

Agenda

Hillsborough Tourism Board

5:30 p.m. October 12, 2026

Town Annex Conference Room, 105 E. Corbin St.



1. **Call to order and confirmation of quorum**
2. **Agenda changes and approval**
3. **Minutes**
 - A. August 31, 2026
4. **Presentations**
5. **Regular Discussion/Action Items**
 - A. Execute updated Town/Tourism Staff Support Contract
6. **Monthly Reports and Comments**
 - A. Tourism Staff Updates
 - CycleNC event
 - Fall events
 - Halloween Weekend (Last Fridays, Merchant Trick or Treat, HPD Trunk or Treat)
 - B. Tourism Board Member Comments & Updates
7. **Adjournment**

Interpreter services or special sound equipment for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act is available on request. If you are disabled and need assistance with reasonable accommodations, call the Town Clerk's Office at 919-296-9443 a minimum of one business day in advance of the meeting.

Minutes

TOURISM BOARD

Regular meeting

5:30 p.m. August 31st, 2026

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



Present: Chair Victoria Pace, Vice-Chair Eryk Pruitt, Rainbow Cabbage, Meaghun Darab, Smita Patel, Blake Tedder, and Spencer Welborn

Absent: Barney Caton, Scott Czechlewski

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

1. Call to order and confirmation of quorum

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

2. Agenda changes and approval

Member Meaghun Darab stated that she had no agenda changes.

Motion: Darab moved to approve the agenda as presented. Vice-Chair Eryk Pruitt seconded.
Vote: 8-0.

3. Minutes

A. January 5th, 2026

Pace asked whether there were any changes to the January 5th, 2026, minutes. None were offered.

Motion: Darab moved to approve the January 5th, 2026, minutes as submitted. Pruitt seconded.
Vote: 8-0.

B. June 1st, 2026 (Budget Public Hearing)

Member Spencer Welborn noted that the minutes recorded him as seconding a motion but did not list him in the attendance at the top of the document. Members confirmed that he was present at the meeting. The Chair stated that the minutes would be modified to add Member Welborn to the attendance list. Member Blake Tedder abstained from the vote as he was not present at the meeting.

Motion: Darab moved to approve the June 1st, 2026, minutes with the modification. Pruitt seconded.
Vote: 7-0.

4. Presentations

A. Q3/Q4 Updates and Final Contract Partner(s) Reports (in packet) for FY26:

Pace introduced the fiscal year 2026 Q3/Q4 presentations from the contract partners.

- Burwell School

Elizabeth Hays, the new site director, introduced herself to the Board. She had started in May. She announced that the site is now known as the Elizabeth Keckley Center at the Burwell School. She described the change as part of a move toward more programming and a fuller, more complete telling of the site's history.

Hays reported an operating budget of \$165,000 for the prior year, which has increased for the coming year. From January through June the site held one well-attended event. The site was closed in January and had staffing changes. The former site coordinator, who had organized the gala (since postponed) and smaller educational programs, left around the holidays and returned briefly before a major event. Hays hired BB Miller as the new visitor and historic services coordinator. New commissioners, including Sally Green, are working with Ms. Miller to develop the Keckley Center as both a physical space and a program of activities. Its aim is to be a community center and also to attract visitors from around and outside the state.

Hays reported that the site is being repainted and that 83 broken or cracked windows have been replaced. Upcoming activities include:

- Participation in Outlandish, on-site Saturday, with a tea at the house on Sunday
- A launch of the site's historic comic books
- An adult Halloween event being planned by the events committee
- A small music festival with WHUP on the lawn on November 7 from 12 to 4 p.m.
- A discussion on historic bricks with Peter Sandbeck, from Orange County

The star party was cancelled and replaced with a commissioner and staff celebration.

Member Tedder asked whether the State had any bearing on the name change. Hays responded that it did not. The legal entity is the Historic Hillsborough Commission, established by statute. She reported strong interest in Keckley from academics at UNC and Duke. She said the response from donors to the announcement was overwhelmingly positive, while some distress had appeared on social media. She noted the site was a girls' school for only about 20 years and was a private residence until 1963. Darab observed that the website listed only the tea among upcoming events, that the Orange County label was cut off, and that Visit Hillsborough was not listed. Ms. Hays responded that a new website, being built by Josh Collins, is in progress and will be easier to update. She said she would ensure Visit Hillsborough is included as a sponsor.

Tedder asked about the philosophy of becoming a community space. Hays stated her view that serving Orange County residents builds local ownership. Residents then bring visitors from outside the area, which grows the site's reach beyond Hillsborough.

