

Draft Minutes

TOURISM BOARD

Regular meeting

5:30 p.m. May 6, 2024

Board Meeting Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.



Present: Meaghun Darab, Chair Victoria Pace, Rainbow Cabbage, Barry Hupp, Megan Kimball, Smita Patel and Scott Czechlewski, Eryk Pruitt

Absent: Barney Caton

Staff: Planning and Economic Development Manager Shannan Campbell, Planning Technician Kelsey Carson

1. Call to order

Vice Chair Victoria Pace called the meeting to order at 5:33p.m.

2. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on March 4, 2024

Motion: Board member Meaghun Darab moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Board member Eryk Pruitt seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

Minutes from regular meeting on April 10, 2024

Member Rainbow Cabbage indicated that the minutes did not capture her full experience at the Visitors Center and she wanted to further address what was stated in last month's minutes regarding her unsatisfactory experience during her visit to the Hillsborough Visitors Center. She wanted to emphasize the importance of training for Visitors Center volunteers, and that accurate information is being presented to guests. She explained further that the kiosk video is still showing advertising for Mystery Brewery which has been closed and that the ADA access door needs to be unlocked during business hours for those with mobility issues.

Pace and board member Megan Kimball stated the importance of the Visitors Center having volunteers to help in this typer of greeter position. Kimball stated that the Visitors Center is always staffed with at least one full time staff member that can also help answer questions. Pace pointed out her own experience volunteering with the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough that its training tends to focus on the 'history' aspect of Hillsborough and not as much the hospitality side of things. Campbell restated what edits to the minutes Cabbage would like to see addressed and asked if it would be more appropriate to capture this during the April 10th minutes or the minutes from tonight's meeting. Cabbage stated that she was satisfied with what was discussed today being in this meetings' minutes and that it is true that these volunteer positions are important and that we are all grateful for them but that they need the tools necessary to support these volunteers. More knowledge about downtown and the West Hillsborough businesses would be preferred.

101 E. Orange St., PO Box 429, Hillsborough, NC 27278
919-732-1270 | www.hillsboroughnc.gov | @HillsboroughGov
www.visithillsboroughnc.com | @HillsboroughNC

Cabbage stated that she would like to add that she was directed to Antonia's for pizza, which they do not have, and was told that Radius pizza had closed.

Scott Czechlewski would like to amend the minutes from last month clarifying that the Chamber of Commerce "would take the Tourism Board's recommendation and will be holding the parade and tree lighting ceremony on two separate days" He explained that the Chamber accepted this recommendation from the Tourism Board. Giving credit for the idea to the Tourism Board and that the Chamber had not brought this idea forward.

Darab and Kimball asked for name spelling corrections in last month's minutes.

Motion: Board member Darab moved to approve the minutes as amended. Pruitt seconded.
Vote: 8-0.

3. Agenda changes and approval

Campbell had none but introduced the board to Kelsey Carson, Planning Technician, who would be taking their minutes.

4. Discussion Items

A. Grant Scoring and Project Awards for FY25

Campbell explained that members were able to score the grants online using 'Submittable', a grant platform. The top three for highest scores were displayed on the screen but the board could vote to fund more or less than the top 3. Caton, who was absent for tonight's meeting, has provided his feedback on each for Campbell to share with the group. The group discussed that they would like to hear some rationale on why members scored high or low.

Pace had made the suggestion to go through and comment on each. Starting with those below the top three starting with the Gravestone Studies submission. Kimball explained that since it was a conference and included overnights that it might be better for the other tourism board. Campbell said she could refer it to the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) Board, which uses the revenues from the Occupancy tax. Members confirmed that funding may be better through the TDA. Campbell clarified the difference in revenue sources between both boards. Discussion from the group on whether to fund the Gravestone Conference or not ultimately decided that they would not be funding it for this year but request that Campbell ask them to apply through the TDA for support for this project.

