

**Steering Committee Minutes
Blue Ridge Heartland
Regional Tourism Initiative
11 AM, Friday March 9, 2007
Crossroads Institute, Galax, VA**

Dr. Jim Harrell called the meeting to order with an invocation and a word of welcome.

Steering Committee Members Present:	Jim Harrell, Surry County Glenna Myers, Carroll County Donnie Turner, Carroll County Don Adams, Alleghany County Ken Richardson, Alleghany County Chuck Riedhammer, City of Galax Stanley Smith, Stokes County Darlene Bullins, Stokes County Mike Maynard, Grayson County Jessica Icenhour, Tourism Advisory Committee Macon C. Sammons, Surry County
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Others Present:	Barbara DeBord, Smyth County Kim Bates, Yadkin County Ray Kohl, Wythe County Sheldon Stanley, Surry County MIS Mandy Nester, Professional Networks Judy Brannock, Twin County Chamber Dennis Thompson, Consultant
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Minutes

The minutes of the January 19, 2007 were declared approved as submitted by the Chair, following inquiry and no changes offered by members.

Website Development

Donnie Turner reported on the Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting of February 23, which focused on the website. Mandy Nester of Professional Network did a demonstration of the homepage. The Steering Committee offered many suggestions, including development of a song about the region to be played on the homepage and a story to be told. Suggestions were also offered on the map. Ray Kohl suggested the use of an Eastern Seaboard map. David Long is working on short narratives for the six marketing themes.

Nester noted importance of tracking both hits and unique visitors. Mandy requested key words from Steering Committee members for the search engine to locate us. Jim Harrell noted after further TAC review, perhaps the homepage should be reviewed as a work in progress by local governing bodies.

Assets and Attractions Inventory

Dennis noted that he had prepared a format for the inventory and had entered two counties' data and Teresa Hester had completed the process for the rest of the counties. There are a number of

gaps. On motion by Chuck, seconded by Don, and unanimous vote, the inventory was released to the TAC for review and completion, with Dennis to follow up as needed.

Branding and Image Workshop

Jim and Donnie gave a brief summary on the January 19 Branding and Image Workshop, led by Stacy Tomas of NC State, with approximately 55 participants from across the RTI region. The workshop was deemed a success by virtually all participants, identifying numerous leads for names, tags lines and marketing brands (report workshop available on request).

Marketing Plan Development

Jim opened a discussion on the marketing plan. He has talked with 3 marketing firms. He offered an estimated cost of \$30,000 - \$50,000 or more, depending on the amount of work done by local officials and the universities. Macon reported the 3 universities continue to report interest, but no specific proposals for marketing plan work. After lengthy discussion, on motion by Donnie, seconded by Chuck, and unanimous vote, the matter was referred to the Resource Development Committee (RDC) with the request that the RDC select and proposes grant writing resources (one from each state) to locate the necessary funds.

Barbara and Chuck suggested that the Steering Committee invite Steve Gallean and his NC counterpart to meet with the Steering Committee to talk about strategies for completing the marketing plan. Barbara noted we must market both to our sponsors and to our tourists.

Name

On the recommendation of the TAC, Donnie moved that the Steering Committee establish "Blue Ridge Heartland" as the working name for the region, seconded by Macon and unanimously approved.

Prospectus and Business Plan

Dennis indicated the Prospectus and Business Plan is now complete and ready for printing, if the Steering Committee wishes to proceed with that. It was the consensus of the Steering Committee that the County contact information be added and that it be forwarded to the Surry MIS office for input on ways to give it a professional look prior to or in lieu of printing.

Market Survey Data

Dennis distributed a list of 15 sources of market data from within our region and gave the stack of reports to Surry County for safekeeping.

Membership

After discussion, it was agreed on motion by Donnie, second by Don and unanimous vote to extend no more invitations beyond the 12 counties now involved and to leave the door open for Ashe, Floyd, Smyth and Wythe counties.

FY 08

Jim noted that at the February 27 meeting of the Resource Development Committee (RDC), it is recommended that the FY 08 contribution remain at \$7,500 per County. It was noted that this will be needed for match money to complete the marketing plan and other initiatives. On motion, Jim, second by Chuck, it was approved that \$7,500 be established as the amount for voting membership in FY 08.

Next Meeting

Volunteers were requested to host the next meeting. Jim proposed that the meeting be set for Friday, April 20, with the time and location to be confirmed later. He noted that this meeting might be a combination of a Steering Committee meeting with a later demonstration of the website to members (and governing body representatives) as a “work in progress”.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:25 PM.

Respectively submitted,

Macon C. Sammons, Jr.
Assistant Secretary

MCS/th