



Tourism Advisory Board

April 10, 2025 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, 1st Floor

- 9:30 am Call to order, approval of past meeting minutes**
- 9:35 am Jessica Blythe, Assistant Director of Economic Development**
- 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

March 13, 2025 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, First Floor

Members/City Staff Participating:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center

Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon

Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival

Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)

Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum

Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism

Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean

Corrie Park – City Council Liaison

Keith Taylor - Mary Baldwin University

Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager

Members/City Staff Absent:

Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South

Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia

Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro

Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library

Ross Williams – Frederick House

Others Participating:

Jessica Blythe – Asst. Director of Economic Development

Lowell Brown - Citizen

Megan Burrows – Burrow & Vine

June Collmer – Heifetz Retail Shop

Breanna Decker – Juniper Lane

Amy Lessley – Staunton Innovation Hub

Dave Metz – Citizen

Kevin Ross, Brooklyn Kennedy, Katie Campbell, Robin Miller – Blackburn Inn & Conference Center

Felicia Sheets – Marino’s

Annette Spencer – Heritage Hospitality

Juliette Swenson – CoArt Gallery

Christian Vames – Frontline Models and Hobbies

Pamela Wagner – Arcadia Project

Madeline and Alycia - MBU

Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. Introductions were made. There were notes from Samantha from the previous Zoom meeting where there was technical trouble, but not official minutes to approve.

Samantha commended Jessica Williams and Gretchen Long from Queen City Creative on receiving “Visitor Guide of The Year” from the Virginia Tourism Corp (VTC). The twelve VTC Welcome Centers voted. The framed award will be hanging in the Visitor Center soon.

Mary Baldwin University Senior Capstone Project – Alycia and Madeline, MBU Seniors

Alycia and Madeline discussed a collaborative event to bridge the gap between Mary Baldwin University (MBU) students and downtown Staunton, which could include music and vendor involvement. They suggested the event could be held on Barrister’s Row or other central locations. After input and

discussion from TAB members, they are hopeful for potential partnerships with businesses for vendor tables, coupons/promotions, event lanyards, and food/beverage offerings. They need to determine if Saturday might be a better day for the event versus Friday. The students hope the first event would be held in September, like a welcome back event. There was discussion of it being a monthly event, with holiday themes perhaps, and they may reach out to venues like Blackburn, the Arcadia Project, and Studio Broad to potentially host the MBU student event during winter months. There was mention of the possibility of a t-shirt that businesses could wear in support of MBU for these events. Samantha suggested having certain days of the week like "Fighting Squirrel Friday" where discounts were offered to students. Felicia at Marinos said they have MBU days at Marinos now. Megan suggested having places to host students for study times, maybe providing light snacks, coffee, tea, etc. There was also mention of a passport, but the students suggested not everyone was in favor of it.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Samantha provided an overview of the tourism report for February:

- We're seeing a consistent flow in line with the state and national average with hotel revenue and stays down.
- Submitting a VTC grant today for new campaign targeting Charlotte NC, as our data shows they are most likely to spend on accommodations.
- We hosted 40 members of VTC staff for a retreat here in Staunton, who are charged with telling the story of Staunton to a greater market. They participated in events such as charcuterie making/wine tasting and wand making.
- Great organic article in Travel and Leisure.

Jessica reported:

- Met with 25-30 tour operators and planners at ABA in Philadelphia. Have sent out follow up to ones that wanted or needed specific information. When in Philly, we meet with travel planners from all over the US.
- Primary themes for group travel: VA250, which actually ranges from 2025 to 2031, as it celebrates the entire revolution. People also want hands-on experiences.
- Encouraging groups to come in spring, summer or winter as fall is saturated. Some are coming for the train in April.
- Group travel show season begins again in August, so would love to have some itineraries or experiences as operators will be booking 2026 and 2027 now.
- Samantha added most group tours are seniors, so keep that in mind when thinking about your product and space (mobility).
- There is a decrease in engagement on Facebook, most likely due to the political climate as well as other things. We will continue to post there, but also continue on Instagram for reels and some YouTube. Will also continue to look at other platforms. Jessica is also tagging businesses more often to increase the reach.