- Hillsborough Arts Council

Heather Tatreau, Executive Director, distributed the FY26 impact report and presented highlights. The Council reported two interns, five staff (three full-time and two part-time), 15 board members, 37 community partners, and 155 volunteers. It has since increased to four full-time staff. Gallery walls were added to the gallery space, 2026 Last Friday Art Walk season planning was completed, and the Handmade Parade was scheduled for April 2027. A board retreat for strategic planning was also held.

The gallery and gift shop had over 5,000 visitors. Three Last Friday events drew about 4,500 attendees, and the Council held two Handmade Parade workshops, two house concert fundraisers, and a gallery after-hours reception. Visitor surveys showed 73 percent of visitors came from outside Hillsborough and 57 percent from outside Orange County, with Durham County the next largest group. The Council paid 18 performers for the Live on the Lawn series and averaged about 300 attendees monthly. The Makers Market included 53 art vendors and seven community booths. Around town, the Council collaborated with 19 venues, 31 gallery receptions, and 21 venues with live music. The email list has over 6,000 subscribers. Art kits sold for \$12 to \$15 are an additional source of income and are sold

through partners including the Rookery and Yonder. The Council's next events are the September and October Last Friday events, with October focused on Halloween, and planning for the Solstice Lantern Walk begins in early September.

In response to Tedder, Tatreau explained that local business partners are largely art walk venues, galleries, performance venues, and organizations such as the Alliance and the Historical Museum.

In response to Darab's question about HAC strategic planning, Ms. Julia Workman, HAC board chair, described the strategic planning retreat. The Council engaged a facilitator for the meeting. The process included pre-retreat questions for the board and staff and a four-hour retreat. It produced 12 objectives, which the Council organized into six committees: executive, finance, development, recruitment and board development, program impact and accessibility, and facilities. Workman and Tatreau said the structure has increased board engagement, centralized work that was previously scattered across individual board members and allowed the Council to be more proactive. The 12 goals are expected to carry the Council for about two years. Ms. Workman thanked the Board for its support.

In response to Tedder, Tatreau explained that when the programs and marketing director left, the position was split into a marketing coordinator and an events coordinator, both entry-level positions. Workman reported that despite having four full-time staff, total staffing costs are lower.

- OC Museum

Catie Atkinson presented for the Museum, noting that funding remains the same for next year.

- **Q3:** 515 on-site visitors, 358 served through programs and events, and 60 on field trips, for a total of 933.
- **Q4:** 893 on-site visitors, 583 served through programs and events, and 75 on field trips, for a total of 1,551.
- **Full-year:** The Museum engaged 5,820 individuals against a projection of 4,569 and last year's total of about 4,500.
- **Visitor origin (full year):** 20 percent Hillsborough, 12 percent elsewhere in Orange County, 45 percent elsewhere in North Carolina, 20 percent out of state, and 3 percent international.

Highlights included a series of talks marking the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, covering foundational documents, women's history, John Adams, and Native American and African American history. A plaque honoring Anne Hooper was unveiled in the Old Town Cemetery with descendants of the signers. The Museum opened a new exhibit, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall: Unity and Division in Orange County History," spotlighting 36 residents across six themes. It was the most attended opening reception the Museum has held. Field trips included Expedition School and Duke School. Upcoming events include "LiberTEA with the Ladies of Hillsborough 1776" on September 12 and a follow-up reunion and cocktail tasting at Yonder the following week.

In response to Member Welborn, Atkinson attributed the increase to the weekly talk series (usually the Museum offers about one program per month), which drew 40 to 60 attendees each, and to last September's large Third Provincial Congress celebration. Walk-in visits were also up. She said donations have remained steady but not increased, which she attributed to the current climate for nonprofit giving. In response to Member Tedder's question about how often exhibits change, she said special exhibits are generally installed in March or April and remain through December.

- Alliance (Visitor's Center)

Dani McIvor, Executive Director of the Alliance for Historic Hillsborough, presented the Q3/Q4 report and some full-year figures.

The first Burns Night Scottish Dinner drew 75 participants and sold out. The Indigenous Memories class was held with Judge Beverly Scarlet. Revolutionary War Living History Day drew almost 700 participants. Preservation Day, held in partnership with Preservation NC, drew 360 participants, its largest to date.

The Visitors Center had 3,738 visitors in Q3/Q4 and just over 6,000 for the fiscal year. Guided tours drew 134 attendees in Q3/Q4 and 272 for the season. Field trips totaled 549 for the season, 166 of them in Q3/Q4.

Private tour and field trip booking moved to the Zephy ticketing system. The Alliance developed the "History Within Reach" accessible seated tour and is planning a seated West Hillsborough tour, possibly at the Orange County Arts Mill. Offering donations at ticket purchase has increased giving, and a revamped donor acknowledgment plan includes personalized letters.

