



Tourism Advisory Board

August 8, 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

July 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
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum
Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library
Keith Taylor - Mary Baldwin University
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager (Zoom)
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Members/City Staff Absent:

Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro

Others Present:

L. Brown – new to Staunton
Brianna Decker – Juniper Lane
Amanda DiMeo – Director of Economic Development
Amanda Kaufman – Assistant City Manager
Josh Knight – Engagement and Communications Manager
Felicia Sheets – Marino’s
Annette Spencer – Heritage Hospitality
Juliette Swenson, CoArt Gallery
Christian Vames – Frontline Model Kits & Hobbies
Pamela Wagner – Arcadia Project
Michael and Vickie - Heifetz

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 Sarah Lynch seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Jessica spoke briefly about her travel to Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia speaking with tour operators and local AAA offices about Staunton and the Shenandoah Valley. They are looking for a different experience and want to offer new tours to their groups.

Jessica mentioned the new Staunton Visitor Guide and rack card is at the press right now, and we should have it in a few weeks. We distribute in Welcome Centers which will have the full guide, and rest areas along I64 and I81 that will have the rack card.

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

- June blog promotions featured PET-FRIENDLY STAUNTON: WHERE TO STAY, EAT, AND PLAY!, CELEBRATE JUNETEENTH AND AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY DAY, SUMMER BEGINS! HOW TO SEE VIRGINIA’S FLORA AND FAUNA, HOW TO HAVE A BLAST THIS 4TH OF JULY IN STAUNTON
- Partnered with VTC International to host German travel writer Domonik Mohr
- Finalized edits for the new Staunton Visitors Guide
- Met with regional videographers to receive proposals for destination commercial and footage
- Attended VTC Brand Webinar previewing upcoming Virginia is for Lovers Campaign and FY25 Marketing Co-Ops
- Attended VTC Board Meeting held in Staunton at Hotel 24 South (provided welcome bags for attendees)
- Provided welcome bags for the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia
- Attended VRLTA Shenandoah Valley regional meeting (Hosted in Staunton)
- Executed VADMO Sales Blitz, targeting new motorcoach business
- Attended Blue Ridge Parkway Familiarization drive tour with regional tourism offices, VTC destination manager, and BRPA Executive Director
- Met with VTC Destination Manager, Kelli Weaver, to discuss programming opportunities
- Met with MBU President, Dr. Jeff Stein; American Shakespeare Center’s Executive Director, Vanessa Morosco; Leisure Media’s regional rep.
- Attended Creative Mornings meeting
- Attended Heifetz Institutes “Friday in the Gallery” concert
- Conducted site-visits and planning sessions with Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission and The Book Dragon
- Meetings Attended: NextGen Governance Initiative, GART, VA250, SVTP, Virginia by Rail, Beerwerks, SVTA, MATPRA, Happy Birthday America, QCMM

