

Minutes

TOURISM BOARD

Regular meeting

5:30 p.m. November 6, 2024

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



Present: Chair and Commissioner Matt Hughes, Rainbow Cabbage, Barney Caton, Barry Hupp, Megan Kimball, Victoria Pace, Eryk Pruitt and Scott Czechlewski

Absent: Smita Patel

Staff: Planning and Economic Development Manager Shannan Campbell

1. Call to order

Chair and Commissioner Matt Hughes called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. Planning and Economic Development Manager Shannan Campbell confirmed the presence of a quorum.

2. Agenda changes and approval

Motion: Board member Barry Hupp moved to approve the agenda as presented. Board member Rainbow Cabbage seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

3. Minutes review and approval

Minutes from regular meeting on September 12, 2023

Motion: Board member Barney Caton moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Board member Scott Czechlewski seconded.

Vote: 5-0.

Hupp pointed out one of the staff recommendations wasn't complete. Campbell made the correction.

Board members Megan Kimball and Victoria Pace arrived at 5:35.

4. Action items

A. Tourism Board Partnership in Downtown Parking Study (\$2,500)

Campbell summarized problems with parking downtown. Since the problem was identified by the town in 2019, the town has continued to grow, with more visitors and new businesses opening. She noted that when the Colonial Inn reopened, it didn't have sufficient parking for its employees and had to contract with businesses on the periphery of town to secure employee parking. A parking study was budgeted for FY 2019-2020. Then the pandemic hit, and the problem subsided. Businesses and tourism have now rebounded, and customers and businesses are complaining about a parking shortage, about where people are parking, and about how long they're staying. The parking study was originally funded in FY21 for \$50,000; the cost is now expected to be \$75,000. The local Metropolitan Planning Organization is being

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asked to contribute \$60,000, the town Board of Commissioners \$10,000, and the Tourism Board and the Tourism Development Authority \$2500 each for the new study. Campbell explained how the consultant would conduct its analysis. She said Orange County has done some preliminary work and will have to expand parking for its courthouse.

Czechlewski asked why the cost of the study had increased 50% in two years. Campbell said due to inflation the cost was now standard for the industry. Hupp asked how Carrboro had funded its study. Hughes said that study was probably funded largely by the Met Planning Organization. Cabbage asked who would be paying for the extra parking. Campbell said it would depend on where parking was needed. She said the Tourism Board might partner with the town and county. Czechlewski added there were numerous ways it could be funded.

Board member Meghan Kimball challenged the premise that more parking was the solution and said the town should promote sustainability by encouraging visitors to use other forms of transportation besides cars, like buses, park-and-ride lots, and shuttles. Campbell suggested the analysis could be called a multi-modal study rather than a parking study. There was a brief discussion of the planned train station and transport options for train riders.

Hupp said there were drivers who don't know that the Eno River Parking Deck offers free parking and suggested the town could provide better signage. Asked by Hughes if the board could weigh in on the Request for Proposals for the study, Campbell said yes, she could bring the RFP back to the board for review and comment. Kimball pointed out that Chapel Hill and Carrboro had decided years ago not to increase parking on campus and to promote bike lanes, free bus service, and park-and-ride lots instead. Hupp asked if the study would consider paid parking. Campbell said that's likely, but noted some critics of paid parking think it discourages visitors. Cabbage asked if the town was even willing to build more parking. Campbell said it would depend on where parking was needed; the study would likely to offer a range of solutions, from bike shares to a new parking deck. She said a deck would be expensive and require the collaboration of several partners to fund it. Kimball asked if the study could take into account the town's sustainability goals. Campbell said it could.

Cabbage asked if the Eno River Parking Deck was ever full. Hupp said only a few days a year. Kimball said the town shouldn't base parking plans on the rare shortages, but rather offer shuttles or park-and-rides on those days. Pace wondered if it was just a perception that there's a parking shortage, adding she'd never had trouble finding parking in town. Czechlewski pointed out the Chamber of Commerce lot, though small, is never full. Cabbage asked if signs could point drivers to underused spaces; Campbell cautioned that the town had to be careful about encouraging parking on private lots. She noted the study might recommend the town build a website like Chapel Hill's "Park on the Hill" that connects drivers to parking. Asked by Kimball if the consultants would be looking at electric vehicle charging stations, Campbell said at such stations were outside the scope of the study and that Orange County had done one study of them recently. She added that most of the currently available charging stations require several hours to charge a vehicle. Hupp suggested quick charging stations would make more sense downtown.

Motion: Board member Victoria Pace moved to allot \$2,500 to help fund the study. Caton seconded.

Hupp questioned limiting the study to the downtown district, which includes only a percentage of businesses that pay the food and beverage tax. Board members agreed that the study should at least include West Hillsborough and maybe an even wider area. Hupp noted that the large gravel parking lot on Nash St. is leased from the railroad, which could cancel its contract with nearby businesses at any time.

Asked about the amount the board was being asked to contribute, Hughes and Campbell said they had negotiated with the town commissioners to reduce the amount of the requested contribution. Cabbage worried that by funding the request the board would be cutting into the fund balance. Hughes and Pace said they thought new revenue numbers would show a healthy balance.

Vote: 5-2. Nays: Cabbage and Hupp.

