



## **Tourism Advisory Board**

**January 9, 2025 9:30 am**

**Caucus Room, City Hall, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor**

- 9:30 am Call to order, approval of past meeting minutes**
- 9:35 am Amanda Kauffman, Asst. City Manager – Lodging Tax Discussion**
- 9:50 am Samantha Johnson – Monthly Tourism Report**
- 10:00 am Sector Reports**
  - Lodging**
  - Restaurants**
  - Retail**
  - Attractions/Arts**
- 10:15 am Staunton Shout-Outs**
- 10:20 am Old Business**
- 10:25 am New Business**
- 10:30 am Adjourn**

# Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

November 7, 2024 9:30 am

## Members/City Staff Present:

Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon  
Steve Claffey, Mayor – City Council Liaison  
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South  
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum  
Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism  
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean  
Keith Taylor - Mary Baldwin University  
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library  
Jessica Williams (Zoom) – Sales and Marketing Manager

## Members/City Staff Absent:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center  
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival  
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute  
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia  
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro  
Ross Williams – Frederick House

## Others Present:

June Collmer – Heifetz Retail Shop  
Brooklyn Kennedy – Blackburn Inn  
Susanna Lerner – Barren Ridge Vineyards and Staunton Farmers’ Market  
Heather Leonard – Well Balanced Paw  
Amy Lessley and Izzy, her dog – Staunton Innovation Hub  
Molly Murphy – Queen City Music Studios and Staunton Jams  
Darren Smith – SDDA Executive Director  
Annette Spencer – Heritage Hospitality  
Juliette Swenson, CoArt Gallery  
Pamela Wagner – Arcadia Project

## Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

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

## Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Samantha: October was busy! Part of our marketing plan for this year is to partner with three travel influencers and content creators - two in the spring. Hosted Brian Oliver, travel influencer from Baltimore, which has been a strong, emerging market for us. We were happy to have Kelli Weaver from VTC with us recently. Also met with Susie Dull from MBU, hoping to utilize internship opportunities. We are also working with MBU on the marketing degree program in spring to partner on their senior Capstone project. The Inauguration at MBU was lovely with perfect weather. Attended a great author event at Staunton Books and Tea. In the process of hiring a new marketing agency for our regional tourism program. Mentioned upcoming Virginia Living cover and article featuring Julia Price, interior designer living in Staunton, who flipped a great property.

Jessica will be attending NTA in Huntsville, Alabama and currently has 15 appointments with motorcoach operators interested in our area. She will provide them with Staunton’s profile sheet and “speed date” Staunton to them, hoping to get additional motorcoaches to our area. We continue to build relationships with tour operators. Jessica asked that everyone please respond to the Google form about Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s events and specials by November 15th. We plan to use this info in our blog posts throughout the season.

**Activities:**

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured [Raise Your Glass for Virginia Cider Week](#), [Shopping Small in Staunton During the Holidays](#), [What You Need To Know About Thanksgiving In Staunton](#)
- VRLTA Government Affairs Update
- Met with hoteliers and regional attraction Directors
- Served of the Shenandoah Valley Tourism Partnership Marketing Agency Selection Committee
- Presented for Citizens University participants
- Attended the Shenandoah Valley Tourism Association’s 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event
- Host Virginia Tourism’s International Representatives for a FAM Tour
- Attended Virginia Tourism’s annual VA-1 Conference
- Presented on a panel discussion at VA-1
- Creative planning with Madden Media
- Met with Virginia Tourism’s Canadian delegate
- Meetings with data and technology providers
- Met with OTT/Digital and event calendar programming vendors
- Decorated Staunton Train Station for holiday season
- Attended National Travel Association’s Travel Exchange in Huntsville, AL – motorcoach travel market
- Meetings Attended: GART, VA 250, SVTP, Virginia by Rail, Beerwerks, QCMM, Staunton PRIDE, CRUSA