The Alliance mixes selective traditional media with e-blasts and online features to market Visit Hillsborough for the Tourism Board. Short-term ad boosts and influencer partnerships performed best, and it plans to expand influencer work to Western North Carolina, Southern Virginia, and families. Instagram has substantially outperformed Facebook on reach. Top-performing content included business profiles, hikes and hidden gems, day guides, and posts with a face on screen. Reported figures:

- New followers rose 21 percent.
- Social media followers grew 14 percent, to over 10,000 on Instagram and 12,500 on Facebook.
- Total social media visits exceeded 1,000,000.
- Newsletter open rate was 32 percent, with about 300 clicks per edition.
- The website had 278,000 views.

Outlandish planning began early, with over \$10,000 in ticket sales to date. The Telling the Full Story fundraising has passed half of its goal. The Visit Hillsborough internship program was successful. Challenges included inclement weather (Burns Night was rescheduled from January to March), the variability of influencer partnerships, promotion of new offerings such as the Solstice Lantern Shuttle, and large-event logistics. A new shuttle system is planned for Outlandish, sponsored by the Hillsborough Tourism Development Authority.

Pruitt offered a comment on engagement tactics for Instagram reels that had worked for his business.

5. Regular Discussion/Action items

- A. Tourism Board Funding Structure Updates (grants, contract partners, special projects/partnerships/sponsorship)

Shannan Campbell, Planning and Economic Development Manager, introduced the item as a discussion item. No motions were made and no decisions were planned to be reached.

Background. Campbell reviewed the history of the funding structure. When she arrived in 2015, grants were the only funding mechanism. Applicants, including ongoing programs, often asked for the same funding every year without knowing what they would receive, and competed with new event proposals. The Board adopted a new system with a three-part structure:

- **Grants** are seed money to start new programs and events, typically limited to two years (reset after COVID).
- **Contract partners** receive ongoing funding for programs that cannot become self-sustaining. They are the Chamber (holiday parade and tree lighting), the Alliance (Visitors Center, website, and social media/marketing Visit Hillsborough), the OC Museum (Visitor Services/Events), Burwell School (Visitor Services/Events), and the Arts Council (Visitor Services/Events). Contracts range from just under \$15,000 (the Chamber) to about \$275,000 (the Visitors Center).
- **Special projects and partnerships** are small, unplanned or pop-up requests of \$4,999 or less. The dollar amount is the most that the board can adjust their budget without Town Board concurrence.

Campbell noted that the Board has used special projects sparingly in recent years, and that the Board can also initiate its own projects, such as the kayak rental pilot program idea and the Visit Hillsborough bus wraps. She reviewed revenue, which has grown steadily since tracking began in FY17. She explained that the dip between FY24 and FY25 reflects a change in how Town Finance department deducts its administrative fees, and that FY26 showed strong growth despite some restaurant closures and remodels. She also noted external feedback

that the Board holds too much fund balance. She said the fund balance provided flexibility during COVID, but that the Board may not need as much as it holds. She said she had heard feedback over the past two years that the Board may wish to restructure their funding. The Town Board may also want to meet with the Tourism Board and TDA this fall to touch base on a variety of items.

Discussion 1: Multi-year contracts for contract partners. Campbell explained that the Town can legally commit to only one fiscal year at a time and that contracts carry a "subject to available revenues" clause. A multi-year arrangement would therefore be an annual contract backed by an expectation of continued funding, with a fixed base amount for ongoing operations. Partners could seek additional money for special projects. Workman asked whether the arrangement would be revisited after the term. Campbell replied that a new amount would be set at the end of the term, and that a two-year pilot could precede a three-year term.

Members expressed reservations:

- Pace did not want to go beyond two years because of board turnover, the importance of members experiencing budget discussions, and year-to-year variation in partner requests. Pace said they could try two year contacts to start.
- Tedder said he wanted to hear from the partners first about the burden a longer term would lift. He asked whether combining multi-year contracts, twice-yearly presentations, and more general reporting would dilute the Board's oversight. He later suggested staggering two-year terms among partners so budget discussions still occur every year and members stay familiar with the process.
- Pruitt cited past experience in which a funded partner's circumstances changed after the budget had been adopted. He preferred that partners continue to present a plan each year for how to spend the tourism funds. He had concerns that the board would feel obligated to fund year two, even if year one wasn't successful and/or if the organization didn't meet contract obligations.
- Member Rainbow Cabbage questioned whether the arrangement was effectively a fictional multi-year contract, expressed discomfort with it, and said that most of the contracts are large amounts of money to not be going over the plan for spending it each year.
- Member Smita Patel said two years seemed reasonable with check-ins and reporting.
- Welborn favored giving partners the planning certainty of two years, noted that partners effectively already plan around their prior-year funding, and wanted to hear what advantages the partners see. He noted that the Board rarely cuts requested amounts even though there is a lot of discussion.
- Tedder suggested the Board could allocate funds for multiple years while still requiring a plan each year.

