



Tourism Advisory Board

September 12, 2024 9:30 am

Caucus Room, First Floor, City Hall

- 9:30 am** Call to order, approval of past meeting minutes
- 9:35 am** Kelli Weaver, Destination Development Manager, Virginia Tourism Corporation
- 9:55 am** Samantha Johnson – Monthly Tourism Report
- 10:05 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

August 8, 2024 9:30 am

Members/City Staff Present:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center
Steve Claffey, Mayor – City Council Liaison
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
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Members/City Staff Absent:

Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager

Others Present:

John and Anna – Queen City Bistro
Grace, Tika and Mary – Holiday Inn Staunton Conference Center
Megan Burrows – Burrow and Vine
Angus Carter – Staunton Augusta Art Center
June Collmer – Heifetz Retail Shop
Brianna Decker – Juniper Lane
Amanda DiMeo – Director of Economic Development
Amanda Kaufman – Assistant City Manager
Susanna Larner – Barren Ridge Vineyards
Julia Sabin – Staunton Books and Tea
Darren Smith - SDDA
Juliette Swenson, CoArt Gallery
Christian Vames – Frontline Model Kits & Hobbies
Pamela Wagner – Arcadia Project

Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. Introductions were made around the room. Stephanie Cabacoy made a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes, and Sarah Lynch seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Happy Birthday America went very well, which kicked us off into a nice, busy month. 51% of the Visitors from HBA were from out of state. New Visitor Guides are on the table, but we are not fully distributing them until we get rid of the remaining boxes of old guides. We applied for a VTC Drive Tourism grant, and will keep you posted on that. Other VTC grants are still open. We will host Kelly from VTC at our next TAB meeting. Had several meetings last month with our marketing partners, and getting ready to shoot a 2-day destination commercial with Kyle of Nomad Media who is local. She noted there is a great assortment of talented photographers and videographers in our area. Staff had a great planning meeting

with our marketing agency Madden Media, where we discussed our target areas of Charlotte, New York, Richmond and Northern Virginia. Staunton made the cut for Blue Ridge Outdoor’s contest for top Adventure Towns, and we are in the medium-sized town category. Samantha will be headed to ESTO, which is a more educational side of tourism and travel. In November, she will be speaking on a panel at the VA1 Conference. Our top markets are basically the same, but we did see an increase in several top feeder markets, namely Richmond, Philadelphia, Charlotte, Baltimore, and Raleigh. Atlanta is hitting in our top 10. Visitors contributed almost 23% for spending last month, so they make a difference. On the flip side of that we’re still seeing the same track and trajectory in that occupancy is down, and the average rate is up. As a whole, revenue is down this year compared to last year. In talking to hoteliers, they are seeing weekend bookings with weekdays being pretty tough. Lots of last-minute bookings. We do not get any data from short term rentals. While at the Visitor Center, Samantha met visitors from Germany, Holland, Australia and France.

Activities:

Visit Staunton staff took part in the following promotional, networking, or administrative activities in July:

- July blog promotions featured HOW TO HAVE A BLAST THIS 4TH OF JULY IN STAUNTON, UNIQUE HOBBIES TO EXPLORE IN STAUNTON, SWEET SUMMERTIME IN STAUNTON, HOW TO PLAN A MULTIGENERATIONAL FAMILY VACATION IN STAUNTON, CHEERS TO CRAFT BEERS
- Wright’s Dairy Bar featured in Garden & Gun Magazine’s Top 7 Old-School Diners
- New Staunton Visitors Guide has arrived
- Submitted Drive Tourism + Grant Application
- Attended VTC Brand Webinar previewing upcoming Virginia is for Lovers Campaign and FY25 Marketing Co-Ops
- Creative Planning meeting with Nomad Media
- Annual review and planning with Madden Media
- Volunteered at Happy Birthday America
- New HBA Promotional Photos captured by Kate Simon
- Attended Hotel 24 South’s 100th Anniversary Celebration
- Met with VTC Destination Manager, Kelli Weaver, to discuss programming opportunities
- Met with MBU Marketing Department; Staunton Music Festival’s Artistic Director, Jason Stell; American Shakespeare Center’s Executive Director, Vanessa Morosco and Marketing Director, Stephanie Cabacoy; Appalachian Arts & Entertainment Award Founder, Jill Hamlin; Staunton Guided Tours Owner, Bruce Fox
- Conducted site-visits and planning sessions with Virginia Scenic Railway
- Dropped off Visitor Guides to various regional attractions
- Meetings Attended: GART, VA250, SVTP, Virginia by Rail, Beerwerks, SVTA, MATPRA, Happy Birthday America, QCMM, Public Works, EDA, MATPRA

