



TOWN OF ABINGDON

133 WEST MAIN STREET • P. O. BOX 789 • ABINGDON, VIRGINIA • 24212

Tourism Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

June 4, 2024, 9:00 am

The Arts Depot | 314 Depot Square, SW | Abingdon, VA 24210

Meeting attendees: Committee Members: Amber Fiorini, Dwayne Anderson, Hana Eichin, Walter Jenny, Danny Owen, Guests: Janice Thayer, Karen Moore, and Town of Abingdon Staff, Mike Cochran, Mayana Rice, Isaiah Thomas, Jamie Barker, and Diana Blackburn.

After an introduction from attendees the idea of having the TAC meetings be more structured and formalized was discussed. While in the past the TAC meetings acted more as a discussion and information sharing group, applying more structure and having elected officials would allow this board the structure to vote on issues, this would assist in accessing more grant money for projects to go along with the VA250 Anniversary Celebrations, updating historical information for more digital interactivity. Mrs. Blackburn went over the current board members and their term end dates. Copies of the bylaws for TAC were handed out.

The departure of Tonya Trippett from the Abingdon Tourism Department the new structure and roles were discussed, including a new position of Tourism Coordinator that be assisting in coordinating events in town going forward once the position is filled. Diane Blackburn said that the new outdoor guides are in the final processes and will be sent out to local businesses for review. This information is generally updated twice a year. A new visitor's guide is also being worked on. The next edition of the Whistle should be out mid-June. Everyone was also reminded that the easiest way to get an event on the Town's Calendar is to create a Facebook event, that will be pulled over automatically.

Some upcoming events are:

- The Fiddler's Convention will be June 21-23
- 4th of July fireworks will be on the 4th, Diane asked for information on any additional event people are having for 4th of July celebrations.
- Virginia Highlands Festival will be July 26 – Aug 4

Amber Fiorini with the Barter Theater spoke on the following

- The Barter's summer season and upcoming plays.

Janice Thayer local business owner spoke about

- Variability of business in the area, with more businesses heading into a busier time of the year.
- Concerns about decay under bridges and trestles that she has seen.

Dwayne Anderson, Council Member, Spoke about

- Most restaurants are doing well in the area, but a few that are off the main path are struggling at times. It may help if we found ways to direct foot traffic to the outlying areas, such as more of the speed limit signs that have been put up along Valley Street. Slower traffic helps pedestrians feel safer walking farther.

Hana Eichin, local business owner, spoke about

- agreed as a business owner whose business is on the western side of town she doesn't get a lot of foot traffic.
- She brought up concerns about pedestrian crosswalk lights not working around Russell Rd. Staff stated that this is known, and more work and information is needed from VDOT for those lights to be turned on.

Isaiah Thomas (Economic Development) stated that the EDA has a facade improvement grant that might help in painting the front of business in the area to help draw more attention to the business.

Walter Jenny, with the Historical Society, spoke about

- improvements needed for the Historical Society building going forward. The historical Society's annual meeting will be on June 29th.
- They also have a new volunteer that is going to work on a family reunion project, helping people find information about ancestors who may have lived or passed through our area in the past.
- The reenactment of historical figures in the cemeteries will be presented during the Highlands festival again this year.
- Will also be working with a gentleman from ETSU on surveying the old African American cemetery to help locate where people are buried.

Danny Owens spoke about

- Traffic has increased with more people staying 2-3 night longer and visiting more locations than just the Barter Theater.
- He also wanted to remind everyone that a lot of the older clientele still like having printed materials and do not like or sometimes understand digital information or how to access it.

Mayana Rice, Assistant Town Manager spoke about

- Showed plans for a new wayfinding path and sign design to help visitors in finding what they are looking for in town.
- Plans to improve signs to encourage drivers to get off the interstate and visit our town.
- Alleys project that is planned, to close off some of the narrower alley ways and have them just be for pedestrian traffic

Janice Thayer also brought up concerns about tall grass around Exit 17, not only can it obstruct drivers views but it is also ugly

Karen Moore with the Arts Depot, spoke about

- A new approved marketing plan for the Art Deport

The need to elect officers at the next meeting was discussed, and the possibility of a Board of Supervisors.