. Kerns served as a step-on guide for potential new residents transferring to the new FBI building. Finally, he reported that an email sent by the Artisans Center of Virginia indicated that they are halting some operations to evaluate the organization and consider its next steps. The board suggested that a letter be sent to them regarding our concerns for the future of the Artisan Trail.

Unfinished Business:

Budget Update – Justin Kerns

Mr. Kerns reported gave an explanation on the differences between the lodging tax revenues for the City of Winchester and Frederick County. He noted that the lodging tax in Winchester is 6%, and the revenue goes to the general fund, whereas an increase to the lodging tax in Frederick County (above 2%) must be designated to tourism efforts. Frederick County approved an increase, to 3.5%, which means the CVB budget is increasing significantly. Mr. Kerns noted that the tourism office has not been approved for an additional staff person this fiscal year.

Committee Reports:

Marketing Committee – Kristen Laise and Sharon Farinholt

The marketing committee met and discussed the increased budget. Potential new initiatives discussed included a new ad campaign, public relations efforts, video production, and agritourism projects.

Board Appointment and Nominations Committee – Andy Gyurisin and Karen Helm

The committee has several suggestions coming in from the community and they will need to fill one vacancy for a non-profit organization, and one for a for-profit business.

Tourism Ambassador Committee – Eddie Richard and Shannon Moeck

The committee is meeting for the first time after the board meeting.

Unfinished Business:

HOG Rally Update – Justin Kerns

Plans for the HOG Rally continue. The organizer was pleased to hear that the construction on Kent Street in front of the Patsy Cline Historic House will be completed before the event.

Spotswood Poles Memorial Initiatives update – Justin Kerns

There is a special night for Spottswood Poles planned this summer at the Winchester Royals game. A street in Jim Barnett Park will be named after him, and an interpretive marker will be placed in the park as well.

New Business:

Haiku Foundation Request – Justin Kerns

Mr. Kerns told the board about the International Haiku Foundation, which is based in Winchester. They mentioned the possibility of placing boulders with haikus on them on a walking trail in the area. Mr. Kerns asked the board about placing one on the Visitors Center property, and they agreed that would be fine.

Newcomer's Event Proposal – Justin Kerns

Mr. Kerns explained how the Visitors Center could host a newcomer's event for those that have just moved to the area, and make it family-friendly. The board agreed that they liked the idea. Kristen Laise suggested that there could be vendor/informational booths, and Andy Gyurisin suggested distributing goodie bags.

Public Comments

Mr. Dunn inquired about seeing a report on the economic impact next year, since the lodging tax has been raised and the CVB's budget has been increased. Mr. Hill noted that Council is looking forward to seeing the Strategic Plan presentation and he also thought favorably of the newcomer's event. Karen Helm announced that visitation at the Patsy Cline Historic House is up this year so far. Kristen Laise reported on the opening of Belle Grove's new Welcome Center barn, and that the Beer Festival is coming up. Eddie Richard reported that Richards Fruit Market opens May 24 and that the blooms appear to be indicating a good crop. Shannon Moeck noted that staffing issues have affected program scheduling, but that they are offering new nature walk programs this year. Lani Pendleton announced that LaQuinta Inn and Suites has joined the Wyndham brand, which has been positive for them. Andy Gyurisin told the board about the Alamo's visit from Emilio Estevez, and that they have plans for many special guests coming up.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 on a motion by Eddie Richard, seconded by Lani Pendleton.

Respectfully Submitted by Renee Bayliss, Creative Design and Visitor Services Manager, City of Winchester