



## **Tourism Advisory Board**

**May 9, 2024 9:30 am**

**Caucus Room, First Floor, City Hall**

**9:30 am Call to order, approval of past meeting minutes**

**9:35 am Samantha Johnson – Monthly Tourism Report**

**9:55 am Sector Reports**

- **Lodging**
- **Restaurants**
- **Retail**
- **Attractions/Arts**

**10:05 am Old Business**

**10:10 am New Business**

**10:20 am Adjourn**

# Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

April 11, 2024 9:30 am

## Members/City Staff Present:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center  
Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon  
Steve Claffey, Mayor – City Council Liaison  
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South  
Gabe Glassmann - Mary Baldwin University  
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)  
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum  
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro  
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library  
Jessica Williams – Staunton Tourism

## Members/City Staff Absent:

Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia  
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean  
Ross Williams – Frederick House

## Others Present:

John Allen – Queen City Bistro  
Lance Barton – Habitat For Humanity  
Megan Burrow – Burrow and Vine  
Angus Carter – Staunton Augusta Art Center  
Brianna Decker – Juniper Lane  
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival  
Tanya Farrell – Stuart Hall  
Sarah Freed – Barren Ridge Vineyards  
Owen Marshall – SDDA  
Nick Sabin – Staunton Books  
Juliette Swenson – CoArt Gallery  
Christian Vames – Frontline Model Kits & Hobbies  
Pamela Wagner – Arcadia Project  
Tara Wall – WWPL  
Jacob – FDHS Intern

## Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. Introductions were made around the room. Sandi made a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes, and Gabe seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

## Posters In Their Natural Habitat – Lance Barton

Lance gave a presentation of Polish posters he plans to bring into the Staunton downtown and display in individual businesses and business windows. The businesses who allow a certain amount of exhibition space will receive a cut of the sales of the poster. All other proceeds will benefit Habitat for Humanity and Habitat For Humanity Poland. Poster prices range from \$30 - \$100. There will be Shakespeare posters and film posters in addition to many other kinds, and they will be displayed also for events such as Staunton Music Festival and Queen City Mischief and Magic. Lance would love to give a 10-minute talk to anyone interested in participating.

## March Monthly Tourism Report – Jessica Williams

### Activities

The Tourism Department staff took part in the following promotional, networking, or administrative activities in March:

March promotions included Let's Celebrate Staunton Women, Staunton Spring Bucket List, Say Hello to 10 New Staunton Businesses, Your Guide to Getting to Staunton, and Embrace the Return of Shop & Dine Out in Downtown.

- Tourism had a booth at the VA Welcome Center at Clearbrook for the month of March promoting Spring Break travel.
- Attended meeting with Amtrak representatives to promote Virginia by Rail History Tour for the VA250 celebration.
- Provided promotional items and a Staunton raffle to the VA Free Clinic Director's Conference at Hotel 24 South.
- Attended SVTA's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration and meeting at Hotel 24 South.
- Staunton was featured in Cary Magazine and Wake Living's March issue. Link to online version [here](#).
- Staunton was featured in Richmond Magazine's March issue. Link to online version [here](#).
- Provided promotional material for the Virginia Building & Code Officials Association meeting at Hotel 24 South.
- Attended the passenger rail infrastructure discussion with Sen. Mark Warner.
- Attended other meetings as needed: SVTP, QCMM, Happy Birthday America, Virginia by Rail, VA 250 Commission, TAB, Beerwerks Trail, MATPRA.

