



Tourism Advisory Board

July 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 Samantha Johnson – Monthly Tourism Report

9:45 am Sector Reports

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

10:00 am Staunton Shout-Outs

10:05 am Old Business

10:15 am New Business

10:30 am Adjourn

Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

June 12, 2025 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, First Floor

Members/City Staff Participating:

Jessica Blythe – Assistant Director of Economic Development
Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum
Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism
Amanda Kaufman – Assistant City Manager
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean
Corrie Park – City Council Liaison
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library
Keith Taylor - Mary Baldwin University
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager

Members/City Staff Absent:

Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival
Brian Gearhart – Heritage Hospitality
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Others Participating:

Scarlet – The Queen Bee
Ellen Boden – Staunton Antiques Center
Adrienne Butler – The Green Room
Kristen Dollar – Magnolia Rose
Heather Hopkins – Studio Broad
Brooklyn Kennedy – Blackburn Inn
Susanna Larner – Barren Ridge Vineyards
Julia Sabin – Staunton Books and Tea
Rich Saunders – Collins Market
Darren Smith – SDDA
Scotty Tiernan – SDDA Creative Marketing and Events Coordinator
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.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Activities:

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured [Welcome Back, Warm Weather!](#), [Staunton’s Wharf: Top Things to See and Do](#), [Make It A Long Weekend In Staunton](#), [Let Us Be Your Guide on a Staunton Tour](#)
- Podcast Episodes Released: [The U is Silent; We Aren’t – Episode 6: Real, Rooted, & Rising: Danielle McEwen’s Bold Playbook to Business](#), Episode 7: [Watch Ya Mouth, Trust Ya Gut: How Chaos and Creativity Launched Startup Success](#)
- [Made of Magic](#) campaign hyper-targeting family travelers and the Charlotte market
- Celebrated National Travel & Tourism Week
- Hosted 10 international travel agents from the UK with VTC and Brand USA
- Attended International Strategic Planning Meeting with Virginia Tourism Corporation
- Hosted regional focus groups + hosted site visits for VTC Strategic Plans
- Provided Staunton Coloring Books to Art on the Town
- Attraction visits with VTC Destination Manager
- Ms. Williams attended a preview of Blackburn Inn’s new “Behind the Scenes” Tour
- Jessica Williams represented Staunton at the VSAE Annual Conference
- Meetings Attended: GART, VA 250, HBA, QCMM, SVTP, Virginia by Rail, Beerwerks, VRLTA, MATPRA, Creative Mornings

Public Relations

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

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
May 10	19 Fascinating Small Towns Where Historic Theaters Still Stand as Living Testaments to Imagination and Community Spirit	MSN.com	110,190,075
May 12	Heifetz 2025 Festival of Concerts: 63 Concerts and Events Across Staunton and the Shenandoah Valley	Yahoo Entertainment	31,383,340
May 20	11 VA Towns Ranked Among Best Places To Live By U.S. News	Patch.com	8,651,777
May 23	Virginians Are Hitting The Road For The Mouth-Watering Mashed Potatoes At This Humble Restaurant	Family Destinations Guide	1,186,381
May 23	The Mashed Potatoes At This Virginia Restaurant Are So Good, You’ll Want To Live Next Door	Family Destinations Guide	1,186,381
May 23	This Unassuming Restaurant In Virginia Has Mashed Potatoes That Are Absolutely To Die For	Family Destinations Guide	1,186,381
May 8	Staunton: Heifetz Institute Latest to Lose NEA Grant Funding	Augusta Free Press	569,929
May 7	Staunton Music Festival Loses \$10K NEA Grant. How you can help	Augusta Free Press	569,929
May 12	Heifetz Institute Loses \$20,000 in Funding from National Endowment for the Arts	WHSV-TV	260,455
May 1	Staunton, Virginia: A Place to Press Pause and Reconnect	Northern Virginia Magazine	60,862

