



Tourism Advisory Board

July 11, 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

9:50 am Sector Reports

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

10:20 am Old Business

10:25 am New Business

10:30 am Adjourn

Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

June 13, 2024 9:30 am

Members/City Staff Present:

Vanessa Morosco for 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
Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Members/City Staff Absent:

Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager

Others Present:

John Allen – Queen City Bistro
Ellen Boden – Staunton Antiques Center
Megan Burrow – Burrow and Vine
Brianna Decker – Juniper Lane
Tanya Farrell – Stuart Hall
David Grainer - SDDA
Josh Knight – Engagement and Communications Manager
Amy Lessley – Staunton IHub
Dave Metz – Downtown Resident
Nick & Julia Sabin – Staunton Books
Felicia Sheets – Marino’s
Dr. Jeffrey Stein, MBU President
Juliette Swenson, CoArt Gallery
Susanna and Sarah Freed – Barren Ridge Vineyards
Keith Taylor, MBU
Christian Vames – Frontline Model Kits & Hobbies
Pamela Wagner – Arcadia Project
Jeremy West – Silver Line Theatre Exchange

Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

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

Dr. Jeffrey Stein, MBU

Dr. Stein spoke about Mary Baldwin University and how he intends to bridge the gap between the university and the community. He highlighted MBU’s commitment to serving students from diverse backgrounds, including those from low-income families and adult learners. He discussed the importance

of supporting low-income students in STEM fields of study. He talked about the challenges faced by students, including some who work long hours. He shared the story of MBU graduate Gerado Escalera Cardoso. Dr. Stein plans to partner with local businesses and organizations during homecoming weekend, and invited community members to engage with MBU as their hometown institution. Upcoming events will be shared as a way to connect with the community.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Activities - Visit Staunton staff took part in the following promotional, networking, or administrative activities in May:

- May blog promotions featured Seize The Staunton Day: No Kids Allowed, Staunton’s Best in Virginia Winners, Top 10 Must-Sees Every Visitor Should Explore, Explore Staunton Without Breaking the Bank, Embrace the Great Outdoors in Staunton
- Celebrated National Travel & Tourism Week: May 19-25
- Partnered with VTC International to host Canadian travel writer Jim Bamboulis
- Hosted VTC International PR Team for a familiarization visit (Scenic Railway, tour of Blackburn Inn, tour of Blackfriars)
- Featured in PR Blitz by Princess Cruises
- Met with Virginia Tourism Corporation President, Destination Development Director, and Destination Manager
- Met with Virginia Passenger Railway Assoc. for planning and marketing coordination
- Met with regional videographers to receive proposals for destination commercial and footage
- Attended VSAE Annual Conference to attract small meetings & conferences
- Attended Zarticon to gain knowledge on visitor data assets
- Met with WNRN to discuss public radio marketing opportunities
- Conducted vision-planning meeting with internal staff
- All-Staff meeting with Visitor Center’s Traveler Counselors to plan, listen, and coordinate
- Conducted site-visits and planning sessions with Black Dog Cycling, Heifetz Institute, Vivid Earth Adventures, American Shakespeare Center, Staunton Augusta Art Center, Woodrow Wilson Library + Museum, Batten Green, Gaie Lea, Burrow & Vine, Silver Line Theatre, The Arcadia project, Blackburn Inn, Shenandoah Valley Airport
- Meetings Attended: SVTP, Beerwerks, BRPA, Happy Birthday America, QCMM

Public Relations

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

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
May 13	<u>Princess Cruises Adds Historic America Cruisetour Ahead Of 250th Anniversary Of America</u>	Yahoo! Finance	49,142,119
May 8	<u>Plan An Antiquing Road Trip Through The Shenandoah Valley— Including A Stop At The Largest Antique Mall In The U.S.</u>	Southern Living	13,555,536
May 14	<u>9 Most Inviting Towns In Virginia</u>	World Atlas	5,483,253
May 12	<u>10 Coolest Towns In Virginia For A Summer Vacation In 2024</u>	World Atlas	5,483,253
May 11	<u>11 Senior-Friendly Towns In Virginia</u>	World Atlas	5,483,253
May 8	<u>Plan An Antiquing Road Trip Through The Shenandoah Valley— Including A Stop At The Largest Antique Mall In The U.S.</u>	Yahoo! Lifestyle	4,297,310
May 23	<u>A Star Virginia Chef Has A New Destination Restaurant And Inn In The Shenandoah Valley</u>	Washingtonian Magazine	1,166,417