### Public Relations

The following is a list of newspapers, websites, magazines, and television stations that published articles about Staunton:

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Mar. 14	<a href="#">Staunton Wins Spot In USA TODAY'S 10 Best Small Town Beer Scenes In The US</a>	Yahoo! News	20,965,545
Mar. 03	<a href="#">20 Most Scenic Train Rides In The South</a>	Southern Living	15,794,715
Mar. 22	<a href="#">10 Of The Most Overlooked Towns In Virginia</a>	World Atlas	4,556,482
Mar. 21	<a href="#">These Towns In Virginia Come Alive In Spring</a>	World Atlas	4,556,482
Mar. 13	<a href="#">Virginia's 11 Most Underrated Towns To Visit In 2024</a>	World Atlas	4,556,482
Mar. 26	<a href="#">U.S. Senator Mark Warner Tours The Shenandoah Valley</a>	WHSV-TV	391,985
Mar. 25	<a href="#">Staunton Coca-Cola Plant Listed In The Virginia Landmarks Register</a>	WHSV-TV	391,985
Mar. 24	<a href="#">These Small Towns In Virginia Have The Best Historic Districts</a>	The Tech Advocate	334,509
Mar. 20	<a href="#">13 Best Small Towns In Virginia For Retirees</a>	The Tech Advocate	334,509
Mar. 27	<a href="#">Staunton Awarded \$500K For Study To Increase Amtrak's Cardinal Service To Seven Days</a>	Augusta Free Press	238,257

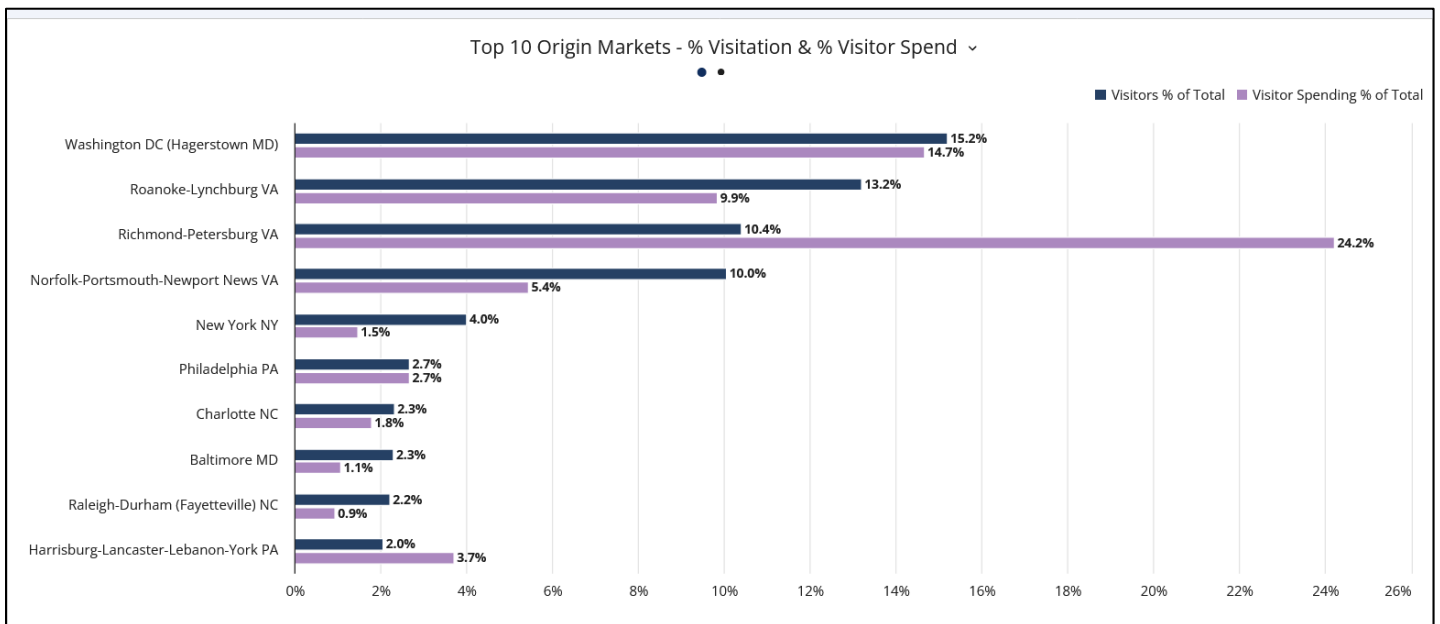
Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Mar. 25	<u>Outdoor Favorites Return To Downtown Staunton</u>	News Leader	80,304
Mar. 15	<u>Historic Staunton Foundation Purchases Historic Cabell Log House</u>	News Leader	80,304
Mar. 14	<u>Marino's Lunch, A Legendary Restaurant And Music Venue, Set To Reopen In March</u>	News Leader	80,304
Mar. 13	<u>Queen City Bistro Ready To Open In Downtown Staunton</u>	News Leader	80,304
Mar. 22	<u>A Gem In The Valley</u>	Richmond Magazine	43,101
Mar. 13	<u>Trapdoors, From Both Sides Now</u>	C-ville Weekly	20,135
Mar. 01	<u>Staunton: The Gem Of The Shenandoah Valley   Cary Magazine</u>	Cary Magazine	200,000
Mar. 01	<u>Staunton: The Gem Of The Shenandoah Valley</u>	Wake Living	200,000
Mar. 12	<u>Frontier Culture Museum, Staunton, Virginia</u>	Travel Gumbo	4,118
			<b>52,909,521</b>