The group then moved on to discussing funding of the Outlandish Hillsborough Scottish Festival. Cabbage asked the group how much the Outlandish festival is projected to cost. Kimball explained it looks like it will cost around \$35,000 from the application. The group discussed which grants the festival has and is planning to apply for to confirm that overfunding of this event will not take place. Campbell said that most of time events apply for many different types of grants and funding hoping that a few will stick. Kimball confirmed that the event has not received funding from anywhere yet. Cabbage restated that she is just wanting to make sure that the funds provided would not be going to an event that is already received funding from somewhere else. Campbell indicated that if awarded and additional funding is secured that the Outlandish festival can always turn down the amount funded by the Tourism Board. There was consensus among the board members that an event like this will bring visitors from many different areas, across states, that these events are hosted by parties who are capable of facilitating events of these nature, and the full initial investment in the event should be funded at \$10,000.

Pace selected the Hillsborough Garden Club Garden Tours entry as the next in discussion. The group discussed some confusion regarding the what the Garden Club has stated for the ability to match and the selling of tickets as this being their main fundraising event. There were some concerns about the event becoming sustainable. Cabbage states that the Garden Club is working to have this event as reoccurring. The board unanimously supported approving the grant funds requested by the Garden Club for the Garden Tours.

Pace selected First Fridays at the Eno Arts Mill as the next entry for discussion. Darab states that she wishes to see more diverse music genres presented at these types of events and the Mill already does that. There is discussion from the group that these organizers select music they expect to draw crowds and that these music artists have been selected in an effort to support many different genre types. Darab clarifies that it should not be a condition of whether they receive the funding or not just feedback for the organizers of events that a variety of music is preferred. The board discussed the Arts Councils' 'Last Friday' vs. The Arts Commission's 'First Friday' timing and if that is continuing to work in the best interest of both groups. Campbell states that the Visitors Center promotes both events equally. She stated that there have been multiple discussion between Hillsborough Arts Council and Orange County Arts Commission on this. She said having the events scheduled the way they are with First Fridays being in West Hillsborough and Last Fridays being downtown means there is more to do in more areas of town. The board voted to fund this event unanimously as well.

Pace selected the Eagle Lodge Foundation entry for the next discussion item. The board stated that they would be more likely to support funds for overall beautification of the building and area, it is just difficult to determine exactly what these funds would be used for if granted based on the application. They discussed some confusion in the budget over the funding/holding of a golf tournament that isn't explained in the narrative. The budget request did not show a clear ask for building/grounds beautification. Cabbage stated that it was her assumption that the funds requested were to be used toward the beautification efforts, but this was not understood by other members. Cabbage asked if resubmittal was possible, Campbell confirmed that they would be allowed to reapply next year. The board did not support funding this application.

There was discussion about funding the full amount for each entry and how that would affect the overall budget numbers. The board asked about partial funding of the requests. Campbell stated that staff would recommend against partial funding as often these entries request the full amount of what is needed to support the event or program and if it only gets partially funded it may not be able to happen and then they would have to require that the money be refunded to the board. She said the exception would be the Snow Approach application, which gave a funding range. She indicated that she had not encountered that before.

Pace moved to the Snow Approach retreats application. She confirmed that although the idea and organization are run by great people, it does not check off what is needed to be considered 'tourism' necessarily. The board discussed that funding elsewhere may be possible for a type of retreat like this, why grant applications from this applicant in the past has not been awarded, and what types of missing information would be required in order to get funding support from the Tourism Board. Ideas included a more detailed schedule of the retreat events and if a shuttle could be used to ensure visiting of local businesses.

Member Smita Patel explained that the application is failing to provide clear detail on how the local businesses would benefit, that this might be something that could be recommended to the TDA with Colonial Inn providing food and beverage. The board discussed possible partial funding of this in order to help get them started since they asked for a range, ideas of \$500, and \$1,000 were discussed. There is a reminder that organizations can only receive funding a limited number of times. The board gathered consensus on a \$2,500 award.

