



Tourism Advisory Board

October 10, 2024 9:30 am

Accordia, 114 E. Beverley St.

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

9:35 am Samantha Johnson – Monthly Tourism Report

9:45 am Sector Reports

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

10:15 am Staunton Shout-Outs

10:20 am Old Business

10:25 am New Business

- A. Discussion of November meeting (date)**

10:30 am Adjourn

Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

September 12, 2024 9:30 am

Members/City Staff Present:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center
Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival
Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean
Keith Taylor - Mary Baldwin University
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Members/City Staff Absent:

Steve Claffey, Mayor – City Council Liaison
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library

Others Present:

John Allen – Queen City Bistro
Megan Burrows – Burrow and Vine
Brianna Decker – Juniper Lane
Amanda DiMeo – Director of Economic Development
Issac Grant – Cottonwood Commercial
Josh Knight – Engagement and Communications Manager
Susanna Larner – Barren Ridge Vineyards
Felicia Sheets – Marino’s
Annette Spencer – Heritage Hospitality
Juliette Swenson, CoArt Gallery
Christian Vames – Frontline Model Kits & Hobbies
Kelli Weaver - VTC
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 Sandi Carraro seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Kelli Weaver – Destination Development Manager, Virginia Tourism Corporation

Kelli explained her role in helping to promote and assist tourism communities in her area, which includes the Shenandoah Valley, Southwest Virginia and the Virginia Mountains Region.

Kelli:

- Discussed various resources and opportunities for local businesses.
- Emphasized the importance of updating listings on [Virginia.org](https://www.virginia.org), which can boost visibility and attractiveness to visitors.

- Highlighted low-cost advertising options at welcome centers, such as \$120 per year for rack cards and \$25 for event kits.
- Mentioned grant programs, including \$5,000 special events grant and a \$20,000 marketing leverage program.
- Encouraged collaboration among local businesses to enhance the visitor experience and shared success stories from other regions.
- Gave updates on tourism impact and visitor spending trends, noting a 2% growth in tourism spending in Staunton, totaling \$117.2 million.
- Emphasized the importance of sharing information with the VTC Richmond team to be featured in blogs and social media posts.
- Discussed the resources available from the VTC Richmond team, including grants, listings, and branding opportunities.
- Highlighted the importance of updating listings on Virginia.org, including photos, descriptions, and amenities. Kelli mentioned the benefits of being listed on Virginia.org, such as increased visibility and potential inclusion in the Virginia Tourism Guide.
- Discussed the low-cost advertising opportunities at welcome centers, including brochure and rack card placement. Kelli mentioned the special event kits available for \$25, which are displayed for two weeks leading up to an event. Kelli discussed the importance of having special offers on rack cards to track conversions.
- Introduced the special events and festivals grant, which requires a 50% match and is competitive.
- Explained the Marketing Leverage Program (MLP), which is open to various travel industry partners and offers a one-to-one match.
- Mentioned the Micro Business MLP, which is for small businesses with 20 or fewer full-time employees and includes in-kind matches. She highlighted the importance of travel data profiles for understanding visitor demographics and preferences.
- Encouraged collaboration within the community using the hub and spoke model. She explained the concept of a hub, which is the primary destination where you stay, and the spokes, which include attractions, dining, entertainment, and shopping in the area/region.
- Emphasized the importance of sharing stories and creating unique and authentic experiences for visitors.
- Discussed the benefits of having a presence at welcome centers and the importance of building relationships with staff.
- Discussed the importance of staying updated with VTC resources and the benefits of attending virtual sessions.



