

TOWN OF FRANKLIN TOURISM DEVELOPEMNT AUTHORITY

MEETING MINUTES

March 9, 2026

Present: Members: Chair Tim Crabtree, Town Manager Amie Owens, Heather Childress Custer, Hannah Edwards, Colin McGinnis, Rob Reale, and Heather Dombroskie (joined via phone).

Absent: Kevin Covell and Guy Gooder.

Others present: Nicole Bradley, Town Clerk
Mia Overton, The Franklin Press
Morgan Stewart, Stewart Communications

1. Call to Order- Chair Tim Crabtree

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m.

2. Approval of the February 9, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Member Hannah Edwards made a motion, seconded by Member Colin McGinnis to approve the minutes of the February 9, 2026 meeting, as presented. Motion carried unanimously by a vote of 7 -0.

3. Financial Reports- ending January 31, 2026

Town Manager Amie Owens presented the Financial Report through the end of January 2026. She noted that occupancy tax collected in December 2025 was \$12,027.75 (2nd highest December on record and above the 10-year average) and in January 2026 was \$8,769.74 (3rd highest January on record and above the 10-year average). Total expenses thus far \$ \$93,091.83 leaving a balance of \$86,908.17 and \$174,964.66 remains in fund balance. The report is incorporated into these minutes as Exhibit A.

Member Collin McGinnis made a motion, seconded by Member Hannah Edwards to approve the financial reports ending January 31, 2026 as presented. Motion carried unanimously by a vote of 7 -0.

4. New Business

A.) Post-Event Report – The Special Liberty Project

Jessica Merritt, Executive Director, gave a post- event report on the funds received from the TDA last year. They received \$2,000 and were able to sponsor 2 military widows for their Healing Hope Retreat last July.

B.) New Application for Consideration – The Special Liberty Project Healing Hope Retreat for Military Widows – Date not posted – Requested amount - \$7,500

Jessica Merritt, Executive Director of The Special Liberty Project, presented an application for funding for the 2026 Military Healing Hope Retreat for Military Widows. The event cost is \$12,000 and the requested amount is \$7,500. Ms. Merritt stated that the women who attend these retreats are brought into Town and some of them return on their own at later dates with their families. This item will be voted on at the April meeting.

C.) New Application for Consideration – Smoky Mountain Pregnancy Care Center Sweet Carolina Music Festival- May 2, 2026 – Requested amount \$8,000

Kellie Burns and Pam Bowen presented an application for funding for the Sweet Carolina Music Festival, to benefit the Smoky Mountain Pregnancy Care Center, to be held on Saturday, May 2, 2026. The requested amount was originally \$5,000, but an increase was requested to \$8,000. They noted John Morgan will headline again this year, along with other artists. They also plan to increase the number of food truck

vendors. Ms. Burns noted that last year they raised \$28,000 for the Smoky Mountain Pregnancy Care Center. This item will be voted on at the April meeting.

D.) Vote on Application – Macon County Transit – Appalachian Trail Shuttle Service – March 4 through May 27, 2026 – Requested amount \$6,000

Darlene Asher, Macon County Transit Director, submitted an application for funding for the “hiker route”. The requested amount is \$6,000.

Member Rob Reale asked if the print media include the TDA sponsorship information. It was noted that there were no sponsors advertised on their print media.

Member Heather Childress Custer stated that this route was a good service for the Town.

Member Colin McGinnis said it was wrong not to support, but there is a need for more transparency.

Member Rob Reale made a motion, seconded by Member Colin McGinnis to fund \$1,000 for the Appalachian Trail Shuttle Service. Motion carried unanimously by a vote of 7-0.

E.) Post-Event Report – New Years Eve Ruby Drop

Tim Crabtree, Crabtree Family Enterprises, gave a post-event report on the Annual New Years Eve Ruby Drop. He noted that the event was close to the budgeted amount, it was a good event, there were no issues with the social district, and next year they hope add additional food trucks.

5. **Items from the Board**

A.) Monthly Marketing Report- Stewart Communications

Morgan Stewart, Stewart Communications, gave his monthly marketing report:

- Social Media
 - Facebook followers – campaign to grow followers
- Current ads/ad views
- Media relations
- Website (more than 11,000 visitors)
 - Increase engagement
 - Build asset files (pictures/videos)
 - Increase website functionality
 - Cost around \$5000
 - Add chatbot, interactive trip tools, maps

B.) Recap of Town Council Meeting – Agreement with NC Dept of Commerce and Agreement with McAdams for Main Street Redesign – Town Manager Amie Owens and/or Councilman Robbie Tompa

Town Manager Amie Owens explained the two projects/plans. The NC Department of Commerce Economic Development project is a free program. The Main Street Redesign project is a multiphase/cost project. There will be some overlap.

C.) Sub-Committee Update

Chair Tim Crabtree said the plan is to meet monthly to discuss the larger/long term projects.

Member Rob Reale asked if the TDA could host their own events. Town Manager Owens will check on this.

D.) Other

Paul Thatcher, Franklin Terrace Bed and Breakfast Owner, asked if he could be given a few minutes to speak. He had concerns about the decrease in the annual gem show crowds (lack of reservations at his bed and breakfast) since Hurricane Helene. He inquired about additional advertising.

6. Announcements

A.) The next regular scheduled TDA meeting will be held on Monday, April 13, 2026 at 5:30 p.m. in the Town Hall Board Room.

7. Adjourn

Member Colin McGinnis made a motion, seconded by Member Hannah Edwards to adjourn the meeting at 6:26 p.m. Motion carried unanimously by a vote of 7-0.

Timothy Crabtree, Chairperson

Nicole Bradley, Town Clerk