Public Relations

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

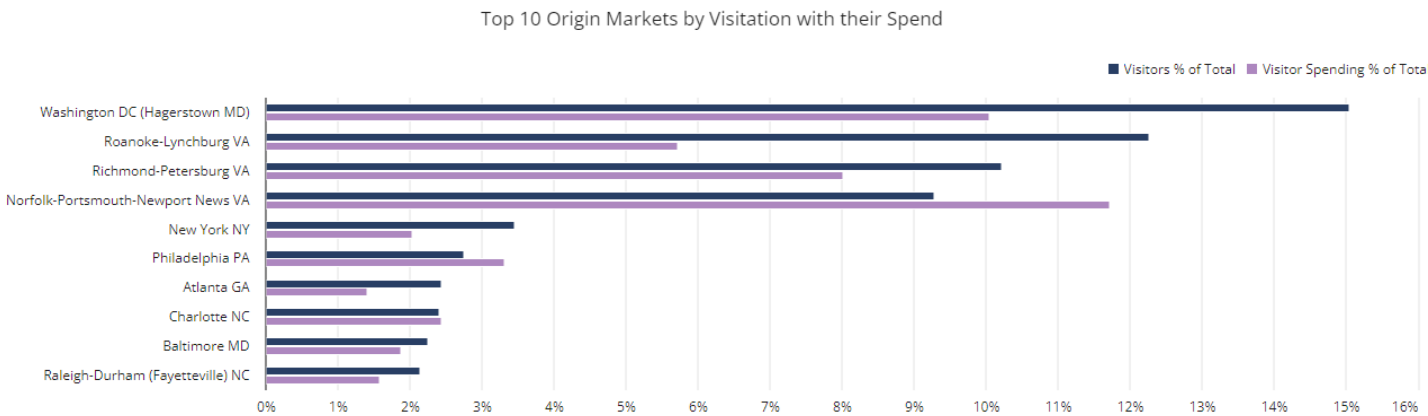
Date	Headline	Source	Reach
June 14	The 9 Best Towns In Virginia For Antiquing	Southern Living	14,483,139
June 2	10 Towns Perfect for Retirement in Virginia	World Atlas	5,483,253
June 23	These 7 Towns in Virginia Have Beautiful Architecture	World Atlas	5,132,971
June 20	8 of the Most Walkable Towns in Virginia	World Atlas	5,132,971
June 19	8 Towns in Virginia With the Best Downtown Areas in 2024	World Atlas	5,132,971
June 17	7 Delightful Towns To Visit In Mid-South	World Atlas	5,132,971
June 17	10 Coziest Towns To Visit In Virginia	World Atlas	5,132,971
June 28	9 of the best places in the US to escape the crowds	Lonely Planet	4,573,891
June 13	Staunton Underground Comics and Zine Fest returns to the Queen City	WHSV-TV	363,880
June 4	Staunton: New director of tourism says city knows its worth as place to live, visit	The Augusta Free Press	269,729

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
June 26	Happy Birthday America: Staunton tradition welcomes Fairland Ferguson as grand marshal	The Augusta Free Press	189,998
June 14	Staunton among 25 Virginia localities awarded tourism funds from VA250	The Augusta Free Press	189,998
June 5	Heifetz 2024 Festival of Concerts	News Leader	118,685
June 24	Music to the ear: Free summer concert series set for Staunton's Gypsy Hill Park bandstand	News Leader	101,134
June 21	Summer Grubbin'	Richmond Magazine	40,037
June 21	Hear the 'stars of tomorrow' today at Heifetz International Music Institute festival in Staunton	THE NEWS VIRGINIAN	34,984
			51,513,583

Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
June 2023	June 2024	% Change
34,000 visitors	38,000 visitors	+11.77%
135 visitor's guide requests	169 visitor's guide requests	+25.1%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending



**Changes from May: Top 6 markets no change. DC & Richmond visitation increased slightly but spend dropped. Newport spend increased over 6%. Increased visitation from Atlanta, Baltimore, and Raleigh. Top visitor pools were surveyed at accommodations, meeting/event space, railway, and Staunton attractions.

Smith Travel Research (STR) Hotel Occupancy Report

Occupancy (%)	2022	2023												2024				
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
This Year	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	61.7
Last Year	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	65.8
Percent Change	16.0	2.4	6.8	5.3	-4.5	2.2	1.0	-6.1	-5.0	-3.7	-6.1	-7.9	-15.0	-13.3	-7.0	-10.0	-8.5	-6.3

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There was discussion on the sample size of the data that Zartico is able to capture. Samantha noted it is a smaller snapshot of the big picture, which is still very beneficial. We also compare with our partners to see if their data is matching ours, in regards to where visitors are coming from.

Sector Reports - Lodging

Ross: June, was on par with last June. Year over year, they were kind of flat. Year to date, up by about 3% revenue wise, but down on occupancy. They're having fewer guests. It's hard to look forward because just like this last week, they weren't even 50% full and sold out within the last three days from the Fourth of July to the weekend. They are a smaller place, so it's easy to sell out.