Pace selected the Garden Club's Childrens Play entry as the next to discuss. The group is in favor of this type of event, commenting that it seems enjoyable and would bring in a different group of individuals for attendance.

There is discussion on the location of this event and whether it could be at Eno house, but the Farmer's Market Pavilion was discussed to be the better location. Campbell provides Catons concerns for this being a one-time event, but Cabbage states that organizers have discussed more events of this nature in the future. Member Barry Hupp is concerned about the funding of this event based on return on investment.

Pace moves to the Flush Fest entry for discussion. Being one of the larger events the group discusses attendance being in the thousands expected in 2025. Hupp has questions regarding the amount allotted for volunteers and what is included within that budget item. The board discussed that the event has been run by volunteers for the last few years and it looks like the applicant is planning to have a few paid positions going forward.

Darab and Pace confirm the amount given by the TDA for the 2024 event. The board was generally in favor of funding this full amount for their 2025 event.

Campbell said that she would plug these grant numbers into the draft budget for adoption/vote at the budget public hearing. She said right now the board is planning to fund approximately \$38,000 in grant requests.

B. Draft FY25 Tourism Board Budget

Campbell began the discussion regarding the FY25 Tourism Board Budget and opened it up for questions. Czechlewski had questions regarding the total cost of the audit required. He commented that this amount seemed high for the service that it is. Campbell confirmed that the cost of these types of government audits are high due to the lack of contactors willing to take this kind of work, but that it is required by state law for the town as well as the tourism boards to have one done. Campbell stated that there is money in the budget for a Revolutionary War Trail sign this is set aside. She said the organization implementing these signs has had a delay but Campbell is hopeful that the Town will be able to spend at least partial of the \$6,000 set aside for some type of signage in 2025 in anticipation of the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the formation of the United States.

C. Contract Partner Renewals FY25

Campbell stated that the current budget for FY25 is showing a little over \$80,000 in the red in regard to spending more than anticipated revenue. She clarified that these funds would come from the fund balance. There was some confusion about the need to discuss Contract Partners again since it was discussed in the previous meeting. Campbell confirmed that discussions are ongoing at multiple meetings.

Czechlewski inquired about the possibility of moving the fund balance to a type of bank account that would accrue interest. The group discussed pros and cons of this and if something like that is allowed for governments. Campbell said that she would ask the Town's Finance Director about this question.

Pace begins discussions for the approval of all contracts. Cabbage asked if there is benefit in looking to run the budget as more of a balanced approach or if there is a purpose for keeping the fund balance high when the Board has additional funds that could be used. The members indicated that since revenue has been exceeding what was projected for the past few years, and that the Board anticipates similar if not more revenue in FY25, that it is comfortable with using fund balance to cover projected revenue shortfalls.

Pace states that if for some reason these trends do not continue in the year to come then the Board can look to tighten its belt for the following year significantly. Pace states that as of yet there has been no concern or consequences with utilizing fund balance to fully fund contract partners and help them grow. Pace asked if a vote was needed. Campbell said no, that they could discuss more and would need to vote to adopt the budget at the budget public hearing next month.

5. Monthly reports and comments

A. Budget Public Hearing June 3, 2024

Pace confirms this hearing date and time. Campbell requests that everyone try to attend this meeting as it will be the final discussion and vote for these budget items for FY25. Kimball requests that members of the Contract Partners attend this meeting in case there are additional questions. Pace reminds the group that she will be unable to attend the June hearing date.

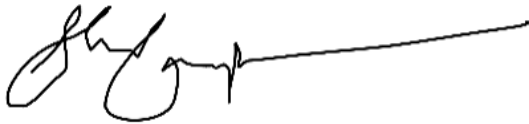
B. Board comments and updates

There were none.

6. Adjournment

Motion: Pace moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannan Campbell', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Shannan Campbell
Planning and Economic Development Manager
Staff support to the Hillsborough Tourism Board

Approved: June 3, 2024