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[What is Generative AI?](#)

[Partnership Marketing and Advertising Program \(PMAP\)](#)

[Pulse of Virginia e-Newsletter](#)

[Orientation](#)

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Activities:

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

- August blog promotions featured [CHEERS TO CRAFT BEERS](#), [Train Travel To And From Staunton](#), [College Send-Off Family Weekend](#), [Exploring Staunton on Your Own](#), [4-Day Weekend Itinerary in Staunton](#)
- New Media Profile Kit designed & released
- Attended ESTO Conference for further professional education
- Filmed new Destination Commercial over 2 days
- Creative Training meeting for optimal User-Generated Content (UGC) with Snapsea
- Toured Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind (VSDB)
- Met with MBU Student Engagement
- Filmed b-roll and attended multiple SMF performances
- Met with SMF Board to review proposed Strategic Plan
- Presented at the VRLTA Shenandoah Valley Chapter meet-up
- Partnered with Virginia Tourism to host FAM with 10 Australian Travel Operators
- Hosted Influencer, Roshni Shah, at Frontier Culture Museum
- Met with Eddy Alexander Agency and fellow VA1 panelist to plan discussion
- Attended MATPRA Media Marketplace to pitch Staunton stories to travel writers and content creators
- Attended VMA Regional Marketplace to meet with Group Travel Operators
- Meetings Attended: GART, VA250, SVTP, Virginia by Rail, Beerwerks, SVTA, MATPRA, QCMM, Staunton PRIDE, CRUSA, EDA

Jessica elaborated on CRUSA: She will have have roughly about 40 appointments with international travelers in either fly, drive or group markets. We realize that international travelers end up staying longer in the area because they're coming here for a few weeks. We're hopefully able to capture them, that they get out of the city and come and visit small towns.

Samantha added: WWPL had 35 international visitors in a two-week span, and ASC and the Visitor Center also saw quite a few international travelers.

Sarah mentioned: Before the FCM, busloads of German tourists used to come be to see the Hessian house her family had purchased.

Samantha: VTC released their local economic impact reports. We will be having a press release come out in the next week or so. A snapshot of the city of Staunton 2023 did see 2% growth of tourism impact and spending. In terms of direct spending, there was a \$79.2 million spend from tourism in Staunton. That's up from \$77.6 million last year. 1,078 jobs were created and supported from the tourism industry. \$5.2 million of local taxes was generated from tourism. That's \$5.2 million that local residents are not paying.

Samantha: There was discussion on how a whole new wave of AI is changing and coming up first in search bars. You want your SEO to get you on the top 20 pages, so sometimes, they aren't even making it to our website. We anticipate numbers to drop because of this. We did see 16,000 outbound clicks on our website in August. Saw a nice increase in overall spending in July, with DC having a 1% increase, and New York a 3% increase. Baltimore also increased, and the Atlanta and Raleigh

Public Relations

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

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
July 14	10 Best Places to Live in the South	Travel + Leisure	14,869,703
Aug 30	22 Picturesque Mountain Towns To Visit This Fall With Fewer Crowds And Fabulous Foliage	Southern Living	13,169,296