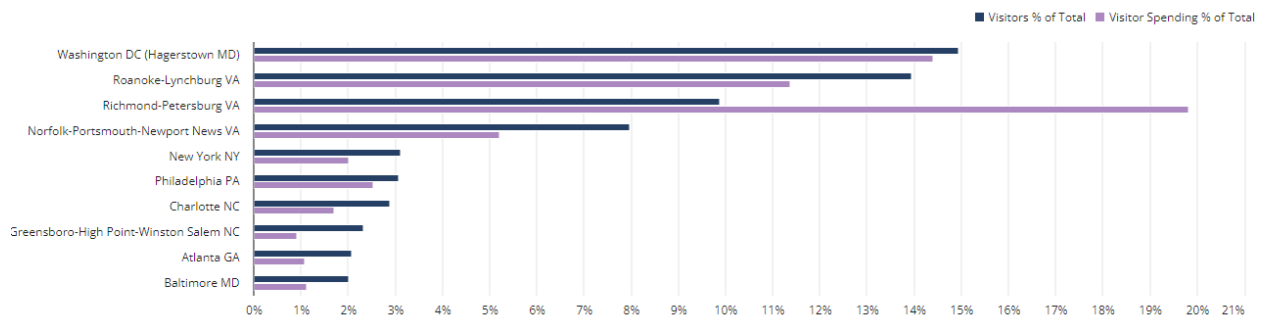
Date	Headline	Source	Reach
May 01	American Shakespeare Center Partners With Local Libraries To Give Free Tickets To Plays	WHSV-TV	465,681
May 14	Dinner At Virginia's Maude & The Bear Is A Culinary Journey	Garden and Gun	426,944
May 21	Art On The Town Festival Returns To Staunton	WHSV-TV	372,753
May 15	Pro Re Nata Acquires Skipping Rock In Staunton, Renovations Underway	WHSV-TV	372,753
May 13	Princess Cruises Adds Historic Cruisetour For The 250th Anniversary Of America In 2025	TravelPulse.com	285,122
May 16	Hot Off The Press: Finally, Staunton's Own Book Festival Will Turn The Page On October 19	Augusta Free Press	269,729
May 29	Wood-Fired Pizza, Handmade Pasta And Ice Cream — Have You Been To The Shack? It'll Surprise You.	News Leader	118,685
May 24	After A Very Successful Opening, Staunton's Pizza Luca Remaining Dinner-Only For Now	News Leader	118,685
May 06	Queen City Word Fest: Literary Event Coming To Staunton This October	News Leader	112,571
May 14	Princess Showcases Historic America Cruise-Tour Ahead Of USA's Yahoo! Finance 250th Anniversary	Insider Travel Report	35,767
May 22	Crozet Brewery Acquires Skipping Rock Beer Co. In Staunton	News Virginian	27,124
			87,216,955

Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
May 2023	May 2024	% Change
34,000 visitors	41,000 visitors	+21.43%
128 visitor's guide requests	138 visitor's guide requests 512 visitor's guide requests (Blue Ridge County)	+7.8%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

Top 10 Origin Markets by Visitation with their Spend



Smith Travel Research (STR) Hotel Occupancy Report

Occupancy (%)	2022		2023												2024			
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
This Year	58.1	47.2	40.6	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	48.7	55.7
Last Year	53.7	40.7	39.7	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	54.1	60.9
Percent Change	8.2	16.0	2.4	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	-10.0	-8.5

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Samantha said that VTC had been to Staunton several times recently, and the next rounds of grants are getting ready to open. They have a series of webinars online at VTC.org. Anything for 2025 events must be submitted in 2024.

