

# Minutes

## TOURISM BOARD

Regular meeting

5:30 p.m. April 6, 2026

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



Present: Chair Victoria Pace, Vice-Chair Megan Kimball, Rainbow Cabbage, Barney Caton, Meaghun Darab, Scott Czechlewski, Spencer Welborn, and Eryk Pruitt

Absent: Smita Patel

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

### 1. Call to order

Planning and Economic Development Manager Shannan Campbell confirmed the presence of a quorum. Chair Victoria Pace called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

### 2. Agenda changes and approval

A request was made to add a presentation by Meaghun Darab representing PORCH Hillsborough to the agenda as Item 5a. Additionally, it was requested by Member Rainbow Cabbage that a brief discussion on the America 250 event proposal from the previous meeting be added. That item was proposed to be added as Item 5d under Regular Discussion/Action Items.

Motion: Member Eryk Pruitt moved to approve the agenda as amended. Member Spencer Welborn seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

### 3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on March 2, 2026

Member Cabbage noted that details of the America 250 proposal appeared to have evolved since the March meeting — specifically, that the food component had shifted away from indigenous foods toward watermelon, and that the event landscape in Orange County had changed with Chapel Hill announcing a drone show. It was clarified that the minutes must reflect the conversation as it occurred at the time of the meeting, not subsequent developments. The board agreed that the America 250 discussion would be taken up under Item 5d.

Motion: Member Pruitt moved to approve the March 2, 2026, minutes as submitted. Member Barney Caton seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

### 4. Presentations

Contract Scope of Work Response Presentations:

101 E. Orange St., PO Box 429, Hillsborough, NC 27278  
919-732-1270 | [www.hillsboroughnc.gov](http://www.hillsboroughnc.gov) | @HillsboroughGov  
[www.visithillsboroughnc.com](http://www.visithillsboroughnc.com) | @HillsboroughNC

A. Alliance- Visitors Center (\$271,922)

Dani McIvor, Executive Director of the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough, presented the organization's funding request. She noted the overall budget has not changed significantly, with two targeted increases being sought. The first is a 3% cost-of-living adjustment for staff, consistent with the federal figure, which combined with a 5% retirement contribution for Site Manager Ben — who has reached three years of full-time service per the Alliance policy — totals \$3,364.28. The second increase of \$1,352 addresses rising professional service fees, including accounting, Zoom, and payroll software subscriptions. McIvor emphasized that all requested increases were categorized as the highest priority in the budget justification. Overhead costs such as cleaning and pest control have remained stable. Continuation of the event shuttle pilot program was noted as included in the budget at the same price as last year.

B. Hillsborough Arts Council (\$75,000)

Heather Tatreau, Executive Director of the Hillsborough Arts Council, presented the organization's funding request. She opened with an overview of the Arts Council's reliance on tourism funding relative to its own earned revenue and fundraising, emphasizing the importance of tourism board support in making free public events possible. The request for regular programming remains unchanged from last year.

The new addition to this year's ask is \$5,000 toward the Handmade Parade, scheduled for April 2027. The Parade occurs every two years but has had a three-year gap due to staffing transitions. Tatreau explained that the \$5,000 previously received in prior years for off-year preparation was not requested last year and has since been used for workshops and staffing support. The 2027 parade will require additional contracted performers and puppeteers to compensate for the loss of the organization's own giant puppets, which were destroyed flooding from TS Chantal. The Arts Council currently retains only two puppets and plans to contract with 123 Puppetry and Paperhand Puppet Intervention to fill out the parade. Musical acts and drummers are also being pursued. Tatreau noted that April was selected as the parade date to avoid the summer travel season and the busy fall event calendar. The Arts Council has been building awareness through puppetry workshops in partnership with Scrap Exchange in Durham, with the intent of drawing Durham County residents to Hillsborough for the event.

C. OC Museum (\$59,500)

Catie Atkinson, Site Manager of the Orange County Historical Museum, presented the organization's request, which is unchanged from the prior year at \$59,500. Atkinson noted that while the museum's budget will increase slightly due to cost-of-living adjustments, holding the ask flat is intended to create greater incentive for the board to pursue fundraising. Plans for next year include a larger annual fundraising event, a more robust April–June annual campaign, an expanded November–December holiday giving campaign, and increased sponsor solicitation for special exhibits and general museum support through tiered sponsorship levels.

Atkinson also announced the opening of a new exhibit on Thursday, April 9, titled United We Stand, Divided We Fall: Unity and Division in Orange County History, featuring 36 spotlighted individuals and spanning six thematic lenses of Orange County history. Board members were invited to an opening reception.

