

**Town of Swansboro**  
**Swansboro Tourism Development Authority**  
**May 08, 2025, Special Meeting Minutes**

In attendance: Chairman Randy Swanson, Jack Harnatkiewicz, Preston Patterson, and Michael Diehl and Steven Overby. Linda Thornley were absent.

**Call to Order**

Chair Randy Swanson called the meeting to order at 2:34 pm.

**Approval of Minutes**

On a motion by Mr. Overby, seconded by Mr. Diehl, the meeting minutes for February 6, 2025, Special Meeting and the April 10, 2025, Regular Meeting were unanimously approved.

**Business**

*FY 2024-2025 Year End Projections/Potential Budget Amendment*

Finance Director Sonia Johnson provided a review of year-end projections which would include a projected surplus of \$2,700.00. If any items that were to be reviewed by Ann Marie were to be funded a budget amended would be needed.

*Marketing/Advertising Service Contract Consideration with Front Row Communications*

Anne Marie Bass, Owner & Principal of Front Row Communications, presented the proposed marketing and advertising plan for the upcoming fiscal year. She outlined several key components of the plan. The Downtown Merchant's Guide was highlighted as being in its sixth printing, now renamed "Merchant's Tours Food and Drink Guide." A total of 250 copies were distributed to North Carolina Welcome Centers and are frequently depleted. The new edition featured a fresh design with peachy orange and blue colors and included updates such as festival schedules.

Ms. Bass explained that the website was continuously updated with new content, including listings and festival information, and mentioned the recent addition regarding the Hamlet's Beach State Park Ferry Service. For email list building, she reported that there were 1,557 highly engaged contacts, boasting open rates nearly double the industry standard. The getaway contest sign-ups were noted as a successful strategy for capturing email addresses.

The relationship with Our State Magazine was detailed, which includes print ads, sponsored e-blasts, and two new opportunities: Tar Heel Reels (a short-form social media video) and sponsored content articles. Similarly, Ms. Bass outlined the proposed advertising plan with Raleigh Magazine, which involves print ads and digital banner ads.

For social media advertising, Ms. Bass reported spending \$7,000 in the current year and proposed the same amount for the forthcoming year. Other advertising efforts include continuing the Chamber Guide ad and the video ad at OHA airport. She also explained the potential for additional advertising opportunities through the state tourism conference via Visit NC Co-op, with a possible expenditure of \$3,200.

Finally, Ms. Bass presented three advertising budget options for the board's consideration: Option 1 at \$75,844, which includes all new elements; Option 2 at \$70,049, which includes some new elements; and Option 3 at \$69,449, which includes one new element.

Board members asked questions about the readership of Our State Magazine, the possibility of distributing guides to out-of-state welcome centers, and the engagement rates on social media posts.

Sonia Johnson, Finance Director, clarified that the proposed budget included Option 1 from Ms. Bass's presentation, but did not include an additional \$3,200 for the Visit NC Co-op opportunities. Ms. Johnson shared that the unused contingency funds could be utilized to fund this opportunity in the current fiscal year.

#### *Board Projects/Discussion Items*

Randy Swanson, Chair, introduced a discussion about potential projects and initiatives. The following items were discussed:

- Airbnb Outreach: Creating informational materials to encourage Airbnb owners to register and pay appropriate taxes. Board members emphasized the importance of framing this as an educational effort rather than implying that owners were intentionally avoiding taxes.
- Live Cameras: Suggestion was made about investigating the possibility of installing live cameras to showcase traffic and water views of Swansboro. The board agreed to research the costs and technical requirements for such a project.
- Inviting State Representative: Mr. Overby shared that he mentioned inviting the local state representative to attend a future meeting to discuss tourism-related issues and potential opportunities.
- Portable Restrooms: Researching the purchase of portable restrooms to have in place while the visitors center was under construction was desired. Staff would research the cost/specifics and bring back details at the next meeting.

### *FY 2025/2026 Annual Budget*

Finance Director Johnson presented the proposed budget for FY 2025/2026. She provided the following key points:

- Projected Revenue: \$110,000 from occupancy tax, \$14,361 from assigned fund balance, and \$4,800 from downtown merchant donations.
- Advertising Budget: \$42,954 and included Front Row Communication's marketing plan Option 1 plan at \$75,844.
- Contingency: \$3,500
- Budget Adjustments: Proposed shifting \$2,595 to the contingency fund if the board went with Option 2 of Front Row Communication's marketing plan instead of Option 1.

The public hearing was opened at 3:43 pm then closed as no comments were received.

On a motion by Mr. Diehl, seconded by Mr. Harnatkiewicz, the budget for FY 2025/2026 with Front Row Communication's Option 2 plan included for \$70,049 and shifting contingency funds if needed was approved unanimously.

### **Board Comments**

Mr. Diehl shared that he recalled last year's discussion on tracking marketing effectiveness and emphasized the need for tools like QR codes and summary dashboards to better understand engagement and return on investment but did not see any such details shared. Ms. Bass committed to getting some details and would work to get a report to the authority.

### **Adjournment**

On a motion by Mr. Harnatkiewicz, seconded by Mr. Overby, the meeting adjourned at 4:01 pm.