

Minutes

TOURISM BOARD

Regular meeting

5:30 p.m. November 3rd, 2025

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



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

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

Chair Pace asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Hearing none, a motion was made to approve the agenda.

Motion: Member Meaghun Darab moved to approve the agenda. Member Rainbow Cabbage seconded.
Vote: 8-0.

3. Minutes

Chair Pace asked if there were any changes to the August minutes. Hearing none, a motion was made to approve the minutes.

Motion: Member Scott Czechlewski moved approval of the August 4th, 2025, minutes as submitted. Member Smita Patel seconded.
Vote: 8-0.

4. Discussion/Action Items

A. Q1 Reports from Contract Partners

a. Alliance for Historic Hillsborough (Visitors Center)

Dani McIvor, the new Executive Director of the Alliance, presented the Q1 report. Key highlights included:

- Hills Academy: A continuing education program that has evolved into a speaker series focused on historical education, with both free and ticketed events featuring local historians and experts
- Field trips and tours: These continue to be popular, with the History walking tours and Outlandish tour being particularly successful
- Events support: The Alliance supported multiple events including Uproar, 3PC, Last Fridays, Burwell's Fall Fest, and Walk Fairview Day

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- Visitor statistics: The center served 1,282 people in Q1, with September being a particularly busy month due to cooling temperatures
- Private tours: Two tours were conducted with 32 people, and 72 students were served through field trips

Mclvor discussed several initiatives:

1. Occoneechee Village restoration: The village was severely damaged by Hurricane Chantal, but community workdays have helped restore it, with more scheduled for November 9 and 23. Interpretive signage will be installed on December 2.
2. Telling the Full Story: Phase two is being planned to highlight 10 new historic sites that share Black and Indigenous histories of Hillsborough.
3. MOU with Board of Education: An agreement is being developed for Hughes Academy and Cameron Icehouse to ensure maintenance and expanded educational programming.

Marketing successes included growth in Instagram audience, increased newsletter engagement, and website traffic. Collaborations with partners like 3PC were also highlighted as successful.

Challenges discussed included slow summer tour offerings in July, difficulty with the Hills Academy format (shifting from a semester system to more individual events), and the need for wider community event participation beyond traditional partners.

Promotional projects included a Chapelboro article about Hillsborough nightlife, a native ad article in Blue Ridge Outdoors magazine, and plans to expand influencer partnerships. Mclvor mentioned that a TikTok account is being created to reach new audiences.

b. Hillsborough Arts Council

Heather Tatreau, Executive Director of Hillsborough Arts Council, presented their Q1 report:

- Staffing: Three full-time staff plus two part-time positions (events coordinator and digital coordinator)
- Volunteer support: Over 300 volunteer hours from 100 volunteers in Q1
- Last Fridays: Three events with approximately 6,700 attendees
- Gallery gift shop: Over 3,000 visitors, open six days a week
- Other events: Two puppetry workshops in preparation for the Handmade Parade (21 attendees) and a house concert at a historic home (40 attendees)

Tatreau detailed the "Live on the Lawn" series on the Old Courthouse lawn, featuring 15 paid performers over three months with approximately 500 attendees. The Maker's Market included 73 art vendors and 12 community booths.

The Arts Council organized Creation Stations on the lawn, engaging over 150 participants in art activities such as live sketching. Their information booth, staffed by board and staff members, engaged with about 260 people.

A community fashion show in September was particularly successful, drawing 250 attendees. Given its success, another fashion show is planned for April to align with Earth Month, focusing on upcycling.

The Gallery and Gift Shop generated \$27,500 in retail sales, with 60% (\$16,000) going back to artists as commissions. Of the 3,000+ visitors, 65% were from outside Hillsborough and 53% from outside Orange County.

Marketing statistics showed substantial website visits and a 40% open rate for their twice-monthly e-newsletter. Future events include the Solstice Lantern Walk and Market, with registration opening soon.

c. Burwell School

Emma Vadney, Site Coordinator at Burwell School, presented their Q1 report, noting that it was a slower quarter due to HVAC problems and weather issues:

- HVAC issues: The system was not fixed until midway through July, preventing events and tours

- Ash's Lab event: Hosted researchers from NC State who are using DNA to explore enslaved communities from the Hardscrabble plantation
- Uproar Festival: Displayed a banana-themed artwork on the grounds
- Star Party in August
- Book release party for Jan Irwin, a former commissioner, who released a historical fiction children's book

Vadney shared their historic comic book project funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services grant. The comic books feature local artists and authors, with free copies available online and at Burwell School. They've been distributed to students and teachers throughout Orange County, with accompanying lesson plans.

