

Minutes

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Regular meeting

5:30 p.m. September 10th, 2025

Annex Conference Room of Town Hall Annex, 105 E. Corbin St.



Present: Chair Meaghun Darab, Dani Black and Victoria Pace

Staff: Planning and Economic Development Manager
Shannan Campbell
Planning Technician Dakotah Kimbrough

1. Call to order

Chair Meaghun Darab called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m. The presence of a quorum was confirmed.

2. Agenda changes and approval

There were no agenda changes presented.

Motion: Member Victoria Pace moved to approve the agenda. Member Dani Black seconded.

Vote: 3-0.

3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from Budget Public Hearing Meeting on May 21st, 2025.

Motion: Member Pace moved approval of the May 21st, 2025, minutes as submitted. Member Black seconded.

Vote: 3-0.

4. Action items

A. Special Project & Partnerships Funding: Tinsel & Traditions Home Tour (Alliance for Historic Hillsborough)

Kelly Arnold, Programs and Events Coordinator from the Alliance, presented the Tinsel and Traditions Home Tour funding application. She explained that this event would be a modernized version of the previously beloved candlelight tours, combined with joint events that started with the Chamber of Commerce last year. The event would include:

- Six different residences (five already confirmed) featuring historic vignettes showing how holidays were celebrated during different time periods (1770s, 1840s, 1920s, 1940s, etc.)
- A community fair with partners from multicultural organizations representing winter holidays like Diwali, Ramadan, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Three Kings Day, and Lunar New Year
- Interactive elements including crafts, small food offerings, and activities particularly for children and families
- A rotating format where in future years the houses would feature multicultural celebrations, and the fair would focus on historic elements

101 E. Orange St., PO Box 429, Hillsborough, NC 27278
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Kelly noted they planned to partner with the Chamber of Commerce to create a comprehensive "Jingle and Joy" weekend that would include the tree lighting, holiday parade, and home tour all in one weekend to encourage overnight visitation. Transportation between venues would be provided via shuttles, and they would work with homeowners to identify ADA-accessible locations.

Dani McIvor (Alliance) added that the Tourism Board had already funded the full requested amount of \$10,000 but wanted to know if the TDA would be interested in cost-sharing. The plan is to run this as a biennial event in odd years, with Santa visits and photos continuing annually.

Members asked questions about transportation options, and ADA accessibility of the homes (varies by location but efforts would be made to note which venues were accessible).

After discussion, the TDA determined they would consider this request along with the other funding applications before making a decision.

B. Special Project & Partnerships Funding: Uproar Festival of Public Art (Orange County Arts Commission/Arts Alliance) additional funding request in FY26

Gail Cooley, representing the Orange County Arts Alliance as Secretary, presented an additional funding request for the Uproar Festival of Public Art. She noted that while the festival had been successfully executed despite challenges related to recent flooding, they did not quite meet their budget and were requesting an additional \$5,000 in support.

Gail highlighted that Uproar had increased visitation to Hillsborough and brought art installations throughout the town. She noted the voting mechanism had been improved this year, and the People's Choice award went to a piece displayed at The Rookery. She mentioned that Hillsborough would be receiving two of the sculptures to be permanently displayed at Town Hall - a gong and an owl.

Members discussed the need to better quantify the tourism impact of events like Uproar, particularly regarding overnight stays. It was noted that the festival had provided approximately 60 room nights for 30 artists in 2023. Discussion centered around developing better methods to track the impact of events on occupancy rates and hotel bookings in the future.

C. Special Project & Partnerships Funding: FlushFest (After the Rain)

Grace Beeler presented information about the upcoming FlushFest, which would be in its eighth year (with some years off during COVID). The festival would take place on October 3-4, 2025, at the Eno River Brewery, Eno House, and Nash Street Tavern in West Hillsborough.

She detailed the 17 acts that would be performing, including Footnotes Tap Ensemble with live jazz, Tom Whiteside doing reel-to-reel films as a tribute to the recently deceased Peter Eastep (festival co-founder), and various world music performances including Brazilian, Mexican, and Panamanian artists.

Grace explained that the festival originated as a fundraiser for a documentary about sewer systems in Brazilian urban slums and continues to collect donations for the Appropriate Sanitation Institute to support clean water projects worldwide. She noted they've made efforts to coordinate with lodging providers including reaching out to local Airbnb hosts to offer special rates for festival attendees.

She also mentioned that Peter Eastep's memorial would be held on Sunday following the festival since many people would already be in town for the event.

After hearing all three funding presentations, the TDA discussed how to allocate funds to the requests.

Motion: Member Pace moved to approve \$5,000 for Tinsel & Traditions Home Tour, \$5,000 for Uproar Festival of Public Art, and \$10,000 for FlushFest. Member Black seconded.

Vote: 3-0.

5. Discussion items

A. CycleNC 2026 RFP and TDA funding/budget amendment to support the event

Planning and Economic Development Manager Shannan Campbell presented information about a request from CycleNC to include Hillsborough as an overnight stop on their 2026 Mountains to Coast bike tour. The event would bring approximately 950 cyclists to town for one night in October 2026.

Campbell initially had concerns about accommodating so many people but explained that the CycleNC organizer (a previous resident) had plans for handling lodging through a combination of:

- Using hotel rooms for 200-300 participants
- Setting up tent camping in River Park
- Allowing RVs to park at Gold Park
- Providing shower trucks and portable toilets

The event would require coordination of:

- Transportation between venues
- Food vendors to supplement the catered meals provided to some participants (175-200 riders on meal plan, leaving approximately 800 needing to eat in town)
- A welcome tent with information about local attractions
- A finish line celebration

Shannan noted that she had spoken with representatives from Visit Alamance who had hosted the event in Burlington and Mebane with positive results, though they acknowledged it required significant coordination. The estimated cost to the tourism program would be \$7,000-\$10,000.

Members expressed both excitement about the potential economic impact and concerns about the logistical challenges and volume of work the event would create without any clear staff capacity to run it. The average age of participants was noted to be 61, and they would likely spend money in local restaurants and shops. There was discussion about whether restaurants would need to stay open later on Sunday night to accommodate the influx of visitors. The TDA members indicated they would support the endeavor if tourism staff thought that it was transactable.

6. Monthly reports

A. Tourism Staff Updates

Shannan reported that:

- The TDA had successfully purchased two pieces of art from Uproar: "Sounds of tranquility" a reclaimed steel, Japanese inspired interactive gong and "A Feather in time" an owl sculpture on a clock, both to be installed on the Town Hall campus in coming weeks.
- Four more oversized presents had been ordered for the holiday tree display using the holiday decor budget.
- Occupancy tax revenues were down, similar to food and beverage tax revenues. Shannan theorized that while restaurants still seemed busy, people might be ordering less (skipping appetizers, desserts, or alcoholic beverages) and hotel guests might be shortening their stays.
- There was uncertainty about the Colonial Inn's operations, with some changes in management occurring and questions about whether they would fully reopen their kitchen.

B. Board comments

Members noted that the most recent Last Friday event had been particularly successful with excellent weather and a variety of activities that created a magical atmosphere.

7. Adjournment

Motion: Member Black motioned to adjourn the meeting. Member Pace seconded.

Vote: 3-0.

Chair Darab adjourned the meeting at 6:53pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dakotah Kimbrough
Planning Technician

Approved: December 1, 2025