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
May 12	Heifetz 2025 Festival of Concerts: 63 Concerts and Events Across Staunton and the Shenandoah Valley	News Leader	60,062
May 5	Secrets Of Virginia's Great Wagon Road Junctions	TouristSecrets	45,018
May 2	Roam If You Want To	Richmond Magazine	40,578
May 1	New 'Beer Hiking in Virginia' Guide Connects Shenandoah to Eastern Shore, Hikers to Brews	The News And Advance	38,610
May 14	Misty Morning Valleys Of Virginia's Shenandoah Await	TouristSecrets	32,771
May 21	Staunton Named in "Best Places to Live in Virginia in 2025-2026"	Rocktown Now	24,373
May 14	Summer Arts Preview	The Georgetowner	23,582
May 1	New 'Beer Hiking in Virginia' Guide Connects Shenandoah to Eastern Shore, Hikers to Brews	The News Virginian	13,547
May 28	The 10 Best Blue Ridge Parkway Museums to Visit	Blue Ridge Mountains Travel Guide	11,293
May 6	The 13 Coolest & Quirkiest Museums in Virginia	The Dogwood	6,868
May 7	Beyond Your Backyard - Staunton, VA	WORL-AM	1,645
May 27	18 Virginia Attractions You Can Visit for Free with Culture Passes	The Good Information Foundation	96
May 5	The 2025 Top 25 Historic Hotels of America® Best of Adaptive Reuse List Is Announced in Celebration of Preservation Month	Metro Latino USA	-
		TOTAL	155,543,953

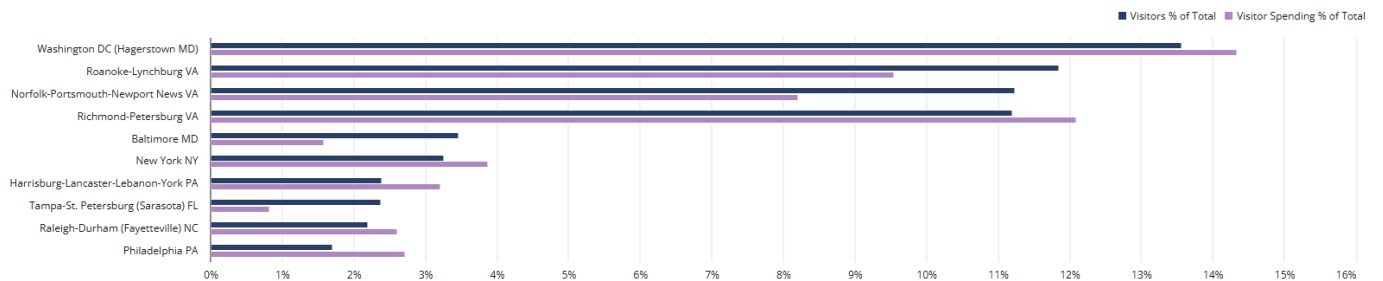
Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
May 2024	May 2025	% Change
40,986 visitors	43,659 visitors	+6.3 %
138 guide requests	185 visitor's guide requests	+34%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