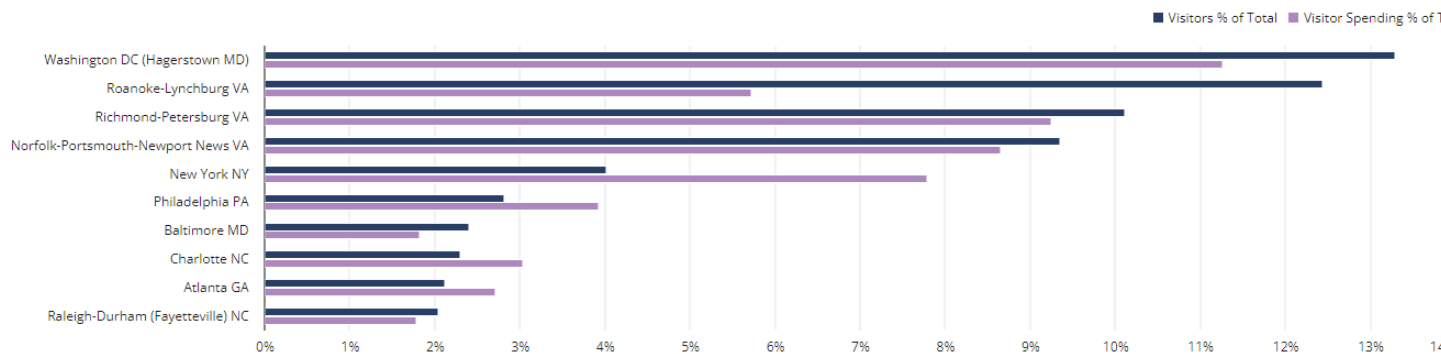
Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Aug 25	8 Undiscovered Small Towns in Virginia	World Atlas	5,403,689
Aug 23	10 Towns in Mid-South that Were Ranked Among US Favorites	World Atlas	5,403,689
Aug 5	Multiple West Virginia towns are finalists in the 14th annual Top Adventure Towns Contest	Yahoo! Lifestyle	4,382,107
Aug 15	Photos: THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST At ASC's Blackfriars Playhouse	BroadwayWorld.com	1,275,417
Aug 15	Photos: Shakespeare Center Presents MACBETH	BroadwayWorld.com	1,275,417
Aug 23	7 Charming Small Towns In The Blue Ridge Mountains To See Autumn Colors	The Travel	2,027,878
Aug 7	Maude & the Bear	InsideNoVa.com	330,490
Aug 26	Staunton students exposed to classical music through partnership with Staunton Music Festival	World News	254,196
Aug 17	Compositions, instruments span centuries at Staunton Music Festival	The Daily Progress	198,293
Aug 14	Staunton Music Festival spans centuries: The Eras Tour begins Friday	News Leader	107,767
Aug 25	Staunton: SDDA names Traipse CEO Darren Smith new executive director	The Augusta Free Press	98,295
Aug 7	All aboard: Fall excursion in the Shenandoah Valley offers immersive experience by train	The Augusta Free Press	93,256
Aug 17	Staunton Music Festival	News Virginian	17,822
Aug 4	Hear Together: Frontier Culture Museum – Lord Dunmore’s War Weekend	WNRN-FM	5,550
Aug 19	Day Trips for This Labor Day Weekend	Lynchburg Living Magazine	3,386
Aug 26	Roberto Sierra, Featured Living Composer at the Staunton Music Festival	Subito Music Corp	2,886
			48,919,137

Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
August 2023	August 2024	% Change
37,000 visitors	30,000 visitors	-18.92 %
224 visitor’s guide requests	151 visitor’s guide requests	-32.6%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

Top 10 Origin Markets by Visitation with their Spend



Increase from July: Increase of nearly 1% in spending and visitation from DC market. NY saw a large jump of nearly 3% in visitor spending. Baltimore also increased, and we saw Atlanta and Raleigh reappear in the Top 10 Origin Markets. Visitors contributed 16.9% of overall monthly spending, up 14.4% from last year, with a \$56 daily average, down from \$59 last year.

Smith Travel Research (STR) Hotel Occupancy Report

Occupancy (%)	2023												2024					
	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
This Year	45.7	54.0	60.8	65.7	65.5	60.9	60.8	60.7	67.2	53.4	40.0	35.1	42.5	48.6	55.6	61.6	58.5	57.5
Last Year	42.8	51.2	63.7	64.2	64.9	64.9	64.1	67.2	71.6	58.0	47.1	40.5	45.7	54.0	60.8	65.7	65.5	60.9
Percent 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	-6.9	-10.0	-8.5	-6.3	-10.7	-5.6

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Sector Reports – Retail

Sandi: Frontline was up double digits in August from July. His sales numbers for the year are double what they were the previous year. He sees the same basic business for shop and dine out. The Book Dragon was up in August over July, and just shy of double digits up for the year. We have a lot of events coming up, including the Queen City Word Fest.

Sector Reports – Restaurants

Sarah: Pro Re Nata + has opened, and getting rave reviews on food and atmosphere.

