

Minutes

TOURISM BOARD

Regular meeting

5:30 p.m. April 10, 2024

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



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

Staff: Planning and Economic Development Manager
Shannan Campbell

1. Call to order

Chair Victoria Pace called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

2. Agenda changes and approval

Pace proposed two changes to the agenda: allow the Orange County History museum to make their presentation first and add the reappointment of Megan Kimball to the board as an action item.

Motion: Member Barry Hupp moved to approve the minutes as amended. Member Barney Caton seconded.

Vote: 8-0.

3. Presentations

A. Orange County Historical Museum Contract Renewal (Visitor Services & Operations)

- Board Chair Tonya Brami and site manager Catie Atkinson said their requests for funding contained nothing new. Brami reported that the number of onsite visitors through March was up 25% from last year and the total number of people served was 3447, up over 37% over the same period last year. She briefly described programming, including a current exhibit called "Working for a Living" on the history of trades in the county. She said the museum was asking for a cost of living raise for staff and a small increase for marketing, for a total increase of 4.8% over last year's request. Campbell summarized that the museum was asking for \$57,600 in FY25, a \$1,500 increase over the FY24 contract amount of \$56,100.

Member Rainbow Cabbage arrived at 5:36pm.

Member Meghan Darab asked if the museum tours were mainly school field trips. Atkinson said that many were, but some adult tour groups had participated in tours. Darab asked if students in the trade programs at local high schools had visited to see the exhibit on trades. Atkinson said not yet, but that woodworking students at Cedar Ridge High School are featured in the exhibit. Brami said it would be a good idea to reach out to the trade students.

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B. Alliance Contract Renewal for FY25 (Hillsborough Visitors Center Operations)

Amanda Boyd explained that the alliance has two primary missions, running the visitors center and doing heritage tourism and preservation work. She said most of the alliance's requests were to provide a cost-of-living adjustment for three employees and to cover increased operation costs. Campbell summarized that the Alliance was asking for \$250,676 in FY25, a \$21,507 increase over the FY24 contract amount of \$229,169.

Member Rainbow Cabbage asked about training of volunteers, noting she had received an unsatisfactory answer recently when she asked a volunteer at the visitors' center desk where she could find pizza in town.

Boyd said volunteers were required to shadow staff member a certain number of hours, depending on their duties. She added the alliance provides the front desk with a binder and some one-sheets, which allows the center to keep restaurant hours up to date.

Darab asked about the two grants the alliance is applying for and what would be the consequences if the alliance didn't receive them. Boyd explained the grants would help with additional programming but were not intended for operations of the visitors center.

Pace asked about the additional \$7,000 requested for marketing. Boyd explained that the alliance can currently get only limited in exposure with the marketing budget of \$22,000, though it has recently secured bigger feature articles in Southern Living, WRAL, and Raleigh magazine. Staff have identified Charlotte, Raleigh, and Durham as the chief marketing targets that are growing. She said the additional funds for marketing would give the visitors center the ability to reach an expanded audience through multiple digital and print avenues, providing a more well-rounded approach. Campbell said they had recently started doing some marketing with social media influencers and seen good responses. Member Scott Czechlewski asked if the alliance received much free advertising through feature articles on alliance events like the Outlandish programs. Boyd said yes, but that doing so requires pitching events with a story; print outlets won't run a general Hillsborough tourism ad for free.

C. Burwell School Contract Renewal for FY25 (Visitors Services & Operations)

- Site coordinator Emma Vadney said the tourism board's support has allowed the school to be fully staffed the past year. She said the number of visitors to the school had already surpassed the number seen throughout the last fiscal year. Board chair Matt Hughes noted this year's request was lower than last year and explained that the school has seen an increase in donations and has been more aggressive in applying for grants. He said the school is trying to bring in more diverse and younger visitors and has developed a strategic plan with a robust fundraising plan to diversity its revenue stream. It is also exploring new partnerships. He said the school had pivoted to a new way of looking at its mission. Pace said she found the report exciting, and commended school staff and the board for their hard work. She asked about rumors that the school might be shifting to a focus on black history. Hughes said he thought the school was well positioned to do that, adding that the school was exploring how it might adopt a namesake title for Elizabeth Keckley, but not give the impression that it would be an archival center. He added that recently a small fraction of the funds embezzled by a former employee had been returned to the school by the courts, which he found heartening. Campbell summarized that the Burwell School was asking for \$70,000 in FY25, a \$15,000 decrease over the FY24 contract amount of \$85,000.

D. Chamber of Commerce Contract (Hillsborough Holiday Parade and Tree Lighting)

Czechlewski passed out copies of a photo taken by a drone of the Elf Run at the last Holiday Parade. He said the events bring probably thousands of visitors to Hillsborough and involve 1800 parade participants, over 600 runners, and 36 volunteers. He said the chamber had decided to hold the parade and the tree lighting on two separate days this year. The parade will take place on Sunday Dec. 8th. He said Campbell suggested the

chamber tie the tree lighting to Small Business Saturday, which will be held on Thanksgiving weekend. He said he thought this would be a really good idea to pair Small Business Saturday with the tree lighting event.

