

**Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Northwest North Carolina/Southwest Virginia
Regional Tourism Initiative
Hampton Inn, Exit 93, Dobson, NC
10:00 a.m., Friday, November 9, 2007**

In Attendance:

Donnie Turner, Carroll County
Felicia Nash, Grayson County
Tom Holder, NC Tourism Division
Chuck Riedhammer, City of Galax
Jessica Icenhour, Mount Airy Chamber of Commerce
Laurette Leagon, Yadkin Valley Chamber of Commerce
Bob Bamberg, Alleghany Chamber of Commerce
Linda Cheek, Wilkes Chamber of Commerce
Helen Ruth Almond, NC Commerce
Barbara DeBord, Smyth County Tourism Association
Susan Medlin, Vintage Marketing
Dennis Thompson, Consultant
David Long, Consultant
Chris Knopf, Surry County

Donnie Turner called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone at 10:05 a.m.

Donnie explained that the purpose of the meeting was to consider a number of initiatives and provide guidance to the Regional Tourism Initiative (RTI) Steering Committee about the following subjects: 1) approved name and logo, 2) website incorporation of name and logo, 3) funding plan for marketing, 4) how to roll out the new name and marketing strategy, and 5) ideas for organizing a host group.

Donnie introduced Susan Medlin of Vintage Marketing who has been coordinating this effort on behalf of the Steering Committee.

Susan reviewed with the group the focus group and survey process involved in developing an identity for the region. The theme "Cascade Highlands" was presented to the group. The process involved in choosing the theme and how it relates to each member county was presented and much discussion followed. Susan presented examples of what a potential marketing campaign might entail with a video clip and mock-up magazine ads and billboards. Local photos and landmarks would be used in the marketing campaign.

The group briefly discussed the idea of partnering with North Carolina Tourism and Virginia Tourism on advertising based with the possibility of some cost breaks. Start-up funding with the NC Rural Center, Governor's Office's, USEDA, etc. were also discussed.

Susan requested that the group assist in identifying someone with a marketing background who would be employed by the RTI to promote and sell the region full-time. Helen Ruth Almond stated that a full-time employee is needed to advocate, write grants, and represent the entire area.

Donnie discussed that the member jurisdictions of the RTI desire for this effort to evolve into a privately funded enterprise. Bob Bamberg cautioned that entities receiving free publicity in the infancy of this effort (while it is still being administered by the RTI) may balk at having to pay for publicity at a later date.

The group discussed issues such as the need for an employee and whether nonprofit status would be appropriate for the RTI and continued to discuss possible funding and organizational options.

Linda Cheek stated her concerns about the theme selected by the RTI. Specifically, the theme may imply that a planned community is being promoted versus a region catering to tourists. The group discussed that “tag lines” included in advertising with the theme should clear up any confusion. Chuck Riedhammer stated that while the theme may not have been preferred by some involved in the selection process, collectively the RTI has great faith in Vintage Marketing’s ability to advise on the theme’s merits and whether it will resonate with tourists.

Donnie asked the group for a recommendation to the Steering Committee.

The group stated that they need to review a draft organizational structure and a fiscal structure before they can make a solid recommendation to the Steering Committee on the questions posed to them at the beginning of the meeting.

Dennis Thompson informed the group that the RTI has been invited by USED A to submit a pre-application for funding which he is preparing. As a part of this application, each member jurisdiction needs to submit employment loss information for their respective community. Dennis handed out a worksheet for each jurisdiction to complete and return to him.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chris Knopf
Surry County

CMK/ck