



Tourism Advisory Board

June 12, 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

May 8, 2025 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, First Floor

Members/City Staff Participating:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center
Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)
Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism
Amanda Kaufman – Assistant City Manager
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library
Keith Taylor - Mary Baldwin University
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Members/City Staff Absent:

Brian Gearhart – Heritage Hospitality
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean
Corrie Park – City Council Liaison
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro

Others Participating:

Scott & Jackie – Ciders From Mars
Madeline
Megan Burrows – Burrow and Vine
June Collmer – Heifetz Retail Shop
Kim Davidson – Arcadia Project and Reunion Bakery
Brooklyn Kennedy – Blackburn Inn
Breanna Decker – Juniper Lane
Amy Lessley – Staunton Innovation Hub
Molly Murphy – Staunton Jams
Darren Smith - SDDA
Annette Spencer – Heritage Hospitality
Juliette Swenson – CoArt Gallery
Christian Vames – Frontline Models and Hobbies
Pamela Wagner – Arcadia Project

Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. Introductions were made. Ross made a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes, and Stephanie seconded the motion.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Busy Spring, launched our “Made of Magic” campaign, as the comment came up often no matter who was talking about Staunton, highlighting the big things visitors can experience as well as the unmatched, unique experiences and the everyday things. Focusing on family travelers from the Charlotte NC market as data showed they were likely to spend more and stay longer. Still marketing to our strongest market, NoVa and DC. Charlotte, Baltimore and Philadelphia are growing strongly for us.

Charlotte is a 4-hr. drive range and also a direct flight to/from SHD. Testing this market for the next several months. Campaign went out, digital ads went out, social content went out. Hosted two influencers recently, one from the Charlotte market. We also have had a social content creator from the DC market. Jessica and Samantha volunteered at the VA 250 Mobile Museum at Frontier Culture Museum. They did a fabulous job hosting, and there were three busses lined up literally the minute it opened and they were ready to go with field trips. Jessica spoke about the redesign of the Beerwerks program with new rack cards coming out. There is a new marketing agency, and 2026 will be the 10-year anniversary! Possibly attending some beer festivals, plus a different type of T shirt to celebrate 10 years, and we are now 20 breweries strong. There is a new business, The Carriage, a 14-passenger mini bus that now will pick you up from a location and take you around to the breweries that are along the trail. SVTP has had some bumps in the road with their website and other issues, and they are working with their current agency to remedy that. GART will be working with the Historical Society to redo their rack card. Samantha said more VA250 PR will be coming out. National Tourism and Travel week coming up, and Samantha thanked all of the partners for welcoming visitors to Staunton. Tourism makes an \$80 million impact in Staunton each year, and that is estimated to save every household in Staunton \$700 per year. Samantha asked that anyone who has ideas for marketing, community buy-in or partnerships to share their ideas in the watering can in the back.

Activities:

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured Earth Day and All Things Green in Staunton, 6 Unique Stays in Staunton for Your Next Getaway, Staunton Is Made of Magic, National Indie Bookshop Day in Staunton!, Staunton After Dark
- Podcast Episodes Released: The U is Silent; We Aren't - Episode 4: Steel Rails, Scenic Trails: Why Train Travel Still Captivates Us, Episode 5: Breaking Bread and Boundaries: The Audacious Rise of Ian Boden
- Visit Staunton launched the new Made of Magic campaign hyper-targeting family travelers and the Charlotte market
- Samantha met with Virginian legislators during Destination Capitol Hill to discuss issues facing the tourism industry
- Attended VADMO Spring Symposium
- Attended Virginia Tourism Leadership Institute training
- Hosted content creators @brown.eyed.flower.child from Charlotte and @shiondafarrel from DC
- Volunteered at the VA250 Mobile Museum hosted by Frontier Culture Museum
- Created several itineraries for motorcoach customers and FAM tours
- Appeared on Charlotte Today to promote visitation to Staunton from Charlotte
- Attended Go Virginia and VEDA round table discussion
- Shenandoah Beerwerks Trail annual Brewer meeting
- Meetings Attended: GART, VA 250, HBA, 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
Apr. 25	Ride Merle Haggard's Vintage Dome Train Car Through Virginia	MSN.com	122,324,471
Apr. 25	Mother's Day Founder, Anna Jarvis Irked By Commercialization Of Holiday	MSN.com	122,324,471