5. Discussion Items

A. Tourism Board Funding Discussion (continued)

Campbell summarized changes she'd made to the quarterly reports for contract partners and to the rubric for scoring grant applications. There were numerous suggestions for improving the rubric. Czechlewski suggested rewording the criteria under "tourism impact," for example by stipulating that a high-ranking proposal provide return on investments that are "great" or "substantial" rather than "significant." There was discussion of whether the board should expect applicants to have partnerships in place for their proposals. Cabbage questioned whether a proposal needed to be "original" and "creative." Czechlewski, Pace, and Caton felt there was some value in including "originality." Cabbage thought the main criterion should be, "Is it a good fit for Hillsborough?" Czechlewski agreed that would be a good addition to the rubric. Kimball asked if the board received a proposal that it didn't like but it scored well, could there be legal challenges? Campbell said the rubric was a guide and that some members follow it more loosely than others. Hupp said he found it frustrating that he'd score one application, then on reading the next application, felt he had to go back and rescore the first. Czechlewski said he had the same experience, but thought that was to be expected when scoring. Asked by Kimball about legal challenges from applicants who were denied, Campbell said it would be difficult for an applicant to sue the board based on scores that are subjective. She noted the guide is meant to help applicants understand what the board is looking for. Cabbage pointed out that the Snow Approach Foundation proposal got the highest marks in the last grant cycle, but when the board considered that its tourism impact would be minimal, it decided not to fund the proposal. Asked whether applicants are sent the rubric, Campbell explained that it's posted on the application. Cabbage thought having to rescore applications after seeing other applications meant the rubric was flawed.

Czechlewski pointed out that it's common for scorers to go back and rescore a proposal or essay after they've seen more samples. Pace asked if the board could add a disclaimer, that the rubric is only a suggested guideline for applicants. Hughes thought the rubric was used for discussion among the board, not as quantifiable scores. He asked if there were too many possible numerical scores and suggested the range could be shortened from 1 to 8 to 1 to 4. Caton said he didn't think the board used the rubric for discussion: once board members submit their scores to Campbell, they're done with the scores and move on to discussion. Campbell noted that members seemed receptive to the criterion, "Is it good for Hillsborough?" Kimball suggested that criterion be worked into the category "tourism impact." She then proposed doing away with the weighing; Pace said she found the weight useful. Pruitt said he liked the idea of simplifying scores from 1 to 5.

There was discussion of the opera proposal that was turned down in the last grant cycle, and whether the board should provide feedback to the applicant. Czechlewski asked why none of the grant applicants attended the meeting in which the board discussed applications. Campbell explained that she doesn't invite applicants to attend, which might lead them to plead their case and entail a back-and-forth discussion between applicants and the board. Czechlewski said it might be an opportunity to ask applicants questions, as the board does with contract partners. Campbell explained that funding requests from contract partners were different: back-and-forth discussion was expected for those requests. She added that all aspects of a grant proposal should be clear in submitted applications, so the board doesn't

need to ask questions. Hughes asked Campbell if she had enough information and feedback to guide her in revising the rubric. Cabbage said the rubric should be scrapped all together.

Motion: Cabbage moved to discontinue using the scoring guide. Kimball seconded.

A brief discussion followed the motion. Kimball said she thought the board didn't need to score applications or give weight to categories in the rubric, but rather use a looser rubric as a tool to guide its thinking and help applicants know what it's looking for. Hupp thought all that was needed of the old rubric was the column describing an "excellent" application, which explains what the board is looking for. Caton said he liked the idea of a pared down form, with the addition of the criterion "a good fit for Hillsborough." Czechlewski said he didn't know of any organizations that made funding decisions without a rubric and that there should be some kind of guide. Pace expressed exasperation at the amount the time the board had spent on the topic and said members essentially agreed on what criteria should guide their decision making.

Motion: Pace motioned to end the discussion. Czechlewski seconded.
Vote 7-0.

Vote on Cabbage's motion: 1-6: Nays: Caton, Czechlewski, Hupp, Kimball, Pace, and Pruitt.

Hughes said Cabbage and Czechlewski had agreed to continue to work on the rubric and would report back to the board in its December meeting.

6. Monthly reports and comments

A. Tourism Staff Report, Visitors Center Updates, & OC Visitors Bureau Updates

Campbell had several items to report:

- She will tell contract partners who are asking for funding increases to submit separate lines for separate items, such as advertising, personnel, and grounds maintenance, and to prioritize their requests for increases.
- Because some contract partners have new personnel, she plans to meet with them to clarify expectations. She will also advise them to submit more concise quarterly reports.
- The Uproar Festival concluded and was very successful, attracting lots of media attention and many visitors. Her report is forthcoming.
- The Tourism Development Authority has funded a mural on a wall of the Wooden Nickel.
- Updated food and beverage tax numbers for September will be available soon.
- The town has changed the procedure for sharing packets for board meetings: instead of being sent to members as email attachments, they will be posted online using a link to a new software template.

B. Board comments and updates

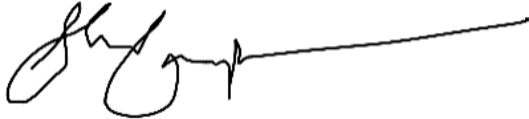
There were none.

7. Adjournment

Motion: Board member Eryk Pruitt moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:17 p.m. Hupp seconded.

Vote: 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannan Campbell', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Shannan Campbell
Planning and Economic Development Manager
Staff support to the Hillsborough Tourism Board

Approved: Month X, 202X

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