

## Lexington and Rockbridge Area Tourism Board Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 15, 2020 at 8:30am, by conference call

Members Present: Dennis Ayers, Leslie Ayers, Kristina Ramsey, Jerry Price, Corey Berkstresser

Members Absent: Shana Layman, George Huger

Staff Present: Jean Clark, Patty Williams, Marie Plank

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Board Vice Chairperson Jerry Price called the meeting to order at 8:32am. Kristina Ramsey made motion to approve the minutes of the June 17, 2020 meeting, and Corey Berkstresser seconded the motion. All present voted aye, and the minutes were approved.

### Buena Vista Report

- Kristina Ramsey announced that the July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks display at Glen Maury Park drew a very large crowd, and was a very successful event.
- She announced a gospel music festival to be held at Glen Maury Park the weekend of July 18-19, and the Beach Music Festival to be held at Glen Maury Park Saturday, July 25, 2020.
- Ms. Ramsey told the board that City of Buena Vista officials continue work on distributing Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (**CARES**) Act funding received.

### Lexington Report

- Dennis Ayers announced that first-year students at Washington & Lee University will begin arriving on campus in small groups on August 13, 2020. Upper classes will also arrive in small groups beginning August 20, 2020, and W&L Law School students will arrive on August 17, 2020.
- He reminded the board that W&L will not be holding any athletic competitions this fall, and that the speaker series and any musical events will be live streamed.
- Mr. Ayers said that the name change for Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery is ongoing. Over 1,400 online suggestions for name change have been received to date. He said the removed cemetery signs are being held by the City for interested parties to be determined at a future date.
- Dennis told the board that the Enfield property lawsuit is temporarily stalled, and will hopefully resume by the end of the year.

### Rockbridge County Report

- Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors has not had a July meeting at this time, and Ms. Ayers had nothing to report regarding a meeting.
- Leslie told the board that COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Rockbridge County.
- She also said that allocation of the \$1,600,000 **CARES** funding is still being considered by County finance committee.

### Marketing Director Report

- Patty Williams told the board that all the businesses currently signed up to participate in the PACT program are in the City of Lexington. She described the outreach of the program and said that radio coverage will begin shortly. She will pay a personal visit to industry partners in Buena Vista and Natural Bridge on Thursday, July 16. She emphasized the advertising potential for participating businesses.
- Ms. Williams told the board that the Blue Ridge Country getaway promotion received more than 4,700 entries. The promotion ended on Monday, July 13, 2020.
- In the interest of time, Ms. Williams asked the board to review the June marketing report at their leisure.

### Executive Director Report

- Director Clark announced that all three visitor centers have re-opened with shortened hours at Natural Bridge State Park and Buena Vista Visitor Center, and in Lexington on weekends.
- She told the board that NBSP had more than 7,000 visitors over the July 4<sup>th</sup> week, even though the Park continues to limit the number of visitors inside the Visitor Center at a time.
- She told the board about the Kids Track Trail at NBSP, and spoke about the great work that tourism staffer, Anne Ritter has done on this program.
- Ms. Clark said that there had been more visitors to Lexington Visitor Center than expected, and reviewed some of the reasons of the visits to Lexington.
- Jean said that weddings continue to be held in the area with reduced wedding size, fewer guests, and other pandemic precautions and accommodations.
- Director Clark announced a \$10,000 grant awarded to tourism, and asked Marketing Director Williams to explain further.

- Patty Williams told the board about the Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) “WanderLOVE” Recovery Grants, which are designed to provide immediate recovery marketing funds to destination marketing organizations (DMO) across the Commonwealth that have been heavily impacted by the novel coronavirus pandemic. The tourism project, “WanderLove: Small Towns, Big Backyard Road Trip” will provide travel inspiration for epic road trip activities including outdoor recreation, hidden gems, small towns, and VTC’s LOVEworks program. Grant components will include itineraries, blogs, a video and video promotion via social media.
- Director Clark urged board members to stop by the Virginia Welcome Center in Covington, Virginia and see the large, lighted display promoting the Rockbridge area.
- Ms. Clark described her plan for a more expansive information kiosk outside the Lexington Visitor Center, and said she would move forward on the creation of this kiosk with board approval.
- Director Clark told the board that the river markers for the Upper James River will soon be ready to install.
- She said that a celebration is planned soon for the designation of the Upper Maury River as a Virginia Scenic River.
- Ms. Clark asked board member Corey Berkstresser how his business at Lee Hi Truck Stop was doing, and he assured her that traffic is picking up at the truck stop, and that the iHop is now open for both indoor dining and curbside pickup.
- There was no new business brought before the board. Dennis Ayers made the motion to adjourn the meeting, Kristina Ramsey seconded the motion, and Jerry Price adjourned the meeting at 9:10 am.

Time of next meeting: TBD

Minutes recorded by Marie Plank