

RUCKERSVILLE CITIZENS COUNCIL

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Minutes of August 4, 2009 Meeting

Discussion with Greene's new Visitor Center Manager, John Humphries.

1. Introduction – a little bit about **John Humphries** and his new job functions with the Visitor Center and Greene Tourism. **John** commented that worked for AT&T in the Greene service area before partial "retirement". Since then he worked part time for Greene Parks and Recreation, and then for 1 ½ years managed Orange tourism.
2. About tourism initiatives in Greene
 - a. What Greene has to offer – **John** mentioned that there are thirteen "Blue Ridge Inns" in Greene that are attractive and have been doing very well. They are booked through the November "leaf" season. Our access to the Skyline Drive and Shenandoah National Park via route 33 is our big plus for tourists. We also have two vineyards, Autumn Hill and Stone Mountain.
 - b. Staffing for tourism initiatives, promotion to potential tourists, funding – **John** is the Visitor Center Manager. In addition, there is a volunteer tourism council and volunteer visitor center staff. The Blue Ridge Inns are having a group brochure made. An attractive new web site for Greene tourism is being created, and is partially completed as of 11-16-09. **John** explained that most of Greene's visitors come from other parts of Virginia and neighboring states. Greene hopes to generate about \$400,000 a year average in tourism dollars over the next 6 years, hopefully on an increasing schedule. Our lodging tax increase of 3% (enacted in July) will go entirely to fund tourism initiatives and the Visitor Center – this is estimated to be \$80k to \$100k per year. (As of November none of these funds have been turned over to the EDA.) The other 2% of the lodging tax, plus our meals tax, will go to the general fund to pay for other county operating costs. Greene will be advertizing in national magazines beginning next spring to draw in tourists – the budget for this in Orange was about \$100k a year.
 - c. Comments from the group – **Aaron Gilbert** and **Barry Barnett** talked about Greene's attractions for fishermen and hunters. We adjoin the Virginia Wildlife Management Area, which is great for hunters. The Swift Run is trout stocked. The South River is also attractive for fishing. (*Editor's note: Is there a public fishing access to South River which could be added to the Greene Tourism map and promoted?*) **Barry** and **Aaron** suggested advertizing in hunting and fishing magazines.
3. About the Visitor Center
 - a. Hours, location, services offered, staffing, promotion to potential tourists, funding – The new Visitor Center is located next to Blue Ridge Café. It includes a reception area with a computer station to allow access to the attractive Greene Tourism web page and other tourist information; racks for brochures for Greene and area tourism attractions, lodgings, and restaurants; and a small conference room with storage space. The space has been leased for 5 years and \$1,000 a month. The old location on route 33 business in Stanardsville was getting very limited use – 35 visits in a four month period. The Orange visitor center was getting that many visitors and more in a single day. (*Editor's note: The new Greene Visitor Center has already received 365 visitors through the past three months.*)

Volunteers will power the new Visitor Center, probably 4 hour shifts from 9-1 and 1-5. There are about 20 volunteers involved serving once a week or twice a month, and more are desired. The Center will be open 5 days a week, including Saturday and Sunday, which is required to be certified by the state. The visitor center had a "soft" opening in September and an official ribbon cutting in early November. The phone number is 227-4646.

- b. Comments from the group – **Barry Barnett** asked if the Visitor Center qualifies for blue V-DoT road signs and **John** said yes, but it would cost about \$100 each to get V-DoT to move the existing ones, and it is unclear whether they would let us do it ourselves. **Andrea Wilkinson** mentioned that the need to improve the appearance of the County web site had received comment at the Comprehensive Plan meetings, and wondered if the EDA personnel could improve that as well.
4. Plans to improve attractiveness and convenience of Greene for tourists and residents
 - a. **John** commented that one of the Garden Clubs has offered to keep up the planting bed in front of the visitor center. In addition, they were offered an antique wagon, which they would have stocked with flowers, etc, which would be placed on the grassy area in front. The decision regarding the use of the wagon is in discussion with the County as there is concern it would be too close to the right-of-way. The wagon, planting bed, and signage for the Visitor Center on the main sign to the Blue Ridge Café area are currently tied up in red tape re lost sign permits and V-Dot road easements.
 - b. Comments from the group re Greene and other communities in which group members have lived – **Larry Miller** said the Greene tourism brochures and restaurant brochures should be placed in home sales offices as well, so new home owners and prospective home owners will be aware of these opportunities. **Andrea Wilkinson** suggested that a map brochure be developed that shows Greene and its attractions, lodgings, and restaurants on one side; and on the other side a map showing Greene and the surrounding region, with the major attractions in the surrounding area located – those within a 1 hour drive or easy day trip, for example.

Next meeting Tuesday, **September 1th**. Guest speaker will be **Ann Mallek, Albemarle County Supervisor**, and two representatives from **Crozet Citizens Advisory Committee**. Tuesday, October 6, **Jim Frydl, Planning Commission Chair**, re Comprehensive Plan and Designated Growth Area.

Tuesday, **December 1**, **Shelley** from **Journey Through Hallowed Ground**, and **Jackie Pamenter** from **Greene County Historical Society** re historical tourism initiatives in our region and in Greene.