**Website Visitation**

Website Traffic		
March 2023	March 2024	% Change
39,227 visitors	37,000 visitors	-5.6%
174 visitor's guide requests	180 visitor's guide requests	+3.4%

**Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending  
Smith Travel Research (STR) Hotel Occupancy Report**

Occupancy	2023											2024		Year to Date		
	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	2022	2023	2024
This Year	45.8	54.1	60.9	65.8	65.6	61.0	60.9	60.8	67.4	53.5	40.1	35.2	42.6	39.7	40.6	38.7
Last Year	42.9	51.3	63.8	64.4	65.0	65.0	64.2	67.3	71.7	58.1	47.2	40.6	45.8	26.0	39.7	43.1
% Change	6.8	5.3	-4.5	2.2	1.0	-6.1	-5.0	-9.7	-6.1	-7.9	-15.0	-13.3	-7.0	52.5	2.4	-10.1



### Sector Reports - Lodging

Jeff: Gibsons is doing well. We went a little lower on rates in January and February to drive occupancy. We are starting to see spring bookings, and I'm pretty confident where we are heading.

Michelle: March for us was very flat to last year, occupancy was slightly down, ADR was up slightly. Will finish April a little up from last year. Still pacing behind for May, but June looks really strong as well as July.

### Sector Reports - Restaurants

Jeff: Jonathan at Redbeard mentioned the USA Today article. Jeff noted his restaurant activity: Harrisonburg was up 10%, Staunton was up 12% and Lexington up 12%, which are pretty good numbers. The Depot is entertaining reopening on Mondays. Everyone in the industry is still facing significant staffing issues. We are finding more people to work, just not the skill set. We are being inundated with applications. Still honing down our menus and specials. With labor rates high, we have had to eliminate some management and kitchen positions. Jeff foresees this continuing the next year or even 18 months. Justin is putting finishing touches on Pizza Luca and plans to open in May. Jeff has heard great things about John and Queen City Bistro and welcomed him to Staunton. Justin at Brisket Taco has been closed some with the birth of their baby. The Aioli business is under contract, and is being purchased by a restaurant group with other locations.

### Sector Reports - Retail

Sandi: The Book Dragon is up double digits for the year and for March. The Book Festival is October 19<sup>th</sup>, and they will announce their plans in another 10 days or so. Will be using quite a few spaces by the Wharf area. We have two possible sponsors, and six plus other publishers who are considering sending us authors. Juniper Lane just celebrated their one-year anniversary. Frontline Model Kits and Hobbies were up about 10% from March. They were down a little in February, but up double digits for the year. The Heifetz Store said traffic was up. The listening room is very popular. Heifetz has Hear and Now Concerts April 8 and May 5. Burrow and Vine has their 2-year anniversary coming up. Her best weekend was Valley Women's Weekend.