Campbell clarified that the Board decides how funds are distributed but that partner input is advisable in this process if the board is going to re-work for next fiscal year. She said she would gather feedback from the partners and bring a summary of ideas, and that partners would be invited to react to a proposal rather than hold a question-and-answer session during a meeting. Several members supported hearing feedback from the partners.

Discussion 2: Reporting. Campbell reported that partners find the reporting burdensome, noting that quarterly highlights were originally intended to help partners coordinate with each other, which they now do fairly well. Members were generally in favor of reducing the frequency. Pace favored twice a year, a mid-year and an end-of-year report, rather than quarterly. Pace and Darab both liked having formal reports in the packet. Cabbage cautioned that the Board must retain enough oversight to avoid a repeat of issues or miscommunications with contract partners. Darab and Tedder suggested the mid-year report be lighter, with statistics and economic impact, and the year-end report more detailed. Pruitt asked that reports emphasize how many people were brought to town and the effect on local businesses. The Board reached consensus on a formal report at the end of the year and informal presentations mid-way through the year and again at the end of the year to accompany the formal report in the packet.

Discussion 3: Level of detail in contract partner budgets. Campbell stated that some partners submit very detailed budgets, such as very itemized details, while others submit general line items. She said the Town's expectation is line-item budgeting and offered to provide a model to contract partners. Darab suggested asking partners to follow general accounting standards and roll items up to a higher level. The Board agreed that general line items are acceptable, with questions asked when a figure warrants it. Cabbage explained that the earlier July 4 questions arose because of a large, vague food line item. She indicated that it will be helpful to have some level of detail.

Discussion 4: Simplifying funding opportunities. Members generally favored keeping all three funding pots (grants, contract partners, and special projects) and did not wish to combine or eliminate any. Pace said the special projects/partnerships pot is valuable for small requests without extensive paperwork.

Cabbage raised that the grant window is short and may exclude outlying areas such as West Hillsborough, and she asked for a longer window or two rounds a year. Campbell proposed a spring and a fall round. If adopted, the Board would need to allocate funds for the second round, for example doubling a \$20,000 pool to \$40,000, with a budget amendment if needed. The Chair expressed concern about exhausting all funds in the first round, and Member Tedder noted that two rounds would help applicants who were not planning in spring but would not by itself increase applications from or for events in West Hillsborough. Campbell noted that a fall round would have to fund activity in the spring, because money cannot be allocated across fiscal years. Pace indicated that expanding the pot could also help address concerns about spending down the fund balance.

Grant applicant interaction. Campbell asked whether members wanted to interact directly with grant applicants. Members discussed offering feedback after decisions, inviting applicants to ask questions, and possibly a feedback round before a final decision. She noted that the Board previously interviewed applicants and that some felt applicants then said what they thought the Board wanted to hear in person and that the information provided in person wasn't what was in the grant application. She said she sends anonymized scoring sheets and an explanatory letter to unsuccessful applicants and has not received a response or request for clarity from applicants. Darab described another program that requires presentations from applicants requesting above a threshold amount. Cabbage explained that there was a mural project in a past grant cycle that might have benefited from back and forth discussion. Manager Campbell said she would also review programs in similar towns.

She stated that she would prepare a summary of the discussion tonight, seek feedback from the partners, and return with some recommendations. She also noted that she may recommend next fiscal year that the Board hire a dedicated tourism staff person.

6. Monthly reports and Comments

A. Tourism Staff Updates

Campbell welcomed Blake Tedder, Vice Chair of the Alliance, who is taking the appointed seat vacated by Megan Kimball. He is originally from Rocky Mount but has made Hillsborough home since 2014.

- OCVB Updates: Campbell reported that Orange County Visitors Bureau Executive Director Laurie Paolicelli is retiring in October. She said the Town of Chapel Hill has withdrawn all of its tourism funding from the OCVB, after a cut the previous year as well, and has discussed hiring its own tourism staff person. She explained that Hillsborough and Carrboro operate under the standard occupancy tax structure, in which proceeds must be spent on tourism, while the County and Chapel Hill have a nonstandard structure that lets them spend some of their tourism funding on other things. The County has reduced its tourism spending, leaving the Visitors Bureau on a very tight budget. It plans to retain staff and its Chapel Hill visitor center location and continue some marketing, but its regional and national reach will likely shrink until new leadership is in place with a funding plan. She said this

does not directly affect the Board's funds, but it's good information to have, as there may be increased asks from both Tourism Board and TDA until the Visitors Bureau is sorted.