Michelle: Great end to June; a lot better than anticipated. And similarly, like July 4, they had the strongest July 4 that they've ever had. Two days before the Fourth of July, they went from 60% to 100% occupancy. July is off to a great start, and August is really strong. September and October look really, really good. They are hoping to have a really strong finish to the year. Michelle touched base with her lodging connections at the beach, and they had been suffering somewhat, but they ended up having a great June as well. In July, they're picking up three days, four days, and taking rates down and then taking rates up. Staffing is always a struggle, with housekeeping being the hardest.

Sector Reports - Restaurants

Sarah: Baja really picked up beginning July 3rd, and had a great July 4th. Had a lot of people from DC, especially women. John at Redbeard said they were flat June to June. He met with some other brewers who said they are down about 1/3 in production. It has been a weird year...people are broke, and it is an election year. Pizza Luca is killing it, noting the long lines waiting to get in, and Ross has heard several guests raging about Maude and the Bear. Aioli has been sold, and the new people coming in have been working inside.

Sector Reports - Retail

Sandi: Frontline was up double digits in June and year to date. They're having visitors from NoVa, and from North Carolina. Heifetz is going on right now, the retail store sales are up, and they are continuing to be open seven days a week. Their customer numbers were three times higher than they were in May or June. There are more than 50 concerts, and Sandi has met some of the most wonderful visitors, many staying in our downtown. The Book Dragon is up double digits for the year, and just celebrated their five-year anniversary over Fourth of July weekend. The Queen City Wordfest has just approved 60 plus authors. The venues are almost all confirmed. The panels are being planned and we'll be announcing those soon. Sandi has also noted a lot of women traveling together and a number of bachelorette parties. Samantha plans on doing a She-nanigans itinerary. Felicia noted she has seen a lot of lady groups at Marinos, as well as a book club of approximately 20 people that comes in every two weeks to have lunch and discuss the books they are reading. Sandi said they are seeing more book vacations, where a book comes out and a group meets together to read, go out for meals and shopping, etc.

Sector Reports - Attractions

Robin: We had a great June at Woodrow Wilson. We were up 13% over last year. We had gotten used to them booking 18 months out, and then it started getting to three to four months out. Now we are seeing people booking for October- November of 2025, which makes Robin hopeful that something is coming. Robin thinks there's a little bit of an uptick in people looking at presidential libraries in general, and they have been tracking with others at both the national and federal sites. It is due to this is an

election year and people are looking to the past to compare with the world today. Every president has a presidential library or site, except Trump's hasn't been named yet.

Paige: The FCM was down about 7% year over year in June, but year over year from 2020 to 2023 was up 22%. She thinks they are just evening out. For the entire fiscal year, they were up 2.68%, so basically the same as the previous year. Paige believes weather has been a big factor because they did have some really big cold snaps in January and February that affected the visitation. Now it's just been too hot the past three or four weeks for people to really want to be outside for two to three hours walking around. July 4th wasn't fantastic, but Happy Birthday America is growing. They're thinking of adjusting event days so as not to compete for the same crowd. The FCM no longer hosts the Naturalization Ceremony since the federal judges put it on hold, and with construction starting, they would not be able to host the 1,000+ people that would come. Extracurricular Night is on July 19, and this is testing out new programming that is related to the VA 250th.

Camille: After concluding the SMF Spring Fest in April, which was a Baroque Fest, it went so well that from now it will be a Baroque Fest from here on out. We draw people from as far away as Canada and California, as a Baroque enthusiast will travel far and wide. The SMF summer festival is gearing up and will be August 16-25. Ticket sales are going really well. They've had a huge bump in sales for the annual and summer passes, which are actual ticketed seats. There are two specialty concerts that will be held at the old Suntrust Bank that sold out in 45 minutes. There will be 90 musicians staying in Staunton. SMF is providing outreach to Staunton City Schools and every 5th grade student from each school will get to attend a noon concert for free. Still selling ad space for festival program books, and 1200 will be printed. Around 1,000 people attend the concerts.