Website Visitation

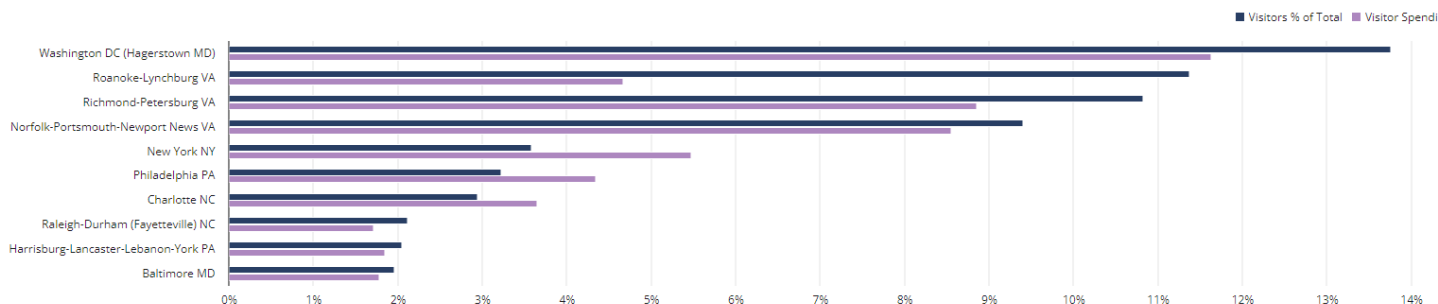
Website Traffic		
July 2023	July 2024	% Change
43,000 visitors	30,000 visitors	-30.23%
209 visitor’s guide requests	169 visitor’s guide requests 235 Digital Guides via Blue Ridge County Magazine	19.1%

PR Report

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
July 16	Hotel 24 South Receives Proclamations from Historic Hotels of America & the City of Staunton as it Celebrates its 100th Anniversary	Associated Press	49,992,567
July 14	10 Best Places to Live in the South, According to Local Real Estate Experts	Travel and Leisure	14,869,703
July 21	2024's 10 Most Beautiful Small Towns in Virginia	World Atlas	4,547,170
July 20	10 Ideal Virginia Destinations for a 3-Day Weekend in 2024	World Atlas	4,547,170
July 11	The Most Picturesque Small Towns in Virginia	World Atlas	4,547,170
July 8	2024's 9 Most Adorable Small Towns in the Mid-South	World Atlas	4,547,170
July 8	9 Affordable Mountain Towns You Can Actually Move To	Yahoo! Lifestyle	4,382,107
July 10	Add A Trip To Staunton, Virginia, To Your Summer Bucket List	Only In Your Town	393,082
July 28	Staunton art shop turns trash to treasure	WHSV-TV	366,940
July 30	American Shakespeare Center's 'MacBeth' breaks the fourth wall without breaking with convention	The Daily Progress	257,767
July 31	Staunton Jams expanding to three festivals a year, starting in September	News Leader	101,819
July 11	Staunton: Silver Line Theatre presents Tony Award-winning show, farm-to-table dinner	Augusta Free Press	93,256
July 19	Festivals Spotlight Virginia's Rich Diversity	Alexandria Living Magazine	33,544
July 16	Hotel 24 South Hosts 100-Year Event With Historic Hotels of America	Lodging Magazine	25,474
July 26	Discover these 10 presidential home sites in Virginia	The Dogwood	23,082
July 29	Visit to the FRONTIER CULTURE MUSEUM (Staunton, VA)	Rumble	unknown
		TOTAL	88,728,021

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

Top 10 Origin Markets by Visitation with their Spend



**Changes from May: Top 6 DMA visitation consistent MoM. DC, Richmond, Philly, Charlotte, Baltimore, Raleigh visitation increase. Norfolk spending increased by 3.5%. Harrisburg/Lancaster area and Baltimore pushed Atlanta out of Top 10. Visitors contributed 22.4% of overall monthly spending, with a \$54 daily average.

Sector Reports – Restaurants

Redbeard was flat if he pulls out the price increase in January. Baja's July was better than the months prior, but still not as good as pre-covid. Sarah spoke with Tim Kaine and relayed to him that it seems people do not value going out to eat as much as they used to, preferring instead to get their stuff to go. The economy is not helpful. The Chop House Tavern is working on their space. Charlotte's Kitchenette is going in Brisket Taco's old space. Cossette is on hold for right now as they decide what to do in their space.

Sector Reports - Attractions

Stephanie: Was in Las Vegas last week for a tech conference, bragging about the work that we do here. A lot of people who were there are seeing similar trends in arts organizations, tourism agencies, and both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Stephanie gave out open invitation cards, which allows people to get two free tickets. This included people from all over Texas, Maryland, Virginia, etc. As they are coming in, she will connect with each of you to see what partnerships we can build out with them. was, They have also been handing these out to their trustees and some of their highly engaged donors and supporters to hand out within their circles as well. There will be a Dracula ½ off ticket event on Oct. 31 with a Transylvania wine-tasting event before the show, with Accordia setting up the menu. They will have some blood-themed items and will encourage patrons to dress in their best Dracula apparel. During the Christmas Sale last week, they sold out two shows.