Despite closures, Burwell had 480 visitors during Q1. Upcoming events include an open house on December 6 aligned with the Holiday Nights Homes Tour (3-8 PM), holiday tours from December 6-19, a fundraising Candlelit Toast event on December 9, and a book launch on December 14 for Sylvia Hoffert's new book about gossip in Antebellum Hillsborough.

d. OC Historical Museum

Catie Atkinson presented the Orange County Historical Museum's Q1 report, highlighting that they served 2,029 people this quarter, potentially a record:

- 913 on-site visitors
- 934 people through programs and events
- 182 on field trips

Visitor demographics showed 23% from Hillsborough, 9% from Orange County outside Hillsborough, 40% from North Carolina outside Orange County, 25% from out of state, and 3% international visitors.

The highlight of the quarter was the Third Provincial Congress event on September 6, which was the museum's largest event to date with approximately 750 attendees. The event featured:

- A reenactment of the Third Provincial Congress with actors portraying 12 delegates across 8 shows (517 attendees)
- Five academic speaker sessions that reached capacity (433 attendees)
- A colonial market with 15 museums/historic sites, 3 vendors, and 20 reenactors
- Children's activities including a "create your own currency" station

Atkinson noted that remarks from all speakers would be published in a bound book available for purchase starting November 10.

The museum also conducted outreach through talks given by Courtney at various locations including Carolina Meadows, First Baptist Church in Mebane, and the Granville County Senior Center. Field trips included students from UNC's Explore program, Hillsborough Elementary, and a NC State public history class.

Upcoming events include a two-part lecture series on slavery in North Carolina on November 6 and 20.

- B. Update on schedule/overview of new 'Jingle and Joy' Holiday Weekend from Chamber/Alliance
Kelly Arnold from the Alliance and Scott Czechlewski from the Chamber presented an update on the "Jingle and Joy" weekend scheduled for December 6-7:

The weekend will combine the tree lighting, Santa visit, and the return of the candlelight home tours. The Alliance received partial funding from the TDA (a \$5,000 special projects/sponsorship) to expand the tree lighting festivities.

Arnold explained that the holiday festivities will expand upon last year's successful event that drew about 500 visitors. Enhancements include:

- More crafts and games themed around the holidays
- Return of Mrs. Claus for readings and Santa for photos
- An expanded holiday market featuring organizations representing holidays celebrated in Hillsborough

- Six sites for the "Tinsel in Traditions" home tours, including notable locations like the Nash Hooper House and Bellevue
- Reopening of the Inn at Teardrops
- Czechlewski noted that the tree lighting will operate similarly to last year, with:
- A candlelight procession starting at the visitor center
- The Color and Light Community Choir leading songs during the procession and at the tree lighting
- An estimated 200-250 attendees expected

The Chamber is also organizing the holiday parade the following day (December 7) and the gingerbread house contest ("Home for the Holidays"), which opened for registration on November 1. Houses will be viewable from December 7 through January 5, with entries due by December 5.

Campbell noted that the TDA has invested in additional holiday decorations including oversized presents at the holiday tree. A storage unit has been secured to store event materials rather than pursuing the previously considered \$20,000 storage building.

Additionally, approximately \$700 of miscellaneous tourism funds were used to purchase A-frame signs for the shuttle stop(s) and yard signs for event parking, which can be reused for future events.

5. Staff Updates

A. F&B Tax Report FY25

Staff reported that the fiscal year ended with approximately \$10,000 less in food and beverage tax revenue than the previous year, though there was some rebound towards the end of the year. Staff advised that the board should plan for revenues not exceeding \$525,000 for the next fiscal year, and/or be prepared to spend down fund balance.

Chair Pace observed that the monthly revenue had become much more consistent throughout the year, with less seasonality than in previous years. The range was narrower (\$39,000 to \$46,000 per month) compared to FY24's range of \$31,000 to \$57,000, suggesting a higher floor but potentially lower ceiling.

Board members suggested inflation might be contributing to the stability in monthly revenues.

6. Board updates/comments

Member Barney Caton inquired about his term status. Campbell confirmed that he is rotating off the board due to term limits but can serve until a replacement is found. Staff mentioned there are two upcoming vacancies: Caton's at-large position and a food and beverage seat that remains unfilled. Staff clarified that food and beverage representatives must work at or own (and be authorized to represent) a food and beverage business, but do not need to live in Hillsborough.

7. Adjournment

Meeting was adjourned by Chair Pace at 6:22 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dakotah Kimbrough
 Planning Technician
 Staff support to the Hillsborough Tourism Board

Approved: January 5, 2026