**Public Relations**

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

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Nov. 16	<a href="#">Frontier Culture Museum: ‘Out of Many, One’</a>	The Epoch Times	6,207,398
Nov. 16	<a href="#">10 Most Comfortable Towns in Virginia for Seniors</a>	World Atlas	5,859,707
Nov. 9	<a href="#">6 Towns in Virginia that Transport You to the Past</a>	World Atlas	5,859,707
Nov. 5	<a href="#">These 10 Towns In Virginia Were Ranked Among US Favorites In 2024</a>	World Atlas	5,630,448
Nov. 26	<a href="#">Renovations at Barristers Row are Complete</a>	WHSV-TV	312,127
Nov. 27	<a href="#">Take a Ride on These 6 Holiday Trains Within Driving Distance of NoVA</a>	Northern Virginia Mag	287,099
Nov. 27	<a href="#">Couple Behind Latin Soul Opening Brand New Mediterranean Restaurant in Staunton</a>	News Leader	137,099
Nov. 12	<a href="#">Vintage Toy Shop Opens in Downtown Staunton</a>	News Leader	137,099
Nov. 28	<a href="#">Staunton Offers Free Public Parking Over Holiday Season</a>	News Virginian	27,294

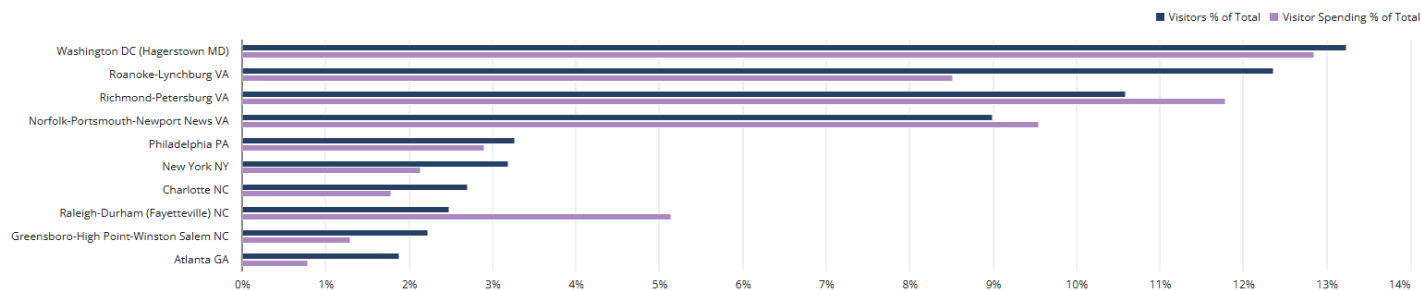
Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Nov. 8	<a href="#">Staunton Receives Prestigious Conservation Award for Gypsy Hill Park Stream Restoration</a>	Rocktown Now	19,395
Nov. 22	<a href="#">10 Small Virginia Towns That Become Real-life Winter Wonderlands</a>	The Dogwood	19,793
Nov. 1	<a href="#">Ski Getaways to Warm Up Winter</a>	Coastal Virginia Mag	9,168
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24,500,334</b>

### Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
November 2023	November 2024	% Change
32,832 visitors	33,423 visitors	+1.80 %
76 guide requests	99 visitor's guide requests	+30%

### Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

Top 10 Origin Markets by Visitation with their Spend



9,168 Sample Size



5% of Overall Restaurant Spend \$45



Increase in visitation by key Out-of-State Visitors including Philadelphia, NYC, & ATL



22% of Overall Retail Spend - \$132



44% of Overall Attraction Spend - \$139



53% Ages 25-54  
45% Household \$100k+  
37% Have Children

### Sector Reports – Lodging

Michelle: Ended up being flat for occupancy and slightly up on rate for October. Seeing similar results in November. December continues to pace behind, but we do see a big turn coming in January as we are

pacing ahead. Not sure about February at this time. We feel really lucky when we look at our competitive sets, as there are two hotels facing double digit losses for occupancy.

### **Sector Reports – Restaurants**

Sarah: Baja had a great September and October. The Chop House opened the end of September, and are doing really well. Latin Soul had a great Latin Festival. Samantha will send Sarah a Google Form to try to collect restaurant info from other restaurants for this sector report.

### **Sector Reports - Retail**

Sandi: Frontline had a good October. Foxtails said they had an absolutely fantastic October and are happy to be in downtown Staunton. Book Dragon was up double digits for October. The Book Fest went very well with over 42 authors and probably about 600 people. Planning for the same weekend next year. Many of the authors stayed overnight, and restaurants saw a bump.

### **Sector Reports – Attractions**

Paige: October was up for the FCM despite not holding Oktoberfest. Last year there were 1,400 in attendance. They saw around 400 for Archaeology Day, and Revolutionary War weekend saw 650 people. Tickets are on sale for Lantern Tours, and have already had to open up another slot. Will be doing holiday workshops as well as other programs to get through construction, especially once the chaos begins next year.