Activities:

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured, [Presidential Road Trips: Historic Sites You Can Visit, Where To Get Your Staunton Margarita on National Margarita Day, Tying the Knot in Staunton – National Wedding Planning Day](#)
- Launched the new podcast, [The U is Silent; We Aren't](#)
- Facilitated meeting between Virginia Tourism and 3 local businesses

- Attended Staunton Black Business Collective New Year Planning
- Collaborative meeting with Charlottesville CVB Destination Development team
- Attended Navigating Disasters training
- Attended Greater Augusta Chamber of Commerce Excellence Awards
- Judged the VRLTA ProStart Invitational
- Jessica attended American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace to sell motorcoach travel in Staunton
- Meetings Attended: GART, VA 250, HBA, SVTP, Virginia by Rail, Beerwerks, VRLTA, MATPRA

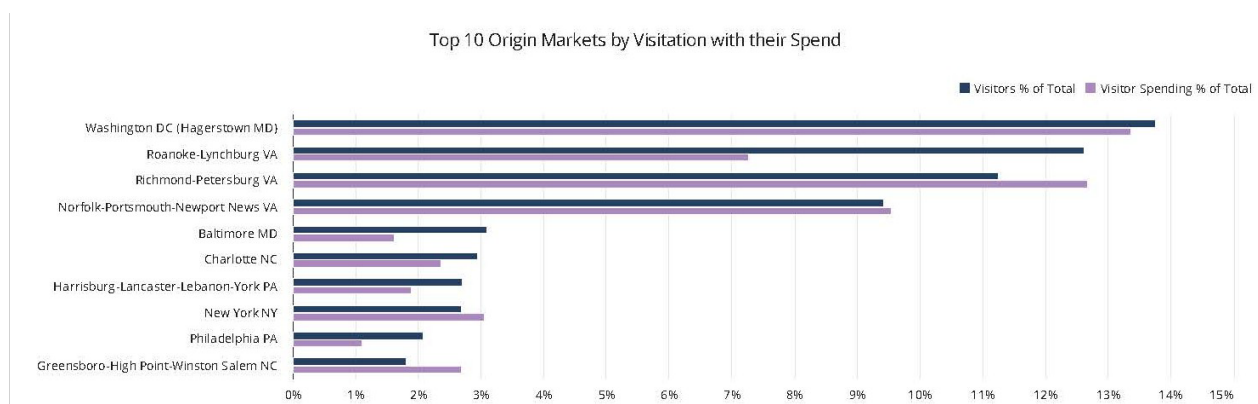
Public Relations

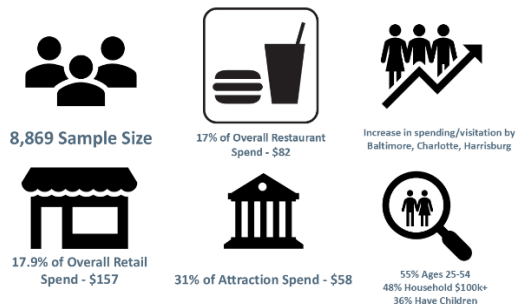
The Following is a list of newspapers, websites, magazines, and television stations that published articles about Staunton:

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Feb. 15	This Small Virginia Town Has a Scenic Train Ride, 6 Historic Districts, and Easy Access to Shenandoah National Park	Travel + Leisure	9,876,963
Feb. 28	6 Virginia Towns That Rival Europe's Best	World Atlas	5,704,883
Feb. 16	Top 8 Virginia Towns To Visit In 2025	World Atlas	5,704,883
Feb. 19	Photos: Louisa May Alcott's LITTLE WOMEN Opens At The American Shakespeare Center	BroadwayWorld.com	1,308,615
Feb. 11	8 Unassuming Restaurants In Virginia With Outrageously Delicious Steaks	Family Destinations Guide	757,262
Feb. 21	Ultimate Virginia Bucket List: 100 Things To Do With Kids in VA	Mommy Poppins	532,555
Feb. 25	Historic Staunton Foundation to Stabilize Civil War-era Cabell Log House	WHSV-TV	372,200
Feb. 28	Secrets Of Virginia's Ancient Natural Villages	TouristSecrets	45,553
Feb. 5	Destination Downtown: The Main Street Adventure Guide	Blue Ridge Outdoors	35,436
		TOTAL	24,354,408

Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
February 2024	February 2025	% Change
30,615 visitors	27,724 visitors	-9.9 %
169 guide requests	138 visitor's guide requests	-18.3%





Sector Reports – Lodging

No report

Sector Reports – Restaurants

No report

Sector Reports - Retail

Samantha: Two businesses downtown closing, the Foundry and Blair Made. Half of reporting businesses reported increases, and half reported decreases. Many did report markets beyond local for the Northern Virginia, New York, Charlotte and DC markets also.

June: Listening room is very popular. Have enjoyed having an MBU student part-time in the shop. June noted Heifetz concerts are free for MBU students.

Sector Reports – Attractions

Camille: For Staunton Music Festival, pre-sales for subscription passes went on sale in November, and are up 139%. Up overall 101% for all pass sales, and have surpassed last years' total pass sales already.

Paige: The museum's construction has closed the Frontier Drive gate. A charity event on March 29 will support 13 local nonprofits affected by the United Way closure.

Andrew: at full enrollment already at 160 students for summer. Will have additional venues this year around downtown. Arrival date is June 22, and again on July 13. August 3 is the big move-out. Bach Around the Clock is on March 22 and all programming is listed online.

Staunton Shout-Outs

Samantha commended Breanna and Megan for their work on International Women's Day. Megan said they had a lot of participation and some great numbers. Their survey said 90% of businesses said it was their best weekend so far for 2025. Megan gave a recap of all weekend activities and said they plan to do something similar next year. Breanna added the swag bags and coupons were well received.

Old Business

[Link 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.

Please use this link to list your events on VisitStaunton.com. Here is the [page of events that have been submitted](#). They will also be included in [Staunton on Tap](#).

Samantha: The podcast “The U is Silent, We Aren’t” has launched and is on several different listening platforms as well as the video itself is on our website.

New Business

Samantha:

- Our new marketing campaign will launch in April, and will also have a Charlotte-based content creator named Shonda in Staunton.
- Emphasized the importance of social media engagement and the need for spring marketing assets (photos, videos). You must have full rights to be able to share them with us. Here is the [link for TAB members to upload their content to our database](#).
- Virginia Scenic Railway is adding two new cars to the train; one with staggered pricing and an adult-only car with a bar.
- International inbound travel plans are being impacted due to the current political climate. VTC is pausing paid advertising and focusing more on organic marketing. We ask that you provide travel data as you can, particularly from attractions and hoteliers. Also, please share and info you see or learn, positive or negative, on international visitation and travel trends. Katie mentioned they had two people directly call saying they would not be traveling to this area due to the current political climate. Andrew noted it was an increasing challenge getting visas for Heifetz faculty and they have come to terms that they will lose some for this summer. There is less of a hoop for students to jump through, some already being here studying abroad and in conservatories.
- Shop and Dine Out coming up – let us know your offerings and we can include in social media or blog posts
- First Fridays are no longer happening.
- Sarah said Darren with SDDA is meeting intensively with Virginia Main Street since the lapse in an SDDA Director.
- Pamela spoke about an event on March 29 at Trinity Church that is aiming to assist the 13 local non-profits that were seriously impacted by the closing of the United Way.
- Jessica Blythe noted the [business retention survey](#) is open until the end of the month, and she hopes everyone will have a chance to complete it.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:59 am. Minutes: Kim Cormier