



## **REGULAR MEETING**

June 17, 2025, at 8:30 a.m.

Town Board Meeting Room

9 S. Main Street

## **MINUTES**

Downtown Waynesville Commission Chair, Jon Feichter, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with the following members present:

Joyce Massie  
Sam Kearney  
Bob Williams  
Jerry Jackson  
Hannah White  
Jessica Garrick  
Kirk Noonan

Staff present: Beth Gilmore, Executive Director, Downtown Waynesville Commission

Others present: Sarah White, Mountaineer Publishing

Corrina Ruffieux, Visit Haywood, Executive Director

Carol Adams, Vicinities, Publisher

MSD merchants: Ann Walsh, Jose Gabriel, Jane Clark, Becky & Charlie Trump

Jack West, MSD Property Owner

### Public comments-

Business owner Ann Walsh said she would like there to be “more of a conversation” between Town leaders, DWC board members and merchants. She feels as if merchants don’t have a voice. She said concerns were raised six months ago regarding the website and nothing has been done about it. She learned from another merchant about recent robberies on Main Street, cars that were broken into. She said, “if that’s true, we need to know...we would be concerned about that.” She said she hopes DWC members will discuss what some merchants have posted on social media about being “flat.” She said there is a lack of communication, referencing the upcoming closure of Wall Street- a decision that will “affect (her) bottom line”- and recent vehicle break ins. “I wish you could be the voice that we need to go to those meetings and speak up for merchants...we need you to take care of merchants,” she said.

DWC Chair Feichter said that vehicle break-ins are a law enforcement issue. He is not aware of the break-ins or any safety concerns. He has “complete confidence” in the police to handle concerns if they arise. He agreed that



communications can fall short and offered to meet with Ann to explore ways to foster better communication between merchants, the DWC and Town Council.

Business owner Becky Trump expressed concern about special event permits. She questioned if events should be allowed if they don't align with Waynesville's brand. She said events on Main Street should align with the organization's "Appalachian True" brand. Events that don't align "hurt merchants," she said. She reiterated Ann's concern about website content updates, asking why changes she suggested two years ago still haven't been made.

Property owner Jack West echoed concerns about the downtown Waynesville website, stating that he hears often from merchants commenting on website content. He raised concern about a lack of communication regarding the closure of Wall Street and asked the board to reprioritize website needs and promotions. "Input from the community should be a priority," he said.

Feichter explained that street closure decisions are made by Town Councilmembers. An application was submitted to hold a parade and close Wall Street on June 28 and there were no public comments offered at that time. He said everyone has an opportunity to weigh in during those meetings. He said he has ideas about how to improve communication with merchants when Council is going to act on something that will impact Main Street. He plans to discuss his ideas with other Council members and Executive Director Gilmore. "So, stay tuned," he said.

Business owner Walsh requested an interactive meeting with merchants, instead of limiting the discussion to the public comment portion of board meetings. She has data for the past five years detailing the impact of closing the street for special events. "Can you please make that happen for us," she said. "Or try?"

Feichter said time allotted for public comments is not designed for back-and-forth dialogue, but "that doesn't mean we can't meet outside those boundaries to discuss these (concerns) and hopefully come to some kind of arrangement so there is more back and forth." He added that Council must consider a number of interests when making decisions. Merchant and staff input is important, but it's not Council's only concern. There are other interests in play, he said.

DWC Member Williams said he has been in the tourism industry for 25 years as a business owner. He also has two vacation rentals that he uses as a barometer for tourism. Vacation rentals and larger area attractions are suffering, he said. "There's a bigger issue," he said. "Maybe it's the impact of Helene coupled with the economy.... I would love a magic wand." He said he reached out to Haywood County tourism leaders, who encouraged him to contact Visit NC who worked with Williams to find ways of communicating that stores in Western North Carolina are open. "We are all feeling it. It would be nice if we had more money, but we as merchants have to look out for ourselves," he said. "You just have to figure out how to crack a nut individually and participate in a bigger thing to make it happen."



DWC Member Massie said she often hears from customers asking if Waynesville is OK since Hurricane Helene. She agrees that tourism is impacted by misconceptions that Waynesville is not open. She agrees that there needs to be more “yes we are open” messages.

Jane Clark, Waynesville native and employee of Ava & Arden, spoke about ways that the Asheville Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Center handled communications after Helene by relying on personal visits, a weekly newsletter, “Experience Guide” magazine, and social media channels.

DWC Member Massie distributed a volunteer sign-up sheet to merchants in attendance urging all to get involved by signing up for a supporting role. “I would love for you to please address this sheet and tell us how you can help, and we would love it,” she said.

DWC Member Noonan said there are merchants on the street who would like to bring back the hotly debated social district issue. He said he understood that it was not well presented previously, also there were issues with the timing of the presentation. He wants to revisit the discussion and make a “better presentation.” Feichter agreed to add the topic to the DWC agenda for a future meeting and consider ways to move it forward to the Council.