## Sector Reports - Attractions

Gabe: Commencement weekend is May 18-19. We will be handing out posters to all for their windows and doors saying Congratulations MBU graduates. One theory for people leaving the area to dine after graduation is lack of reservations, so please let me know if your restaurant will offer reservations. Gabe will be leaving MBU in July, headed to VCU for a grad program.

Paige: Flat with last year, had Homeschool Days with 1500 people and revenue was up. Our Fiber Festival had about 1500 and that was up about 150 people. Had a lot of visitors from Richmond for that. May Day and Memorial Day weekend events are upcoming.

Stephanie: Pride and Prejudice doing very well, saw nearly sold-out houses in March. Seeing more and more sold out shows on Saturdays and Sundays. Midsummer Night's Dream is gaining in popularity. Planning now for Shakespeare's Birthday Party. Will begin next week having student matinees every Wednesday and Thursday through mid-May, so be on the lookout for busloads of kids.

Camille: 3<sup>rd</sup> annual SpringFest this weekend with the Staunton Music Festival. The theme is Baroque Journeys. We have 68 passholders for SpringFest alone, with 170-200 people per event. A lot of new patrons are coming from DC, DE, NC, PA. There is a free concert at noon on Saturday, and children up to age 18 are always free. Now are having actual ticketed seating.

Robin: Fantastic March, up 22% over last March. We are 47% ahead in revenue over last March. We have several bus groups coming in, and they often stop at our site and travel on to DC, NY or Philadelphia. They would like to get them to stay longer in Staunton. Have a speaker series coming up on taxes with Dr. Mark Thomas, a professor of both economics and history at UVA. Working with a group of Stuart Hall students with a focus on 1912-1922. They are presenting their research and it will be open to the public. The second week in June they will be moving their gift shop and visitor center back to its old location. Will have some student summer day programs June 12, July 10 and August 14 entitled "Can You Dig It". Robin credits their revenue being higher on changed marketing tactics, and have talked about the good and bad about Woodrow Wilson. There is an awareness of things changing at WWPL.

Andrew: Ramping up for summer season at Heifetz while also conducting residency programs and Hear and Now series. Doing a collaboration with the Charlottesville Ballet on April 27. That will be a collaboration with a number of different performing arts organizations generally around Albemarle, County, and Charlottesville, so we're hoping to use that as a springboard to get art supporters and arts appreciators more exposure to what we're doing. Enrollment is pretty much locked with 99% of students paying their tuition deposits. There will be 164 students between the Sr. and Jr. divisions, and the primary arrival date is June 14. Session 2 starts July 7, and there will be another big bump in activity. Pivoted to a digital program last year, saving over \$12,000 printing costs, so will be sending everyone sponsorship and advertising opportunities. Preparing welcome packages for families, if anyone would like to offer up items to be included. There will be 56 concerts over six weeks. Advertising in Richmond, Harrisonburg, DC, Charlotte and Hampton Roads area. Have had great success in receiving marketing leverage program grants from the Virginia Tourism Corporation, partnering with the Staunton Music Festival.

## New Business

Pamela: Noticed in the Zartico info that so many people are going to Gypsy Hill Park. Jessica noted a lot of events are held there, such as Art in the Park and music nights through the summer, as well as the Christmas lights. Jessica noted GHP is also on our recent spring marketing "bucket list". Mayor Claffey also suggested pickleball and golf could contribute.

Nick: Making a mobile tourist guide that points to his website through QR codes to target the tourists downtown. Will also include a mobile walking tour.

Jessica: Please take as many QCMM posters as you need for your business.

John: Nice to meet you all, and looking forward to being a part of Staunton.

Juliette: Asked when new Tourism Director is starting, and Jessica said April 22.

Pamela: Asked if there is an update on SDDA position. Sandi said she is on the board and they are starting preliminary interviews via Zoom this week and hopefully in person the next week. Sandi is unsure if Staunton Stories will continue, as it will be up to the new director. Pamela said there is a shop owner in town who is interested in continuing that series.

#### **Old Business**

There was no old business.

#### **Adjourn**

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 am.

Meeting minutes submitted by Kim Cormier.