Sector Reports - Lodging

Michele: Occupancy is down in between 8%-10%. Rev-par is still pretty consistent with last year, due to getting more dollars in rate on weekends. Still suffering occupancy wise on the weekdays, and weekend bookings are coming in late, likely waiting to see the weather forecast. The outlook for June and July is not great, but August we are seeing a huge turn, and of course fall is always busy and filling up. In speaking with their properties at Virginia Beach and other areas, they are seeing truly detrimental numbers and getting the same last-minute business.

Ross: Agrees with Michele, but glad to hear it's on par with the rest of the market. Revenues are up which is great, but occupancy is lagging. August is good with the Staunton Music Festival and September with QCMM.

Sector Reports - Restaurants

Sarah: Great beginning of the summer for Baja, and she believes the labor market is strengthening a bit too. Redbeard reported Q2 was down from Q1 in traffic. Sarah believes this is from the economy and people being afraid to spend money.

Sector Reports - Retail

Sandi: For Frontline, May was up a little. Weekdays are slow but steady. Frontline celebrates 21 years in business and 2 years with Christian owning it. First Fridays isn't going gangbusters. Heifetz getting ready to start up which will bring visitors. Marions's May was up, and Medieval Fantasies was up double digits. All of us have visitors from Lexington and Roanoke area, NJ, NY, MD, NC, TN and PA. Northern VA is the biggest area that visitors are coming from. The Book Dragon was up double digits for May and so far, seems to be continuing that for June. Working on the Book Festival which is Oct. 19th.

Sector Reports - Attractions

Robin: WWPL was flat from last May. Trending at 2019 numbers though. Had international visitors last two weeks. Busy with bus tours at 46% ahead of where we last year. Would love to see these bus tour groups stay a couple of nights and interested in working on packages.

Vanessa: Just closed out our season. Attendance was up compared to last year. Some shows were sold out! Will be opening A Complete Works of William Shakespear (abridged, revised, again). New updates featuring three women comedians which isn't done very often. FLLO (Friday Night Lights On) continues and would love to chat with First Fridays more about support for that event and even talking to anyone about how we might do a local package. Next season shows will be The Importance of Being Earnest, Macbeth and later in September adding Merry Wives of Windsor and Dracula A Comedy of Terrors.

Gabe: From non-working standpoint, I recommend listening to the podcast I've talked about; it features Jeremy's wife and has some great insight on working as a creative and next season will launch in fall and will be about leadership. Released a magazine which you can see online (marybaldwin.edu/magazine). All invited on October 18th for President's Inauguration. Interest in bringing students during orientation downtown to meet shop owners, etc.

Heifetz: Students and faculty have arrived. They are from all over the world. When not in workshops or performing, they will be in town. Concerts go for six weeks and many are free. So, we have a lot going on. Check out the website and free app. Tourism plans to partner with Heifetz to create a welcome packet for the students for next year.

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

Juliette: CoArt has a team of people now working every First Fridays with a raffle, music, food and drinks. Have committed to doing this through the end of the year.

Pamela: Arcadia Project made the first hurdle of a congressionally directed spending appropriation. Senators Kaine and Warner have put forth a \$500,000 appropriation request which is now going to the appropriation committee. It's a slow process getting money from the federal government. We are the only entry from Staunton this year.

Jeremy: Fun things coming up the summer at Silver Line. We're launching a new show and it will be the second in our professional series of shows. Some of those evenings will be dinner theater. Sending a group of high school students to the Scotland Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Started doing improv class once a month.

Nick: Spoken about the QR code window clings for a local mobile guide and it was accepted to the SCCF Capacitor Incubator Program. The program mentors want to expand this to Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Winchester, Lexington, and Roanoke. Advantage for Staunton is that will give additional exposure in those markets.

Adjourn

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:44 am.

Minutes submitted by Kim B. Cormier