

Brunswick County Tourism Development Authority

September 25, 2018

Meeting Minutes

DRAFT

In Attendance: Maryann Azzato, Billy Bernier, Bonnie Cox, Glenda Browning, Dana Fisher, Jerry Helms, Whitney Sauls, and Eddie Walters. **Absent:** Melaney Robbins and Buddy Rudd. **Also in Attendance:** Mitzi York, Executive Director and Michelle Hubacher, Brittany Dagenhart, Seth Regan and Matt Lochel from Walker Marketing.

I. Call to Order:

Bonnie Cox, Chair, called to order the TDA's regular monthly meeting at the Brunswick County TDA office at 712 Village Rd SW in Shallotte at 3:00 pm.

II. Public Comment:

No one requested to speak during the public comment period.

III. Introduction of Walker Marketing Staff/2019 Publications Creative/Brand Survey/Post Florence Messaging

Michelle Hubacher, Vice President and Managing Director of Walker Marketing, introduced herself and other staff members – Brittany Dagenhart; Seth Regan; and Matt Lochel, Director of Account Services. Seth Regan will be handling the account while Brittany is on maternity leave. Gary Walker is now officially retired. She reiterated the agency's commitment to always do the right thing and bring their best work.

Brittany Dagenhart presented the creative for the covers of the 2019 golf guide and 2019 digital wedding guide recommended by the Marketing Committee. Earlier this year, the listings in the wedding guide were updated for the online version. A templated format has been used for the last three years for the vacation guide. This year a new concept for the interior design is recommended. The new concept is less templated. Brittany Dagenhart also presented the cover design for the 2019 vacation guide. Sample mock-ups of introductory and town spreads were shown.

Mitzi York reminded the Board that we sent a brand survey to people on our mailing list to ask them questions about what they like about the area, how often they visited, and similar questions. Brittany Dagenhart added that the survey was designed to see what people look for in a destination and what do they think we offer. Seth Regan reviewed the results of the survey. He reviewed some of the comments from the survey. Brittany Dagenhart advised that we may use some of the quotes in marketing. In the survey, respondents were asked to rank three taglines. The tagline that ranked highest was "The Beaches That Welcome You Back". Walker Marketing recommends officially departing from More Beach for your Blanket as an official tagline in marketing and rather than implementing a

new tagline, utilize The Beaches That Welcome You Back as a long-term brand platform for marketing and creative.

Mitzi York advised the Board that we held back a leisure eblast and a golf eblast that were scheduled to go out before Hurricane Florence. She added that in the past, we were able to say after hurricanes and we're in good shape and everything is open. Circumstances are different this time with some beaches seeing little impact and other areas of the county hit hard. We don't have the same message across the county presently. She has spoken with VisitNC and they are also dealing with a mix message. VisitNC's focus has been on the "CAREolinas" concept. They will be do some co-op marketing at some point. She asked for some input from the Board on immediate messaging. Billy Bernier thought all golf courses would be open within a week. Mitzi York advised that some accommodations in Southport and Bald Head Island are not open. Jerry Helms advised that the US Open King Mackerel Fishing Tournament committee decided to go ahead with the tournament. They felt people were ready to get back on with life. Eddie Walters added that his office was getting calls about the water quality. Whitney Sauls advised that a water quality advisory was issued today. After a brief discussion about message timing and content and audience, it was decided to wait a couple of weeks before sending out the eblasts to be able to give out a positive message.

IV. Marketing Committee Report

Mitzi York reviewed the Marketing Report for August. In August, we received 15,915 leads/request for guides including downloads and views. There were 39,665 unique visitors to our website and 42,694 views of the partner pages and from there 9,951 visits to our partners' websites. Media included Guest Quest, NC Travel Guide, SEM, Interfuse/Connect Golf and Leisure, Links golf eblast, MMSI and VisitNC. YTD this fiscal year, we've received 18,668 leads compared to 23,823 for the same time period last year. The top states for August were North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Tennessee, Virginia and South Carolina. The majority of leads in August came from MMSI and Interfuse.

Mitzi York reviewed the Google analytics reports for August. We had 39,665 new users in August with 50,041 sessions. That is a decrease of about 16% in new users from August of last year. We have been seeing a drop in traffic for a few months and know that there are several factors involved including the new VisitNC website. We know that there are more competing pages out there. Mitzi York has been working with Walker Marketing on what can be done to address the decrease in traffic. We have added some additional information to our About page and adding that we are the official destination marketing organization for the county to increase our page authority. Walker Marketing is working on making the website a secure site. Brittany Dagenhart added that things have been done over the past year to increase SEO but Google's algorithms are ever changing. Google is placing more emphasis on page authority. We are adding to the footer

of every page that the TDA is the official destination marketing organization of the county. In the past the About page has been about the destination and not about the organization. Pages with an SSL certificate get a better rank and we are in the process of adding that certificate. Brittany Dagenhart added recommendations for the new website would include adding more content to the site per each town or beach to address the competitive websites. Google is now also providing their own “travel guide” in search. Mitzi York reported that the top sources of traffic to the site were Google organic, Facebook, the cost per click program, direct traffic, Bing organic, and VisitNC. Top keywords were North Carolina Beaches and the dynamic search ads. Top pages viewed were the home page, islands and towns page, Oak Island page, accommodations page, and events page. Top landing pages in August were the home page, islands and towns page, and Oak Island page. The top states were North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina. The top metro areas were Charlotte, Wilmington, Raleigh-Durham and Atlanta. Glenda Browning asked if the bounce rate was higher in August than usual. Mitzi York advised that it was a little higher. Brittany Dagenhart added that if people are landing deeper into the site they may be getting the information they need on the landing page. Brittany Dagenhart advised that we would keep an eye on the bounce rate.

V. Executive Director’s Report:

Mitzi York advised that because of the hurricane she was not able to have minutes and financial statements for the meeting. She reviewed the occupancy tax report. The check we received for July was considerably larger than last year but it included almost \$32,000 for June. She expected that we would receive additional July funds. Adjusting the prior year for the additional June funds would bring our FY 17-18 year up 10% over the previous year.

Mitzi York advised the Board that the travel writers FAM scheduled for the end of the month was cancelled. We will attempt to see if we can get any refunds for air fare. We will attempt to reschedule the FAM for late April or early May 2019. In August, Holden Beach was included in an Asheville Today online article “Beach don’t Kill my Vibe: North Carolina Basics”. There were a number of events that appeared in Carolina Country’s website and Atlanta Journal Constitution’s website. Trips to Discover included Southport in the online article “Southport is one of North Carolina’s Most Charming Towns”. Trips with Pets named Caswell Beach and Oak Island as the top pet friendly beaches in North Carolina. That information was also picked up by WTVD-TV online in Raleigh and the Arizona Star online. The Kindred Spirit Mailbox was included in an article on the website Fuffling. Spark Magazine ran an article on Oak Island “A Seaside Retreat: Summer’s the Perfect Time to Soak it all in at Sunny Oak Island”. Greenville Today included Holden Beach in an online article “8 Beaches to Get Away for Labor Day”. The total circulation was 114,798, 273 with an earned media value of \$212,229 and earned editorial value of \$636,000. Mitzi

York advised that we have a golf FAM scheduled for late October/early November focusing on female golf writers.

VII. Old Business:

No old business.

VII. New Business:

No new business.

IX. Adjourn:

Maryann Azzato motioned to adjourn, seconded by Jerry Helms. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.

NEXT MEETING: October 23, 2018 at 3:00 pm at the TDA's offices in the Red Apple Building, 712 Village Rd SW Unit 105 in Shallotte.