D. Hillsborough Chamber of Commerce- Parade & Tree Lighting (\$14,600)

Scott Czechlewski presented on behalf of the Hillsborough Chamber of Commerce. He reported that no increase is being requested. While some event costs have risen slightly — particularly rentals and service fees associated with the parade — a modest \$10 increase in the registration fee implemented last year has offset most of those increases. Expenses shared with the Visitors Center for the Jingle and Joy Weekend event, including character appearances and rental floats, also remain consistent. A light hearted exchange ensued

regarding candle supply at the tree lighting event; Czechlewski acknowledged that attendance exceeded expectations last year and committed to increasing the candle order for the coming year.

E. Burwell School (?)

Matt Hughes, presenting on behalf of the Burwell School Historic Site, noted that the formal scope of work had not yet been submitted to the Tourism Board yet due to an ongoing staffing transition. He reported that the organization has recently completed interviews for a new Site Director and that the preferred candidate — who is local to Hillsborough — has accepted the offer, with a start date of May 4 and a transition to full hours in early June.

Hughes stated that the formal ask will be \$85,000, representing an increase over the amount funded last year. Reasons cited for the increase include cost-of-living adjustments for staff, rising utility and liability insurance costs, and two significant financial setbacks during the current fiscal year: the failure of both HVAC units in succession, and the inability to hold the organization's annual gala due to the staffing transition. To compensate for lost gala revenue, the organization is conducting two rounds of annual fund solicitations this year rather than one, and plans to convert its fall festival into a more substantial revenue-generating event. Hughes noted that security and safety improvements to address known trip hazards will also be included in the ask.

**5. Regular Discussion/Action Items**

A. PORCH Hillsborough – Spring Fundraiser Funding Request (Added Item)

Meaghun Darab recused herself from deliberation and voting, disclosing that she serves as Executive Director of PORCH Hillsborough and a Town Commissioner. She then presented the request on behalf of the organization in the absence of Program Manager Nora Decker, who couldn't make the meeting.

PORCH Hillsborough is a food insecurity organization serving Northern Orange County. In 2025, it distributed over \$633,000 worth of food with the support of 6,745 volunteer hours across eight distribution sites. The spring fundraiser, scheduled for Saturday, May 2, 2026, at 2:00 PM, will take the form of a scavenger hunt through downtown Hillsborough. Participants — capped at 100 ticketed attendees at \$40 per ticket — will start at the Visitors Center, collect items representing a typical distribution at eight historic locations around town, and conclude at the Rookery. Clues were developed in collaboration with the Orange County Historical Museum and the Visitors Center. Cedar Ridge High School PORCH club members will assist participants. Local businesses may be invited to offer themed promotions tied to the event.

The total event budget is approximately \$1,000, and PORCH is requesting \$500 from the Tourism Board on a matching basis. Planning and Economic Development Manager Shannan Campbell explained that because of the low dollar amount and the timing — the request came in after the regular grant cycle and the event precedes the start of the new fiscal year when grants become available — staff recommended handling this as a special project partnership request rather than routing it through the formal grant process. It was noted that if approved, any marketing support from the Visitors Center would be through general event calendar promotion rather than dedicated advertising.

The board discussed the tourism value of the event, noting the relatively low ask, the potential for ancillary spending by participants and their guests, and the novelty of the scavenger hunt format. No concerns were raised regarding the dollar amount.

Motion: Member Pruitt moved to fund the \$500 PORCH Hillsborough spring fundraiser request, approving a fund balance budget adjustment for Special Projects/Partnerships, if needed. Member Caton seconded.

Vote: 7-0. Member Darab abstained from the vote.

#### B. Vice Chair Appointment

Campbell noted that the Vice Chair appointment had been tabled at the March meeting because current Vice Chair Megan Kimball was absent at that time. Kimball indicated she would be rolling off the board in the near future upon completion of her term as Alliance Board Chair, with her seat to be filled by Blake Tedder, whose first meeting is anticipated to be late Summer. She expressed willingness to continue as Vice Chair until her departure but encouraged the board to consider another appointment.

Member Pruitt was nominated and accepted the nomination for Vice Chair.

Motion: Member Caton moved to appoint Member Pruitt as Vice Chair. Vice Chair Kimball seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

Pruitt noted that he would not be present for the May meeting and conferred with Chair Pace that she would be able to attend.

#### C. Continue to discuss FY 2027 draft budget

Campbell presented the current draft of the FY 2027 budget for continued board review and discussion, noting that contract partner figures from the evening's scope of work presentations had not yet been incorporated and would be updated for the May meeting. She flagged several highlighted line items as optional— including a proposed Riverwalk entrance shelter — that may depend on co-funding from the Town Board and could be removed if not pursued jointly.

Campbell identified a website update as a higher-priority item. She estimated a cost of \$28,000–\$30,000, to be shared with the TDA, though quotes are still pending. She noted the update would address ADA accessibility improvements and flagged that upcoming federal accessibility requirements, while primarily directed at local governments, may apply to public authorities to some extent. She emphasized the importance of providing tourism information to those who are differently abled.