Paige: Extracurricular night (Rev. war) went really well. Lord Dunmore's War weekend happens on Saturday, September 7, from 5:00 pm until 7:30 pm. You will see volunteer re-enactors scattered throughout downtown, and they will play the fife and drum at the courthouse at about 5:30 to rally the militia. This is important because a lot of the people that fought in the Ohio Valley during that time were here from Augusta County, and they actually mustered at the "Matthews Ordinary" which is the building where the mattress store was and SDDA is currently housed. Then after they come to the courthouse, the street there will be closed for about 30 minutes, and they're going to march up to a short demonstration and head to the Innovation Hub, where they'll table for about an hour and a half. If you see people with firearms, they are historic firearms. They will not be bringing the black powder downtown, they're historic muskets. Samantha noted local businesses are invited to piggyback on this event with special food, drinks or sales. You are welcome to set up a table at the I Hub. The event continues at the Frontier Culture Museum with a pay what you will donation.

Robin: Finalizing the move of the WWPL Visitor Center. There will be an invitation to go out for the dedication and ribbon cutting. They are up 10% over last year for July visitation. It looks to be a busy fall. We are getting groups and field trips scheduled.

Samantha discussed having a symposium for motor coach travel. We would like for Staunton not to be a pass-through, but a destination for group travel. We will have speakers, discuss itineraries.

Keith: MBU opening day of school Aug. 20, with news students moving in on Aug. 22 followed by orientation the following weekend, and Aug. 26 is the first day of classes. There will be a homecoming and inauguration of President Stein, and we are hoping to draw in a lot of alumni and other higher-ed communities in the Western part of Virginia. MBU had one of their stronger recruitment cycles in recent years. Suzy Dull is the Director of The McCree Center For Life Success, instrumental in connecting MBU with local industries, companies and businesses for internships. There is a new marketing program (fully online, but going in person fall of 2025). The program Director is Clayton Smith. Mary Baldwin has switched food providers to Aramark, which means MBU can also offer catering services. You can find this at www.MBU.campusdish.com/catering.

Samantha added she would like to do see something similar to "Fighting Squirrel Fridays" to bring students from Campus into Downtown. She encouraged businesses to put signs in their windows welcoming students into downtown. Keith said to get in touch with him if any items were needed. Keith added he was in the first class of men in 2017 at MBU, and he said he stayed in Staunton after connections he made with the downtown, working at Cranberries and visiting the downtown.

Sector Reports – Lodging

Ross: July was down about 20%, on par with 2019 numbers. June was great. August is looking great with the Staunton Music Festival. Pretty sure we are fully booked for QCMM since April.

Samantha added the SMF is also adding some daytime pop-up shows, and is looking for restaurants that stay open later than usual to send patrons to.

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

June: Heifetz hosted 164 students and 64 faculty. Students were from 15 different countries. Retail sales were up significantly in June and July, with July's doubling June's. Have over 2500 vinyl records and CDs in our listening room. Currently ensuring we have all necessities for local band students. Fall series in the works.

Angus: Art In The Park coming to GHP Labor Day Weekend. Received VTC grants this year and running ads state-wide.

Darren: SDDA guides will be delivered around town next week.

Sarah: QCMM has rack cards at every single Welcome Center in the state.

Mary (Holiday Inn): Last year was way better than this year. Properties in other states are being impacted the same way. Samantha added Staunton is right on par with Richmond, Roanoke, Charlottesville, and others in our region with numbers down. Samantha said Staunton is considering testing out other markets. Stephanie said they are seeing 70% of their audience coming from Virginia, and are considering TV advertising trying to capture visitors within three to four hours. Samantha mentioned the destination commercial we are filming for release in the spring. Looking to do air segments in NoVa and the likes in the spring. YouTube allows you to choose your specific demographics and may be better during an election year. Robin suggested there was a wealth of knowledge in marketing around the table. WWPL has a retired marketer from Johnson and Johnson helping with analysis. Samantha suggested a market symposium sometime mid-January to mid-February.

Julia: Staunton Books and Tea just launched their first international Book Club. Will be building a side bar to be able to brew tea, and then expand hours.

Meagan: Up for July over June due to class attendance. Also, higher price point classes. Down year over year, and she believes its from a lack of driving people downtown with events and activity with the absence of an SDDA Director. She stated it's also an election year, and seeing that lodging has not been great, it all contributes. Working on partnerships and being collaborative.

Brianna: This year compared to last year is tremendously better, and she attributes that to her renovations and rebranding. July was lower than June.

Julliette: Co-Art did really well in July, up from June. They believe 60% of their sales are from visitors.

John: Queen City Bistro – sales were lower in July than in June. May was better than June. John would be interested in the marketing symposium. Would like to market collaboratively, especially with hosting weddings in Staunton. Would love for the upstairs to be an event space and rehearsal dinner venue. Currently finishing up materials to market alongside the Blackburn and Hotel 24 South. John introduced Anna, his Assistant Manager. She suggested marketing directly to Charlottesville, especially the 35-50 age group.

Adjourn - With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:49 am. Minutes: Kim Cormier