Stephanie: June was a nail-biter. ASC didn't hit goal until closing. For June 2025 we need to shift our calendar so the solo show is before the summer season, then starting the repertory shows in. They are still looking at that as well as titles. Student matinees begin September 25, and they are working on a postcard to send the schools. Please contact her with restaurants /venues that can host a large number of students for lunch and they will include you in our brochure. They are mailing to all middle schools in the state of Virginia. Will promote Christmas in July for members and then to the general public at the end of the month. Please take posters for the new season.

Vickie for Heifetz: Vickie is a former Heifetz student. There are 44 staff members, 76 staff team members and 171 students ranging from 8 to 28 years old, coming from 16 countries over the course of 6 weeks. There are 1,460 private lessons given, with 470 champion coachings, 89 studio classes and over 60 concerts produced in those six weeks. Michael added he is trying to get the students out of their bubble and into the downtown during their off time. He is also reaching out to organizations to get free tickets out to their staff.

Samantha plans on providing a welcome package for Heifetz students and faculty for next year; one for 21 and under and one for 21 and over. Anyone that wants to partner, please contact us. It was suggested that a peer ambassador program be started, where other musical kids connect with students to bring them downtown.

Keith: Slower time of year with students gone, but hosting ASC TC and Heifetz right now. MBU is rolling out a new undergraduate experience product and are planning a launch party for it in September. It will be pretty unique in the region as far as the way that the students receive their education. It's much more focused on career outcomes and industry preparedness. This party will be focused on getting basically every state high school guidance counselor, students, parents, and families to come visit Mary Baldwin. Basically, all majors will be broken down into 4 "neighborhoods".

Old Business

Sarah: QCM is advertising this year with rack cards. They will be in six rest areas (Covington, Bristol, 2 on 95N and 95S, and Richmond and Norfolk for free). It's printed with 4 years of dates. This year the collectible will be a bracelet, and participants will go to each business to collect a bead.

Sarah went to a SVTA meeting with Samantha and the outgoing president, Steve, (Shenandoah Tours) said a lot of people are interested in experiences, such as a 5-menu option dining experience with storytelling, music or an interpreter, like a private experience. Robin said their private curated tours are very popular. Samantha would like to meet with interested parties that have the space to accommodate a group for brainstorming. There are also 12-14 sprinter vans that are becoming more popular. Jessica has also talked about this with her Virginia By Rail group. Samantha encouraged everyone to reach out to our office as Jessica is great at selling Staunton at tradeshow and itinerary building.

Samantha reminded all that VTC grants are getting ready to open up. She also asked for people to reach out to our office so we can help compile restaurants that may be open for later SMF concerts. Samantha suggested a Google form for collecting information for the sector reports to be able to get more of a response.

New Business

Sarah asked Mr. Brown how he came to live in Staunton. He mentioned coming to Staunton during the pandemic, how his wife came back, and eventually they decided to move here. He also mentioned the strength of the public high school. He worked in Philadelphia with a community development corporation. He is interested in small business development and operates an Airbnb.

Paige: The FCM is working on Lord Dunmore's War event that will be held partially downtown and partially at the FCM. This is the first big event that happened in the Shenandoah Valley for the Revolutionary War, and is part of the VA250 initiative. She is looking for local businesses to participate in various ways, i.e. a menu item, a coupon, etc. There will be a march that re-enacts the men from Staunton and Augusta County heading off to fight the Shawnee. This event will be March 7-8. There will be high caliber speakers, historians and interpreters of the Eastern Shore Shawnee tribe.

Pamela: Asked about the SDDA Director position, and Sarah said the new director begins on Monday.

Samantha: Introduced Amanda DiMeo as the new Economic Development Director for the City of Staunton. Amanda said the state just announced Virginia placed first as the top state for business in CNBC's analysis.

Camille offered comp tickets to TAB members for the SMF.

Annette: June was really good, and July is starting to pick up a little. July 4 wasn't great. She had a basketball team that tried to get reservations for dining for their players and could not find anywhere.

Adjourn

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

Minutes submitted by Kim B. Cormier