



SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
October 10, 2024, at 8:30 a.m.
Town Hall Board Meeting Room
9 S. Main Street
MINUTES

Downtown Waynesville Commission (DWC) Chair, Dave Barone, called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m. with the following members present:

Dave Barone
Kirk Noonan
Jessica Garrick
Grace Mason
Jon Feichter
Joyce Massie
Alex McKay
Bob Williams (arrived at 9:05am)

The following Town Staff were present: Beth Gilmore, DWC Executive Director

Ava Harvat, DWC Assistant
Candace Poolton, Town Clerk
Jesse Fowler, Assistant Town Manager

Others present: Hannah White, N.C. Association of County Commissioners

David Francis, President of the Haywood County Chamber of Commerce
Corrina Ruffieux, Executive Director, Haywood TDA
Becky Johnson, The Mountaineer

Chairman Barone welcomed everyone and said the purpose of the meeting is to listen to merchants speak, then discuss, as a Commission, the impacts of Helene on downtown businesses.

A motion was made by Jessica Garrick, seconded by Joyce Massie, to add Corrina Ruffieux and David Francis to the agenda to speak. The motion passed unanimously.

Corrina Ruffieux, Executive Director, Haywood TDA, reported that there's a misconception that the Tourism and Development Authority made a decision on their own to request that visitors are not to come to Haywood County last week. She said the Governor of NC, the state tourism office, the NCDOT, Haywood County Board of Commissioners,



Haywood County Emergency Services, and the Haywood County Sheriffs office collectively made that decision in the best interest of Haywood County. She agreed that Haywood County is looking better this week and the statement they will be putting out (jointly) will convey that Haywood County wants visitation, but there are facts that visitors need to be made aware of. She said if they do not properly convey the facts to visitors, they are doing a disservice to emergency workers and the people who live here who have experienced devastation. She said they are still figuring out what happened to Haywood County. Ms. Ruffieux stated that the TDA wants people to know that if you come, Haywood County does not look the same. She said the Blue Ridge Parkway is closed indefinitely, as well as most of the parks, which are the main reasons people visit the area. Ms. Ruffieux said she is including businesses that are open and stores that have online shops in the statement and ways for visitors to support Haywood County residents and small businesses that have been impacted. She added that they are working on a "Shop Local" campaign. She said the TDA is working with hotels to get them registered with FEMA for displaced residents.

David Francis, President of the Haywood County Chamber of Commerce, reported that overall, Haywood County got very lucky. He reminded everyone that two weeks ago, Waynesville had no phone communication with neighboring towns. Mr. Francis said that he and Ms. Ruffieux attended a meeting to develop a grant program with Haywood Advancement Foundation to help small businesses clean up after the storm. Mr. Francis said the Apple Festival is still on, but out of 140 vendors, 47 are not able to attend because they were impacted by the storm. He said that right now, I-40 being closed is most likely having the biggest impact on visitation. He suggested that efforts should be focused on re-opening the highway to help with visitation numbers.

Public Comment

Ann Walsh, owner of Ava and Arden- Ms. Walsh said that small business owners have been impacted and have lost a lot. She reported that her profits have been down 40% compared to last October. She said she'd like to figure out a way to promote visitation to Main Street. Ms. Walsh offered to help recruit volunteers for events and get the word out on social media platforms.

Jack West- Mr. West said he appreciated the balancing act of positivity and reality. He said the messaging avenues should let everyone know that the area is different but there are still things to do here.

Becky Trump, co-owner of Olde Brick House-Mrs. Trump said that Main Street businesses need customers. She stated that even if the customers come back, they've already missed the income equivalent to having their business closed for the first three months of the year. She suggested pursuing virtual customers via an online marketplace. Mrs. Trump said the website is a poor representation of the MSD. She said there are broken links, no parking information, missing businesses and the events tab is lacking business events.



Charlie Trump- Mr. Trump echoed Mrs. Trump's opening statements. Mr. Trump suggested reaching out to the DWC's Facebook page 10,000 followers and having businesses to Facebook reels and live videos introducing themselves and showcasing their businesses.