Robin: Fantastic October and numbers were really great. Individual numbers this year were higher than all of their other numbers combined. Offering free admission to veterans and active military for Veteran's Day with education stations set up. Will hold sessions through the month with mock-ups to get feedback. Will host Christopher Cox, former California U.S. Congressman who has written a meticulously researched book on Woodrow Wilson, suffrage and race.

Samantha for Stephanie: Officially sold out of student matinees for fall and Christmas Carol. Getting ready to roll-out 2025 Spring show lineup. They received great responses from the fall season partnership, and want to continue that collaboration on 2025. Reach out to Stephanie if interested.

Keith: MBU will be out the whole week of Thanksgiving. The semester ends of Dec. 6 with finals the week after.

### **Staunton Shout-Outs**

Juliette saw Charles Dicken's great-great grandson in a Christmas Carol at Wayne Theatre. It was excellent and she recommends going.

Sarah said Collin's Market is doing great and she celebrates them!

Darren shouted-out the Cat Costume participants, around 75 in all. He was impressed and people seemed to really enjoy it.

Pamela commended the blog post writer on Staunton Things We Are Thankful For. Samantha said Erin Smith is our blog post writer and she does a fantastic job.

Samantha shouted out Robin for being on the panel for the Heartland Documentary, and it was a great event overall.

Samantha shouted out Jessica for doing a fantastic job with budgeting/reaching out to the international market. She has been doing a lot of work in CRUSA. We have several international marketing reps that will be visiting next week.

Samantha shouted out John Glover, City Building Official for helping to find a solution at a city attraction within 48 hours.

Robin said the ambassador to the U.S. from South Korea visited recently with little fanfare, where normally that is a big deal.

### Old Business

Samantha noted the date of December 11 for the Group Tour Symposium held at WWPL. You should come away with some great ideas.

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.



### New Business

Samantha: Please send any ideas of possible Enterprise Zone Incentive suggestions to Amanda DiMeo, as there will be a working group in 2025 to discuss this.

Darren said the deadline to enter the Christmas Parade is November 11<sup>th</sup>. Sarah asked about the change in cost for vehicle groups from \$25 total to \$25 each. Parents complained about the parade on a school night that loads of vehicles in it, and their kids not getting to bed until late. They also complained about the level of noise.

Darren said Candy Cane Courtyard would be set up at the bank on Dec. 7<sup>th</sup>, and Gingerbread Gardens at WWPL on Dec. 14, with Dec. 21<sup>st</sup> being Santa's Workshop at the Space. Asking businesses to contribute wrapped packages with nothing in them for display.

Samantha said Virginia Scenic Railway's Santa Train tickets went on sale. Weekends are already sold out but Tu-We-Th tickets are still available.

Susanna noted that the Staunton Farmers' Holiday Market will be held on Dec. 7, 14 and 21 and holiday wreaths will be available.

Pamela: Arcadia Project just received an additional \$100,000 from the IRF, which brings total state investment to \$1.6 million. They also received a really nice matching grant from a family foundation, so they are in their final push. Construction activity should begin in early 2025. Marquee quotes are still available for 2025 for \$250 for the month.

Molly: Queen City Music Studios is now in the storefront at 16 W. Beverley, where Molly will slowly introduce retail such as strings and instrument needs. Will also have some jams in there, taking donations for the space. Also, more rehearsal space. Every Monday is the Old Time Jam, with every third Sunday being a square dance with Bill Wellington. There was also a recent concert to benefit musicians impacted in NC from the hurricane flooding. Molly has put together some Caroling groups for Downtown on Saturdays in December.

June said the Heifetz Homecoming Concert is December 14<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm in the Francis Auditorium at MBU. The Summer institute will run from June 30<sup>th</sup> to August 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Amy: Nov. 12 is free co-working day at the SIH. There will be breakfast as well as a headshot event. There are sponsorship opportunities for 2025 for Happy Hours, so please reach out.

Amy: If interested, contact Mary Sullivan with Virginia Talent and Opportunity Partnership, offering paid internships.

Samantha: No December TAB meeting. Next meeting scheduled for January 9, 2025.

Looking to have off-site TAB Meetings maybe once per quarter if anyone would like to host.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:00 am. Minutes: Kim Cormier