Discussion turned to the overall budget picture. FY 2026 collections were currently trending below the prior year, but could pick up. This flat revenue trend against increasing contract partner asks prompted concern from board members about the overall financial picture and the sustainability of funding at current and increased levels each year to contract partners.

Chair Victoria Pace expressed reservations about potentially drawing down the fund balance by approximately \$92,000 in a single year, particularly given the revenue trend and the potential need to draw from reserves again in FY 2028. She indicated that discretionary special projects and partnership line items, totaling approximately \$40,000–\$65,000, should be considered first for reduction before asking contract partners to cut their requests.

Member Kimball agreed and noted that she planned to meet with the Alliance to identify potential voluntary reductions, and encouraged other contract partners to do the same rather than waiting for the board to impose across-the-board cuts. Heather Tatreau (Arts Council) spoke and cautioned that cuts to contract partner funding translate directly into reduced staffing and programming, which in turn reduces the tourism activity that generates the meals and beverage tax revenue the board depends upon.

Member Caton raised the philosophical question of what an appropriate fund balance threshold should be, suggesting the board consider adopting a formal floor or standard rather than reacting intuitively. Matt

Hughes noted that there are precedents of the state legislature reclaiming fund balances from tourism authorities it perceived as holding excess reserves, a factor worth considering when calibrating how much to retain.

Vice Chair Pruitt raised a previously discussed idea of placing the fund balance in a high-yield savings account to generate interest income so that some of it could be spent for contract partners but some of it could also be growing in case of a natural disaster or severe economic downturn, etc. Campbell confirmed that the finance director had identified a legally permissible option in North Carolina, of which there are not many, and committed to providing more information at the next meeting. Vice Chair Pruitt estimated that at approximately 4% interest, the fund balance could have generated roughly \$23,000 in a single year — a meaningful contribution toward offsetting any projected deficits and funding contract partners.

Campbell noted that the board would have a more complete and specific budget to review at the May meeting, with adoption targeted for the June 1<sup>st</sup> public hearing. She said the budget would be developing and would be updated a little after each meeting and even potentially at the budget public hearing depending on the will of the board.

#### D. America 250 Event Discussion (Added Item)

The board revisited the America 250 event, which received a prior funding commitment from the Tourism Board. Member Rainbow Cabbage raised the question of whether the event's programming had changed since the original proposal, noting that the budget had included a large amount of funding for hospitality and food described at the time as involving indigenous foods, which appeared to have shifted to just watermelon and bottled water distribution.

Campbell clarified that shifts within budget line items are common as events develop and would not ordinarily be prohibited, but that a wholesale change in event character, theme, or purpose would not be permitted. She noted the event is actively evolving, describing the current concept as a vendor market on the Courthouse Lawn from approximately 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM, followed by a walking parade from the Courthouse Lawn down King Street and into River Park, culminating in live music and entertainment in the evening. There are hopes for a laser light show or some kind of light performance at the end. She indicated that there may be some kind of food/water to be given away as well as food for sale. She explained that the event is still being developed and getting funding was a sort of 'first step'.

Campbell confirmed that a flyer and press release are in development and will be distributed to the board and TDA as the event details are finalized. She expressed confidence that the event would be well-executed through the partnership with the Town and Orange County.

Chair Pace noted that while some board members hold reservations — both regarding the general value of the investment relative to other contract partners, and questions about the food and hospitality budget — it was not seen as beneficial to revisit the funding commitment at this stage, as most funding had already been secured from other sources by the time the Tourism Board was approached. She indicated that it would not be appropriate to pull funding after making the commitment, as plans were now coming together.

## 6. Monthly reports and comments

### A. Tourism Staff/Visitors Center/OC Visitors Bureau Updates

Campbell reported that the Revolutionary War interpretive sign project, which had been submitted to the America 250 commission in December, received final approval the prior week. The sign is expected to be installed before the end of the current fiscal year. Campbell noted that the America 250 commission is covering the cost of one sign entirely under a cost-match arrangement, and that the project came in under

budget, with remaining funds to roll back into the fund balance. She thanked Dani at the Visitors Center for moving the project along.

**B. Tourism Board Member Comments & Updates**

Informal discussion took place regarding local food and beverage tax trends, the composition of tax revenue by establishment type, the challenge of tracking and collecting meals tax from food trucks, and the possibility of new restaurant openings in vacant spaces such as the former Pizza Hut location. Campbell noted that sit-down restaurants contribute comparably to fast food establishments in tax revenue, and that a slight slowdown in new restaurant openings and vacant spaces may be a contributing factor to the relatively flat revenues.

**7. Adjournment**

Chair Pace adjourned the meeting at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dakotah Kimbrough  
Planning Technician  
Staff support to the Hillsborough Tourism Board

Approved: June 1, 2026