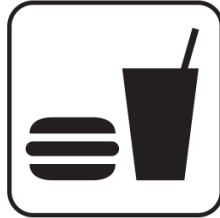
-April 2025-

Top 10 Origin Markets by Visitation with their Spend





9,220 Sample Size



13% of Overall Restaurant Spend - \$73



Hotel Occupancy +7.5%



16.6% of Overall Retail Spend - \$157



9% of Attraction Spend - \$70



52% Ages 25-54
48% Household \$100k+
38% Have Children

Samantha: Podcast is going well and sitting close to 10,000 views. Jessica attended VSAE, and shared that she met with meeting planners who are planning meetings either next year and into the future. May had some good PR, especially the Garden and Gun feature. A one-page ad there is close to \$40,000, so to get a two-and-a-half-page organic spread is pretty phenomenal. 6% overall increase in our web traffic. April saw a 7.5% occupancy increase, which was very encouraging. Not a ton of change between our top 10 markets for April, we continue to see DC, which we're steadily watching. Zartico will be including a local visitor module soon. It also provides a top 10 market for who are within 50-mile radius. In April, 26% came from Rockingham County, which was interesting to see. This does break down retail, restaurants, outdoor, but also accommodations. Following is 24% by City of Staunton, Waynesboro, then Harrisonburg and Charlottesville. Launched our new campaign in April "Made of Magic" in Charlotte in April. Running OTC which is basically streaming service ads, and also running digital ads. In May, typically, Charlotte had been around number eight, nine or ten in website traffic. They jumped to number one in May with a 1,250% increase in website traffic, which, of course, there is money going behind this. That has been encouraging. It should take a few months to see if this translates to visitation. We would love your insight on who is visiting and staying. Virginia Tourism will be going hard into the Philly market, and we are watching that as well. We received \$9,100 from the marketing leverage grant from VTC for the Made of Magic Campaign. We also received a destination marketing grant for \$10,000 for "Step Off The Bus, Step Into Your Story" targeting motorcoach and group travel. We'll be leveraging that for trade shows, meetings, advertising and different products for that particular market. The Micro Business Marketing leverage grant is also open right now. It will be open until July 24 and it's a \$5,000 grant through VTC, and you have to have under 24 full time employees to apply. It can be for Main Street programs, restaurants, retail, and breweries or wineries. VTC has also sent out a partnership form to let them know you would be willing to host travel writers, travel agents or work with them on things like guaranteed meals rates, etc. We will be working with Key Data which is a short-term rental data system which will give us insight on occupancy for those types of units.

Sector Reports – Lodging

Michelle: For May, we had fairly flat occupancy and all of our gains were in daily rate and in our food and beverage aspect. Memorial Day week was actually a little busier than we expected. June has started off a little bit slow. As far as our transient weekend pick up, we usually will still be selling out on weekends. Now, we're getting close, but not quite there. Bookings are coming very last minute. For July, we're up 27% so we're hoping we continue to get that transient pick up on the weekends in July. Looking really strong July and the same moving into August. We don't have as many group bookings in August, so we are relying a little bit more on that transient pickup. We are expecting to have a strong August.

Sector Reports – Restaurants

Sarah: Staunton Jams was a great kick-off into May, Baja up 10% out last year. Most people that filled out the google sheet that came from tourism were up over April, but down year May 2024 to 2025. Spoke to a lot of people in the streets from the Charlotte area.

Sector Reports - Retail

Samantha: Retailers that reported to us were split. Three reported higher sales both month over month and year over year, and four reported either lower or flat. The restaurants and attractions reported consistent visitation from Northern Virginia and Richmond and also an increase in North Carolina. Several also reported international visitors coming through from Canada, UK and a couple other areas.

Sector Reports – Attractions

Robin: We had a wonderful May, up a little over 10% over the previous May, and 17% ahead in our fiscal year compared to the prior year. I think a lot of the reason we're seeing such an increase is because our Visitor Center moved and we have the open flag right on Frederick St. with the parking adjacent. A lot of our visitors are now staying longer, like two and a half hours. Press release going out June 24th program called Civics in the Shade, which will be held in the garden. Will be holding our first cohort of Future Presidents of America, created by different presidential libraries across the country. The age group is 12-14 years old. They will be going to City Hall meeting in Council Chambers, talking with the City Manager, having spoken with Councilman Shepherd the night before.

Stephanie: Both summer shows are running in rep with the Winter's Tale opening last week. With May and June being pretty show, running one show by itself has told us a lot about FY26 planning. A reviewer comes in on Friday which will hopefully increase house attendance, and campers are also in session now.

Paige: Up a little bit from April, but we also didn't have the adventures at the museum with the school system, which accounts for 4000 school kids in April or May. Year over year we were flat or down by 1%. Hopefully construction is not scaring people away.

