

Minutes
Cherokee County Tourism Development Authority
March 9, 2020

The Cherokee County Tourism Development Authority met at 2 p.m. on March 9, 2020 at the Murphy Visitor Center.

Members present were Sandra Daley, Phylis Blackmon, Joan Posey-Neumann, Mike Sheidy, Steve Dickey and Aurelia Stone. Board member Cal Stiles was absent. Also in attendance were Sherry Raines, Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce; Jan Olsen and Gayle Horton, Andrews Chamber of Commerce; Kara Thompson, Murphy Business Association; TDA Manager Cabrina Scionti, and Sande Kimball, Interim manager and who served as clerk to the board.

Chair Sandra Daley called the meeting to order followed by a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance.

A motion to approve the agenda was made by Aurelia Stone and seconded by Phylis Blackmon. The motion passed unanimously. Later, the WLOS Road Trippin' proposal was added to the agenda under new business.

Aurelia Stone made the motion to approve the minutes of the February 10, 2020 meeting, seconded by Phylis Blackmon. The motion passed unanimously.

The financial report, ending March 9, was submitted. It was noted that occupancy tax collections are down with some members pointing to the "soggy" winter. It was pointed out that the closure of the Nantahala Gorge, March 9-15, for repairs will have an impact on visitors to Cherokee County. Aurelia Stone asked that staff work on a preliminary draft budget to assess what can be expected for the 2020-2021 fiscal year (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021.)

February visitor numbers for both the Andrews and Murphy Visitor Centers were presented with no comment.

Unfinished Business – Two bids were presented to the board for replacement of toilets and a pressure valve for the two restrooms. John Sandidge Plumbing Co. was awarded the work at \$920.00 that includes installation of two handicap toilets with commercial seats and one new pressure reducer.

New Business – Cabrina Scionti presented Facebook analytics over the past month. Between Feb. 6 and March 4, people reached was at 265%; and page likes were at 158. The numbers are all "organic" meaning no boosts or paid ads to bring attention to the page.

Wi-Fi – Cabrina Scionti requested up to \$150.00 to upgrade the Wi-Fi at the Murphy Visitor Center. Sandra Daley made the motion to approve, seconded by Joan Posey-Neumann. The motion passed unanimously.

Billboard – The board approved renewal of the billboard sign on Rt. 64 near the intersection of Harshaw Road and also a new design. Aurelia Stone made the motion, seconded by Joan Posey-Neumann and passed unanimously.

The board approved a full-page ad in the 2020-2021 **Celebrate Cherokee County** publication produced by The Cherokee Scout. The board approved the inside back page placement at \$900.00. Cabrina Scionti showed three

new designs with branding: "We're A Little Off The Beaten Path But That's Okay." The finished ad will be presented at the board's next meeting, April 13. Mike Sheldy questioned the distribution. This publication is distributed all around the Cherokee County, Graham, Clay and Graham counties, in addition to being one of the information guides offered at the two visitor centers, upon request by people considering relocation as well as the two chambers – Andrews and Cherokee County. Joan Posey-Neumann made the motion to accept the new design and placement, seconded by Aurella Stone and the motion passed unanimously.

Murphy Spring Festival – Kara Thompson, representing the Murphy Business Association, requested a grant of \$2900.00 for advertising the Murphy Spring Festival, now in its third year. The festival is set for May 2, noon to 8 p.m. with a rain date of May 3, same times. Targeted advertising includes Appalachian Country Living Magazine, a special event on VisitNC.com, Facebook and Instagram, event posters distributed across N. Ga., WNC, and E. Tenn. However, after a lengthy and thorough presentation, Mike Sheldy and Aurella Stone both shared a concern that the festival hours should begin at 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Kara said that would be desirable and the group would work on this for next year. This year the organizers are locked into what the Town of Murphy and its Police Department needs are to accommodate closing down a portion of Tennessee Street from Valley River Ave. and Hiwassee Street to McClelland St. Aurella Stone said this grant request should have been brought to the board in February and considered for award at the March meeting. She made a motion that the request be tabled and put on the April agenda. Her motion died for a second. Because of time constraints and that this event isn't the first time the board has heard the association's request, Phyllis Blackmon made a motion to approve the \$2900.00 for the festival and waive the review stipulation, but this action is not to set a precedent for future requests. Joan Posey-Neumann seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously.

Road Trippin' – Cabrina Scionti opened discussion on an offer by WLOS (ABC out of Asheville) to participate in its summer Road Trippin' series which consists of seven segments at 2 minutes each and reaching an audience of 40,000 plus. To learn more about this program the board was in agreement to discuss the possibility to showcase the county's attractions and businesses in this partnership. Cabrina will bring more definitive information and perhaps a spokesperson from WLOS. The proposal requires a \$5,000 investment.

Public Forum – Jan Olsen and Gayle Horton presented the Andrews Chamber Budget and highlighted tourism promotion. Some of the Andrews events include Spring Fling, 4th of July, Oktoberfest, Christmas on Main, and New Year's Eve. Both offered how to get events published for free in publications such as Our State.

Sherry Raines offered an in-depth report on how the Cherokee County Chamber of Commerce is bringing in tourist trade such as Forks & Corks. She said even though the annual golf tournament is held in Clay County, it brings people into Murphy to stay since Hayesville has no accommodations. She also displayed several other publications advertised in and said the chamber has full charge of what goes in the kiosk at the Valley River Resort and Casino.

Both chambers are up for renewal of the \$2,000 per month grants provided by the TDA to augment tourism promotion.

Executive Session – The board went into executive session to discuss the TDA payroll provider, WorkForce Unlimited. Questions were answered and the board will continue with this contract.

Following motions to come out of executive session and back into public session, and there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sandra H. Kimball, Clerk to the Board

M. Kimball

Clerk to the Board

Sandra B. Daley

Approved

April 13, 2020

Dated