DWC Member Jerry Jackson said parking will be available in the parking garage during the event on June 28. He said there are merchants on Main Street who are really excited about the event on Wall Street and know that “it will be one of their best days. ...We have to consider all of Main Street because there are merchants who will have a great day and are gearing up for it. Please think about all merchants and the diversity we are bringing to Main Street.”

***A Motion by Kirk Noonan, seconded by Joyce Massie, to approve minutes from the DWC meeting on June 17, carried unanimously.***

Executive Director Gilmore delivers the financial report.

***A motion by Kirk Noonan, seconded by Bob Williams, to accept the financial report carried unanimously.***

DWC Chair Feichter said he is waiting to receive drafts of documents detailing the structure of the DWC’s nonprofit arm. He understands after meeting with Town Staff that the nonprofit board structure does not need to be “over complicated” since the organization is mainly a tool to allow the DWC to raise money and provide a tax write off to donors. The DWC will be responsible for deciding how funds are spent. Feichter proposed that the 501(c)3 board remain small, with no more than 5 members. Three of the five members will be DWC officers- Board Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary- and up to two additional individuals. He agreed to ask the Town Attorney to have documents ready for DWC review during the next board meeting. “We have talked this to death, and we need to move forward,” he said.



DWC Member Noonan said he hopes the nonprofit is established in time for the chili cookoff event.

DWC Executive Director Gilmore asked for board input on the brochure project. There are already “rumors” about new businesses coming to Main Street, she said. If we proceed with the current design that includes a complete listing of businesses, it will be impossible to keep the brochure current. As soon as a new business opens, the brochure will become outdated. Using QR codes will provide a way to update information in real time as businesses come and go.

After some discussion, board members agreed to proceed with a brochure styled around QR codes instead of listing every business.

DWC Member Massie distributed a diagram that breaks down a chain of command for special event planning and assigns a single point person for each event.

Massie explained that the Blueridge Big Band has offered to play a free patriotic concert on July 4 to make up for hours they were rained out during the Meet Me at the Arch concert. Executive Director Gilmore said in years past, a patriotic concert was held on the historic courthouse grounds but it was never an ideal location. After some discussion, board members agreed to request use of the United Community Bank parking lot for an evening concert on July 4 at 5:00 p.m. as part of the Art After Dark gallery stroll.

DWC Member Massie requested approval from the board to begin booking live music for summer Saturdays. She said she would like to schedule up to three musicians to play on Saturdays throughout the tourist season at a cost of \$450 to \$600 per Saturday.

DWC Member Jackson asked if the funds are available. DWC Executive Director Gilmore said there is \$65,000 to be divvied up among special events. That total was figured to include \$10,000 for Saturday music. Board members agreed to approve funds for Saturday music through Labor Day and reconsider additional spending after a total events budget has been set.

***A motion by Bob Williams, seconded by Jerry Jackson, to authorize spending up to \$3,500 to book live music on Main Street during Summer Saturdays through Labor Day carried unanimously.***

DWC Chair Feichter provided an update on the Church Street lights project, presenting two estimates for white and colored light options. In addition to lights, stanchions must also be purchased. The board agreed to pursue the less expensive option for white lights. Feichter will continue to research stanchion options.



***A motion by Joyce Massie, seconded by Sam Kearney, to approve the Mosca estimate for the purchase of white lights carried unanimously.***

DWC Executive Director Gilmore said she and Feichter met with a Placer.ai rep to discuss a subscription. He agreed to honor the rate that was offered last year for \$14,000. There are also 2- and 3-year contract arrangements available for reduced rates.

***A motion by Jerry Jackson, seconded by Joyce Massie, to approve a 3-year contract with Placer.ai carried unanimously.***

DWC Executive Director Gilmore agreed to explore the possibility of sharing the subscription cost with the Parks & Rec Department.

Economic Vitality Committee Chair, Hannah White, said that sales tax revenues are up within the town and county. Occupancy taxes are starting to drop. Haywood bookings are down about 20-percent, she said, compared to other tourist destinations like Jackson County and the Outer Banks which are experiencing a 5-percent drop in tourism rates. Local leaders believe the drop that Haywood is experiencing could be attributed to its proximity to harder-hit Asheville and the perception that businesses are still closed.

Executive Director Gilmore said the deadline has been extended to use TDA grant funds awarded in 2023 for the Heritage mural. Coupled with the Dogwood Trust grant, the DWC has \$15,000 available in grant funds that must be spent by March 31, 2026. To meet that deadline, work on the mural will have to be completed before winter when the temperatures drop. It seems impossible to raise the additional funds that are needed to complete the project, conduct an RFQ process, select an artist and have the project finished within the designated timeframe.

After a brief discussion about applying for TDA capital grant funds, board members agreed to postpone the heritage mural project and pursue a capital grant for new Main Street kiosks instead.

***A motion to adjourn by Joyce Massie, seconded by Sam Kearney, carried unanimously***

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

ATTEST:

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Jon Feichter, Board Chair

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Beth Gilmore, Executive Director