

**Steering Committee Minutes
Blue Ridge Heartland
Regional Tourism Initiative
6:30 PM, Tuesday July 10, 2007
Cedarbrook Country Club, Elkin, NC**

Dr. Jim Harrell called the meeting to order at 6:45 PM.

Steering Committee
Members Present:

Ken Richardson, Alleghany County
Don Adams, Alleghany County
Donnie Turner, Carroll County
Chuck Riedhammer, City of Galax
Mike Maynard, Grayson County
Bryan Steen, Stokes County
Jimmy Walker, Stokes County (for Stanley Smith)
Jim Harrell, Surry County
Macon Sammons, Jr., Surry County
Zach Henderson, Wilkes County
Gary Page, Wilkes County
Eric Williams, Yadkin County

Others Present:

Susan Medlin, The Vintage Marketing Group
Dennis Thompson, Consultant
Sheldon Stanley, MIS Web Specialist

Minutes

The minutes of the June 1, 2007 meeting were acknowledged and accepted as a record of that meeting.

Financial Report

Macon summarized the June 30 financial report, noting total expenditures of \$32,920.95 and a balance of \$12,208.05.

FY 08 Funding

Indications from the Steering Committee members present were that the \$7,500 allocations were approved for FY 08 by Alleghany, Carroll, Grayson, Stokes, Surry, Wilkes, and Yadkin Counties, giving a total budget revenue of \$52,500 at present. It was the consensus of the members that the RTI Fiscal Agent should proceed to bill the counties for their FY 08 allocations.

Marketing Plan

Jim called on Susan Medlin of Vintage Marketing to brief the Steering Committee on the appropriate elements in the marketing plan. Following much discussion and debate on whether to proceed with the initial two elements of the marketing plan, or wait until grant applications could be prepared; it was moved by Eric, second by Jimmy and unanimously approved that the Steering Committee utilize Vintage Marketing as our marketing consultant.

Following further discussion of possible funding sources, including the NC Rural Center, VA Housing and Community Development, Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Golden Leaf and others, it was moved by Eric and second by Mike and unanimously approved that the Steering Committee authorize Vintage Marketing to proceed with development of alternative names and logos for RTI prior to the next meeting (6 weeks) at a cost not to exceed \$12,000.

In response to questions, Susan Medlin stated that the total cost of all elements 1 through 12 would be in the range of \$125,000 to \$250,000. She also agreed to quote the elements separately and to forward this information to the Steering Committee. It was generally agreed that work elements 3 through 12 would be held in abeyance until grant funds or other moneys are secured to pay for the work.

Grants

On motion by Gary, second by Don, it was approved that Dennis Thompson and Dr. Dallas Garrett will be the grantsmen for NC and VA respectively. It was further agreed that, if necessary, Galax could be the fiscal agent for VA grants.

Website

Due to the lateness of the hour, the Steering Committee on motion by Zach and second by Mike, unanimously agreed to forward the final payment to Professional Networks. Susan's firm will offer revisions to the website to insure its compatibility with the name, logo and marketing themes before it is made available to the public for use.

Newsletter

Dennis suggested that the RTI proceed with an in-house quarterly newsletter as a means of keeping the general membership informed. He estimated that the cost would be about \$300 for his time, using email distribution. Mike said he thought this was a relatively low priority. No action was taken.

Participation by Non-voting Members

Discussion then centered on non-voting members (Patrick, Smyth, and Wythe Counties) and at what point in time conversion to investing and voting member status should be made. A number of members felt that as work and investments proceed, it would not be fair for some counties to pay all the bills and other counties to benefit without making any investment. After lengthy discussion and unanimous vote, it was agreed that non-voting counties would be given until the end of August to indicate whether they wish to invest and be included in the marketing efforts. It was generally agreed that these counties, even if they do not invest at this time, may continue to attend RTI meetings and that the door should be left open for full future participation in the Regional Tourism Initiative by the non-voting member counties. A letter will be sent to each of these counties as soon as possible.

Assets and Attractions Inventory

Dennis called attention to the assets and attractions inventory and asked all Steering Committee members to review their sites and facilities that are included and to make any needed revisions. He noted that Teresa in Macon's office is compiling this information under his supervision.

Establishing an Office/Staff

Susan emphasized the importance of establishing someone to be RTI staff to maintain website schedules of activities, the inventory and to handle inquiries and requests for information. Gary mentioned that NC Department of Transportation is establishing a new visitor's center on Route

421 and mentioned the possibility that the staff of this center might serve this purpose, at least initially, at no additional cost to the RTI. The merits and advantages of this arrangement were considered, but no action was taken at this time.

Next Meeting

Following further discussion, it was agreed by consensus that the RTI Steering Committee will meet for dinner again at 5:30 PM on Thursday, August 23, 2007 at the Elkin Creek Vineyard at 318 Elkin Creek Mill Road in Elkin.

Respectively submitted,

Macon C. Sammons, Jr.
Assistant Secretary

MCS/th