- TDA may also discuss their funding structure: The TDA does not meet until November and is expected to discuss its funding structure at that time. Campbell noted that currently their funding structure is similar, but that board does not offer grants at this time.
- CycleNC event is coming up on October 5th. Campbell reported that the CycleNC event, funded by the TDA, takes place October 5 with about 1,000 cyclists. Riders will arrive from about 11 am to 5pm via St. Mary's Road and Margaret Lane, and finish at River Park, where many will camp. Hotels are sold out. Shuttles will run between downtown, West Hillsborough, and the hotels. Campbell emailed restaurant/bar businesses that are normally closed on Mondays and encouraged them to stay open, and she had already notified food and beverage businesses that they may see an increase in traffic. She and Dani are working the event at the 'welcome' table.
- Identify possible alternate date for October Tourism Board meeting (due to CycleNC event): Because of the CycleNC event, the Board discussed moving its October meeting. After considering October 12, October 19, and October 28, members agreed by consensus to plan for Monday, October 12 at 5:30 p.m. They noted that the Board of Commissioners meets at 7:00 p.m., so the meeting should finish by then. Campbell stated that she would cancel the meeting if there is no business.

B. Tourism Board Member Comments and Updates

Darab announced that the Chamber is hosting a nonprofit summit on September 30, with four breakout sessions and a keynote at lunchtime.

7. Adjournment

Pace adjourned the meeting at 8:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dakotah Kimbrough
Planning Technician
Staff support to the Hillsborough Tourism Board

Approved: Month X, 202X

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
COUNTY OF ORANGE
TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH

AGREEMENT FOR STAFF SUPPORT SERVICES
BETWEEN THE HILLSBOROUGH TOURISM BOARD
AND THE TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH

THIS AGREEMENT made and entered into as of the 1st day of July 2025, by and between the Hillsborough Tourism Board (“Board”), a public authority formed and operated under authority granted by Chapter 449 Senate Bill 808 of the Sessions Laws of 1993, and Town of Hillsborough, a body corporate and politic of the State of North Carolina, (“Town”), with its principal offices located at 101 East Orange Street, Hillsborough, North Carolina 27278.

WHEREAS, the Board has the power and duty to promote, advertise, and market the area or activity, publish and distribute pamphlets and other materials, provide visitor services, conduct market research, or engage in similar promotional activities that attract tourists or business travelers to the Town of Hillsborough; and

WHEREAS, the Board has the specific mission, in furtherance of these objections and in accordance with its powers and duties, to increase the use of dining and drinking establishments in the town and to attract tourists or business travelers to support cultural and historic attractions; and

WHEREAS, the Board is empowered to contract with any person, firm, organization, or agency to advise, assist in, and carry out its objectives and mission as herein set forth; and

WHEREAS, the Board has determined that the Town can assist with these activities by supplying staff support to the Board.

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the promises and mutual obligations set forth herein, the parties hereto do hereby agree as follows:

1. The Town shall recruit, hire, and train a staff person to provide staff support to the Board.
2. This “support” shall include, but not be limited to, board management functions relating to the operation of the Tourism Board in compliance with state open meetings requirements, and grant, contract, and fiscal management functions related the solicitation, evaluation, dispersal, and oversight of funding awarded by the Board to tourism activities.
3. This “support” shall also include the preparation, adoption and implementation of Tourism development goals and strategies to incrementally develop the tourism program.
4. The Board agrees to provide the Town the market rate salary equivalent to the dedication of fifteen (15) hours of “support” a week to the Board in carrying out its duties. This rate shall be determined annually during the Board and Town’s budget process and shall initially be set for fifteen (15) hours totaling \$26,000.00.
5. This agreement is the same as the agreement made by the Tourism Board at their regular meeting on June 12, 2023. It has been and will continue to be in effect and shall renew for 3-

- year intervals unless terminated or revised sooner as detailed below.
6. Should either party decide not to extend or renew this Agreement, said party shall provide written notice of non-renewal to the other at least 90 days in advance of the proposed termination date.

HILLSBOROUGH TOURISM BOARD

Victoria Pace, Chair

Date

TOWN OF HILLSBOROUGH

Eric J. Peterson, Town Manager

Date

"This instrument has been preaudited in the manner required by the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act."

Finance Director

Date