Keith: July 21-26 is Virginia Private Colleges week. it gets a lot of juniors and seniors in high school out to private colleges like Mary Baldwin. We are actively looking for local businesses, especially downtown, to partner with whether that be for events, for lodging, deals, for discounts or anything that you would be interested to provide.

Staunton Shout-Outs

Samantha shouted out Morgan Smith from the City Manager's Office. She directed Nine to Five The Musical at Oak Grove Theatre and it was fantastic!

Adrienne shouted out Remedy Burger who just received their first "Best of Virginia" award. Remedy is the second-best burger in the valley behind Jack Brown's which has many locations.

Pamela shouted out Kim Cormier, who she learned curates Staunton on Tap each week. Kim mentioned we will be trying a new calendar platform that scrapes websites and Facebook pages for events, and more info will be going out soon. Pam added that is an excellent resource even so people can be tourists in their own town. Samantha shared there is an upcoming idea for local engagement.

Samanth shouted out the Green Room for picking up the SWAG writers open Mic night.

Sarah shouted out Josh Knight in the City Manager's office for doing the Facebook reels on things like trash can rollout and road projects.

Corrie shouted out the Visitor Center staff for being so helpful in following up when people have been interested in particular products that she carries. She noted the staff was very attentive.

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](#).

New Business

Sarah mentioned the Staunton Downtown Business Owner's Facebook page as a way to reach out to each other with information. She also said that SDDA has started their membership drive and that is free this year. Samantha added to let us know if you'd like to be on the TAB Distribution list as well as the weekly e-new list.

The Holiday Inn is hosting a Business After Hours on July 19 and invited the TAB members to attend. Bring your business cards as there will be raffles.

Jessica Blythe spoke about the Business Retention surveys , where 44 respondents gave input on doing business in the City of Staunton. 80% of the businesses that responded said they would choose Staunton again. 79% of those surveys expected steady or increased sales over the next year. One of the big takeaways for us was the struggle to find qualified workers, so that's going to guide some of the work that we do over the next year. Jessica is deep into Enterprise Zone amendments. There have been two stakeholder groups from folks who responded to the survey and said they'd be willing to participate, and we've gotten some really great feedback. They meet with EDA in just a few weeks to go over those draft amendments. If that's something you're interested in seeing and giving some feedback on, Jess would love it, because we are trying to make these incentives more accessible to our smaller businesses, as before, they were more targeted to large industry or very specific sectors, and so we're trying to remove some of those barriers, because we want it to be accessible and used.

Sarah brought QCMM posters for all to take to display. Looking for some businesses to host items from each year as a retrospective. Will have a breakout session for new QCMM participants.

Samanth said there are also Happy Birthday America posters to take. Paige noted the FCM moved their Independence Day event to July 5.

Samantha asked that you let us know about any and all discounts, deals and events that we can help to share on our social media and blog posts.

Ellen shared she would like to know more about what is happening in retail and how we are promoting that. Jessica explained how we curate our blog post topics and try to include different examples all the time of retail, restaurants, lodging and attractions. She also encouraged all to share their images. Sarah said she believed when we get tourists to town they are going to shop, if the businesses are open. Julia noted that the foot traffic seems the same, but less people are buying. Sarah believes we can not control everything, and we just need to provide good customer service and smile, be kind and helpful, while keeping our employees engaged and interested when times are slow. Amanda Kaufman mentioned that Shop and Dine Out is 7 months long and is an event, and it is not too late to get any business signed up if they are interested.

Pam mentioned music on the street called "Arcadia Presents" select weekends throughout Shop and Dine Out, as well as offering tours of the Arcadia Project.

Sarah from the Queen Bee said she was interested in partnering with other businesses. She is located in the former Rask Florist Building on the corner of Augusta and Frederick.

Kristan with Magnolia Rose said they are open 7 days a week. They are a non-profit who are all volunteers who support their mission of being the only emergency human trafficking shelter in Virginia.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:43 am. Minutes: Kim Cormier