

Asheville Watchdog asked TDA officials for comment on two options elected officials have mentioned for spending less on tourism marketing: the county commission could cut the occupancy tax rate, currently at 6%, or state legislators could revise the funding formula to shift more of the TDA's budget toward local needs. Here is their response:

Ashley Greenstein, Public Information Manager at Explore Asheville:

"The BCTDA is a public body bound by law to administer the tax – it is not the agent for changing legislation.

"The lodging tax paid by visitors shoulders 100% of community marketing and capital project investment, while 69% of visitor spending takes place in our local restaurants, retail, entertainment, art galleries, and outdoor outfitters. That's vital for the sustainability of so many of our local, independent businesses and their employees.

"With the leadership of local hotel owners and elected officials, Buncombe County's occupancy tax legislation was changed last year to align with the state guidelines, decreasing the amount invested in promoting our community and increasing the amount invested in community capital projects. According to the state's travel and tourism coalition, all twenty-one occupancy tax bills passed in the recent session were also amended to comply with the same state guidelines. That's important context for residents."

Brenda Durden, Chair of the BCTDA and COO of Asheville Hotel

Group: "As a native of Buncombe County, and a lifelong hospitality worker who started as a front desk agent currently serving as chair of the tourism development authority, I am proud of the BCTDA's forty-year legacy of inspiring economic vitality in Asheville and Buncombe County. We are all connected here, and tourism is part of the DNA of this community. We all have a role to play and the TDA is a willing and eager investment partner within the guardrails established by our state legislation. Lodging tax is not a cure-all but plays a crucial role in fueling nearly \$3 billion in visitor spending to support local businesses, \$915 million in local income for residents, and nearly \$240 million in local and state taxes for government partners. I know our company, Asheville Hotel Group, couldn't achieve success without our talented workforce, dedicated ownership group and valued customers. It takes all of us."

Vic Isley, President and CEO of Explore Asheville and the BCTDA:

“Working my way through college in hospitality and building a career in travel and tourism, I understand the virtuous cycle of visitors first-hand. Our mission at Explore Asheville is to help grow our community’s economy by thoughtfully promoting the place we love and investing in community capital projects that benefit all who live or visit here. We achieve this by generating demand and inspiring visitors and event planners to choose Asheville and Buncombe County. Like concierges, we open the front door to thousands of locally owned businesses for visitors to spend their money on local goods and experiences authentic to our destination. That helps sustain local livelihoods - that virtuous cycle takes all of us working together.”