Sector Reports - Attractions

Camille: The SMF brought fifth graders and high school kids to the festival this year, which everyone... children, teachers, musicians ... really loved a lot. We're going to try to keep expanding our reach into Staunton City Schools. We have a really hard time telling people who've lived here their entire lives that we have this festival going on downtown. She knows people who are in theater and who are on different musical boards and have lived here for 50 years, and they don't know about the Stanton Music Festival.

Keith: Had a great time with students moving in. Trying to figure out how to promote QCMM better, as well as promoting students going downtown. Feel free to come to me with any ideas you may have. Kim shared out our [events calendar](#). You're able to sign up for that and get access to all of our events, and you can also post your own events there if they focus on our students. You'll also find a link on that same page for submitting announcements. That's where you can share less targeted things. We're trying to open up more resources to connect our students with downtown, and you all with our students.

Sarah: For QCMM, we could use a bunch of volunteers with being about 40 shifts short. Please encourage MBU students if they would like to participate. We've got Fishburn coming in strong.

Stephanie: Merry Wives of Windsor opens this evening with the preview performance (pay what you will). It's usually when we open the third show in the rep where we really start to see ticket sales pick up. That's translated to Dracula selling really, really well, even before it's open. The October 31 event that we have is half-way sold at this point. We're looking to create more collaborative pieces, like what we pushed out this week with Dracula, and so you'll be seeing a lot of community partners in that next email.

Samantha for Angus: They had an artist residency gallery and program where they had 509 visitors throughout the time, with an additional 350 throughout the closing reception on September 6. Art in the Park was over Labor Day weekend. We're working with them to try and pull some Zartico data, but again, it's just a sample size, not a full head count. With that, they did say they had 35% of vendors were on par with last year, and 53% of the vendors reported an increase in sales from the event last year. Only 12% were a little bit lower in sales from last year. They had 70 vendors, 40 of which traveled to be

here, with 23 coming in from over a 50-mile radius. Of the 23, it's split evenly between stays in an Airbnb and hotel stays.

Sector Reports – Lodging

Ross: August was up 2% for us, which was a bit of a surprise. August last year was super amazing. Occupancy was actually down by about 2.5% percent. We've had to push our rates to keep up with inflation. So even though we're having fewer guests, we're still growing in the right direction, which is great for the quarter we're behind. July was just brutal for us, but on pace for the year, things are solid and looking good for the festival coming up.

Michelle: Amazing August, up 5% in occupancy, 3% in ADR, 21% overall revenue year over year. It was a great change from July. July was so flat. In September, it's pretty flat, to last year. October looks like it's picking up, so it's really good. I mean, I know Costar reports are saying next year we're going to be backwards 4% here in kind of an even split between occupancy and ADR, so hopefully that'll slowly change over the next couple of months. Election week is really slow for us, but with November having a full three weeks before Thanksgiving week, we hope it will also be strong.

Old Business

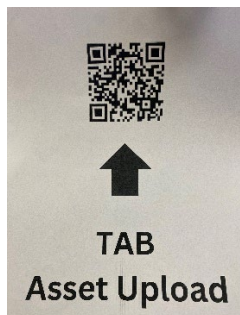
Sarah: For QCMM, there will be a keyed map this year. The map is a nod to the Main Street direction. Maps will be color coded according to the blocks and houses. Sarah left rack cards for everyone to take. Virginia Living is coming for the festival, and QCMM got a lot of great press this month, including Bethesda and Arlington magazines.

Sarah: Mentioned the Enchanted Mushroom Festival in Churchville the weekend of Oct. 5.

New Business

Samantha: For the next TAB, we will meet at Accordia at 9:30 am.

Samantha: Passed around a QR code for TAB members to upload their photos to our database for use in emails, social and other promotions. Please upload your own photos, or gets rights permissions to pass along to us.



Megan: Invited anyone who wanted to attend the local chapter of Creative Mornings.

Pamela: Reminded all about the City Council Candidate Forum on Sept. 18 at 7:00 pm in Council chambers.

Adjournment

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:01 am. Minutes: Kim Cormier