Cabbage asked if the chamber needed additional funds for the tree lighting because it'll be held on a separate day. Czechlewski said there might be some small additional expenses that he did not consider. He said Sunrock currently provides lighting free of charge for the parade and he hoped that arrangement would continue. Kimball asked if lights would be needed if the parade would be held earlier. Pace pointed out that at the board's last meeting they had decided starting the race and parade earlier would push into Sunday church services and the road closure of Churton would be problematic. There was a brief discussion of additional funds that would be needed for an expanded tree lighting and concert for marketing, portalets, etc. Czechlewski thanked the Visitors Center for doing a lot of the marketing for the parade. Darab asked about slower racers delaying the start of the parade. Campbell said the delay was only around 15 minutes, but that she would talk to Martin Wileman from the Hillsborough Running Club about the logistics.

Cabbage suggested Czechlewski re-examine the budget for the tree lighting and parade and see if they needed to be separate for discussion at the next meeting. Campbell summarized that currently the Chamber was asking for \$10,000 in FY25.

E. Hillsborough Arts Council Contract Renewal (Visitors Services & Events)

- Heather Tatreau, the new executive director of the council, reviewed the tourism events provided by the council: Last Fridays and Art Walk, the Solstice Lantern walk, the handmade parade held every other year, and some operational funds for the gallery and gift shop, which supports 60 artists. She explained that one of the requested increases for this year's contract was \$10,000 for the Solstice Lantern Walk. She noted last year had seen a record turnout of 4,500 attendees vs. 3000 people the previous year, and the council wants to maintain that growth. She said council staff are exploring how to accommodate even larger crowds next year, revisiting the route of the walk, and looking for ways to include West Hillsborough, and provide more exits ramps for families and those with mobility challenges. Tatreau said the second requested increase was for an additional \$5,000 for the Last Friday Art Walks, explaining that the council will need more port-a-potties, more staff to supervise volunteers, and a larger budget for performance services. Currently, it can provide only one hour of live music and wants to extend the performance time, diversify genres, and explore providing music in West Hillsborough. She said the increase would also allow the council to bring in photographers, whose work could be shared with magazines and media outlets. Campbell summarized that the Hillsborough Arts Council was asking for \$43,500 in FY25, a \$15,000 increase over the FY24 contract amount of \$28,500.

Kimball asked about parking challenges for events. Tatreau said the council would like to talk with the town about satellite parking and shuttle services and would need to budget money for that. Campbell explained options that might be explored with a local car dealership. Hupp asked for clarification about the math with the requested increase. Tatreau confirmed that the total request was for \$43,500, an increase of \$15,000.

Cabbage asked where the council might stage additional music. Tatreau said she'd just started talking with Whit's Custard. She added that many people were confused about events sponsored by the Arts Council and those by the Eno Mill Arts, for example, Last Fridays and First Fridays. Pace noted the requested increase was substantial, but said it was addressing the board's concerns about extending events to West Hillsborough.

Pruitt had to leave the meeting early.

4. Discussion/Action items

- A. Draft FY25 Tourism Board Budget

Campbell shared a draft budget on the projector. She said she would later enter numbers from partners' contract requests into the draft budget. She said insurance had gone up slightly, as well as audit costs. Cabbage asked if fulfilling all the requests would put the board in the red. Pace said based on the numbers shared by Campbell, the board should still be \$300,000 in the black. Campbell said that only included contract partners and not board operations, though. She said that would look at it at the next meeting, but she didn't think it would be possible to fund all requests with projected revenues- there would have to be use of fund balance.

5. Action items

- A. Reappointment of Meghan Kimball for another term.
Campbell asked Kimball if she was willing to server another term. She said yes.

Motion: Cabbage moved to reappoint Kimball to the board. Member Smita Patel seconded.

Vote: 8-0

6. Monthly reports and comments

- A. Tourism Staff Report, Visitors Center Updates, & OC Visitors Bureau Updates
Campbell said tentative food and beverage tax revenue numbers were looking good. She commended Boyd for developing a new 'West Hillsborough' rack card, which she shared on the projector screen, noting new text that showcased businesses in West Hillsborough. Hupp asked if the card could include the distance from downtown to West Hillsborough. Campbell said yes, and that the additional information would be helpful.

Darab asked about the kayak rental program in last years' budget. Campbell explained that because the kayak rentals were planned for Kings Highway Park she had to ask the Town Board for permission to place them there. She said that some town commissioners had concerns about safety, insurance, emergency floatation devices, and signage, so she has some background work to do, likely in conjunction with town safety staff, public works, and public space. She said the town may need to buy additional liability insurance.

Kimball shared with the board plans for the Outlandish event, which will be a one-day event held on September 28th and would include a Scottish heritage celebration at Ayr Mount and the Outlander extravaganza at the Dickson House. She said Boyd was working hard at establishing partnerships. Boyd said the alliance was submitting a special grant request for the event. She noted a recent teaser posted on social media had elicited 20 inquiries.

Vadney reminded the board of the upcoming Burwell School Derby Gala.

- B. Board comments and updates
There were none.

7. Adjournment

Motion: Hupp moved to adjourn at 7:01 p.m. Patel seconded.

Vote: 8-0

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