

**Steering Committee Minutes**  
**Blue Ridge Heartland**  
**Regional Tourism Initiative**  
**9:30 AM, Friday June 1, 2007**  
**W. Kerr Scott Lake, Forest Edge Amphitheatre, Wilkesboro, NC**

Dr. Jim Harrell called the meeting to order at 9:45 AM.

Steering Committee  
Members Present: Jim Harrell, Surry County  
Mike Maynard, Grayson County  
Ken Richardson, Alleghany County

Others Present: Bob Bamberg, Alleghany County Chamber of Commerce  
Chris Knopf, Surry County  
Susan Medlin, The Vintage Marketing Group  
Dennis Thompson, Consultant

Minutes

The minutes of the April 20, 2007 were declared approved as submitted by the Chair, following inquiry and no changes offered by members.

Website Development

Dennis reviewed the proposed website concept and informed everyone that it was available for comment by viewing it online. Dennis distributed the web address for viewing the website. It has not been officially launched at this time.

Financial Report

Dennis reviewed the finances, noting a balance of \$13,183.05, after expenses for Phase I of Marketing Plan.

Marketing Plan

Jim reviewed the proposal from Vintage Marketing that was included in the agenda packet. Ken discussed the need to look at funding from agencies such as the Rural Center in North Carolina, and similar agencies in Virginia to get the project off the ground. Mike stated that he has spoken with the Virginia agency involved in Housing and Community Development about potential funding sources for this project. Dennis has compiled a list of North Carolina funding agencies and non-profits that could be approached about funding the project.

Jim stated that there are three challenges for the committee:

- 1) maintaining the vision
- 2) developing a marketing plan
- 3) developing a funding mechanism from member counties.

Jim stated that the Steering Committee needs to meet to discuss these issues as well as determine who the member counties will be. A deadline may be needed for counties to make this decision.

Mike added that a plan to generate revenue needs to be in place. Dennis distributed a memorandum on a suggested budget and work program for FY 2008. Ken stated that the idea

was that the private sector would fund this project after the initial year. Bob questioned whether this organization will be a support organization or an independent organization. He also stated that if a tourism officer was hired that it may be a disadvantage based on the fact that such a person would need to be based out of only one location. Bob informed the committee on how High Country Host operates, which is an existing tourism group in Boone that serves a broad area and is membership based. Dennis stated that he feels that some level of staff support will be needed. Mike stated that the plan for membership is the key to success and it needs to be very attractive to prospective members. The group needs to build a means of showcasing the return on investment for potential members. The group discussed that the need for office space may be required for any employees of this effort.

Jim introduced Susan Medlin of The Vintage Marketing Group. Susan stated that she wants to identify the marketing focus of the group. Objectives and measurement are needed. Branding needs to be addressed to improve on the current brand that is being used. She would like for the group to look beyond geography for a brand. The first objective from the survey that was completed by stakeholders in the region was to develop a process for the strategic plan. A budget needs to be identified. The survey also showed that stakeholders want to identify the target market. The survey showed that compiling a database of attractions in the area was important as well. Susan will extract specific information about these concepts today when the larger group convenes at 10:30 AM. Susan asked the committee if they were tied completely to the “Blue Ridge Heartland” brand. The group stated that they were open to other concepts. Susan proposed developing a brand that was not tied to a region but some other concept that the counties had in common. This would allow the group to identify their own, unique brand.

Ken Richardson made the motion to approve Phase 1 of Vintage Marketing’s contract and not to exceed \$10,000, seconded by Jim Harrell, Jr. All present were in favor. Motion carried.

Steering Committee members discussed calling a dinner meeting in July to address the above issues and to assess progress on Phase I of the marketing plan.

Respectively submitted,

Chris Knopf (for Macon Sammons)

CMK/ck