Jerry Jackson, owner of Studio 164- Mr. Jackson thanked first responders and said he's never seen such devastation in his life. He said making these decisions are difficult and he appreciates the decision makers. He said that Studio 164 is probably not going to make it. He said he wants to see more community engagement, and wants to involve Frog Level and Hazelwood. Mr. Jackson said we need to focus on long term sustainability and community engagement. He reminded everyone that these things take time.

Discuss the Impact of Hurricane Helene on MSD Businesses

Mr. Feichter said he appreciates the dose of realism the TDA is introducing. He recommended focusing on how they are presenting what's open or closed and highlighting what's open. DWC Executive Director Beth Gilmore reminded everyone that the TDA's and Chamber's jobs are to bring people to the County, and the DWC role to bring people to Main Street.

Ms. Massie said she likes the idea of creating a map that shows where people can go and what roads are open. She said she also liked the idea about having a virtual marketplace. She shared that Visit Smokies sent out a text alert sharing which merchants have online shops.

Mr. Noonan agreed that a more positive message should be shared and that they could offer alternatives to closures-he used alternate places to hike or drive to look at leaves as an example. He reminded everyone that the DWC mission is to drive people to Main Street.

A member of the audience asked if there are resources for businesses to build a website if they don't have one. Ms. Gilmore said Haywood Community College Small Business Center has great resources.

Mr. Feichter offered to help with website development.

Chairman Barone said he likes the online marketplace idea, but that will take time. He suggested focusing on the next 3-6 months, and said there a lot of events coming up. He said the DWC and Main Street's goal is to be unified in messaging with the Haywood TDA and Chamber, and to all work together. Ms. Garrick suggested trying to draw "day trippers" to the area and possibly doing the "Love the Locals" campaign early

A member of the audience announced that they are working on a community fundraiser to be held on Nov 2nd. He said the proceeds will go to support local fire departments and drive traffic to the area.

Mr. Francis said the Chamber is starting a marketing campaign to Asheville and Hendersonville about Apple Fest.



Mr. Williams suggested that the school superintendent and other leaders in the County could send a message to staff encouraging them to shop locally.

There was discussion about opening up sections of the Blue Ridge Parkway. The consensus was that is not possible at this time because the parkway staff are still inspecting the parkway.

Ms. Massie said that Facebook ads that connect to followers and highlight businesses and having music downtown every weekend would be helpful. Ms. Mason said that social media is a powerful tool right now and it can be used to advertise what is open while focusing on the positive. Mr. Fowler reminded the DWC that according to NC General Statute, government entities cannot highlight specific shops.

Mr. Feichter asked if FEMA funds can be used for advertising for businesses? Mr. Fowler said he does not believe so. Mr. McKay asked if the DWC could repost individual shop owners' posts. Mr. Fowler said as long as every single business is included. Ms. Garrick suggested collectively creating campaigns. She gave the example of highlighting home goods shops, restaurants, etc. Mr. Fowler reminded the DWC that they are an advisory board to the Council so to keep that in mind when sending messaging out to the community.

A motion was made by Jessica Garrick, seconded by Bob Williams, to implement an eat shop downtown campaign on Facebook. The motion passed unanimously.

A motion was made by Joyce Massey, seconded by Kirk Noonan, to have local musicians downtown more frequently on the weekends. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Garrick encouraged businesses to participate in Treats on the Streets. A member from the audience suggested getting grant money to help pay for candy for businesses to pass out on Main Street during that event. A member of the audience suggested contacting the local news to promote businesses.

Ms. Ruffieux suggested that businesses modify hours during the Christmas shopping season so that locals can shop after work and on their days off.

Ms. Gilmore assured that town staff are telling people that downtown is open and encouraging people to visit.

A motion was made by Kirk Noonan, seconded by Grace Mason, to send out a press release that downtown Waynesville is open and welcoming visitors. The motion passed unanimously.

There was discussion about communications between the county, town, DWC, and merchants. Ms. Ruffieux requested that merchants sign up for the TDA alerts and newsletters on their website to stay informed. Ms. Gilmore said the town



sends a newsletter out with monthly bills that highlight events and the DWC puts out a newsletter as well. She recommended that merchants request to be added to the Media Contact email list.

A motion to adjourn was made by Jessica Garrick, seconded by Kirk Noonan, carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:57 a.m.

ATTEST:

Dave Barone, Board Chair

Beth Gilmore, Executive Director