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Apr. 21	Augusta County Driving Tour Showcases Historical Gems Of The Shenandoah Valley	Yahoo! Life	19,351,079
Apr. 25	Ride Country Star Merle Haggard's Vintage Dome Train Through Virginia	Axios	14,049,855
Apr. 14	Not Worth The Stars: Why Virginia Said No To Michelin	Axios	14,049,855
Apr. 14	10 Virginia Towns With Unforgettable Main Streets	World Atlas	6,145,520
Apr. 13	8 Virginia Towns With A Slower Pace Of Life	World Atlas	6,145,520
Apr. 12	11 Serene Virginia Towns For A Weekend Retreat	World Atlas	6,145,520
Apr. 11	9 Most Hospitable Towns In Virginia	World Atlas	6,145,520
Apr. 10	12 Offbeat Virginia Towns To Visit In 2025	World Atlas	6,145,520
Apr. 4	8 Underrated Destinations In Virginia To Avoid Summer Crowds	World Atlas	5,439,218
Apr. 24	Mother's Day Founder, Anna Jarvis Irked By Commercialization Of Holiday	The Columbus Dispatch	3,102,752
Apr. 22	5 Easy Day Trips You Can Take From Richmond, My Favorite Included	Only In Your State	1,532,366
Apr. 28	Discover The Magic Of Staunton – Sponsored By Visitstaunton.Com	WCNC-TV	1,385,938
Apr. 8	If You Love Mashed Potatoes, You Need To Try This Low-Key Restaurant In Virginia This Spring Break	Family Destinations Guide	995,394
Apr. 2	Spring Break In Virginia Isn't Complete Without A Trip To This Charming Small Town	Family Destinations Guide	995,394
Apr. 2	If You're Planning A Spring Day Trip, You Need To Visit This Gorgeous Small Town In Virginia	Family Destinations Guide	995,394
Apr. 2	The Gorgeous Historic Town In Virginia That's Straight Out Of A Hallmark Movie	Family Destinations Guide	995,394
Apr. 7	Richmond Restaurants Snubbed By The James Beard Awards Again	Richmond Times Dispatch	421,463
Apr. 1	9 Photos Of The Virginia Museum Of Fine Arts From The Times-Dispatch Archives	Richmond Times Dispatch	421,463
Apr. 4	Staunton's Sears Hill Bridge Reopens To The Public	WHSV-TV	362,767
Apr. 4	Shop And Dine Out In Downtown Staunton Returns For Sixth Year	WHSV-TV	362,767
Apr. 1	9 Photos Of The Virginia Museum Of Fine Arts From The Times-Dispatch Archives	The Daily Progress	233,293
Apr. 19	A Charming Virginia City Full Of Artistic Energy And Unmatched Local Character Is A Hidden Historic Gem	Islands Magazine	156,068
Apr. 2	Vista Dome Car Once Owned By Country Music Star Now Part Of Virginia Scenic Railway's Fleet	News Leader	81,881
Apr. 21	Augusta County Driving Tour Showcases Historical Gems Of The Shenandoah Valley	News Leader	69,861

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Apr. 9	Take A Spring Day Trip To Shenandoah Valley	Northern Virginia Magazine	60,862
Apr. 18	Virginia Scenic Railway Brings Riders To Staunton And Beyond	Daily News Record	50,625
Apr. 29	Secrets Of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley Mountain Communities	Tourist Secrets	45,018
		TOTAL	346,018,904

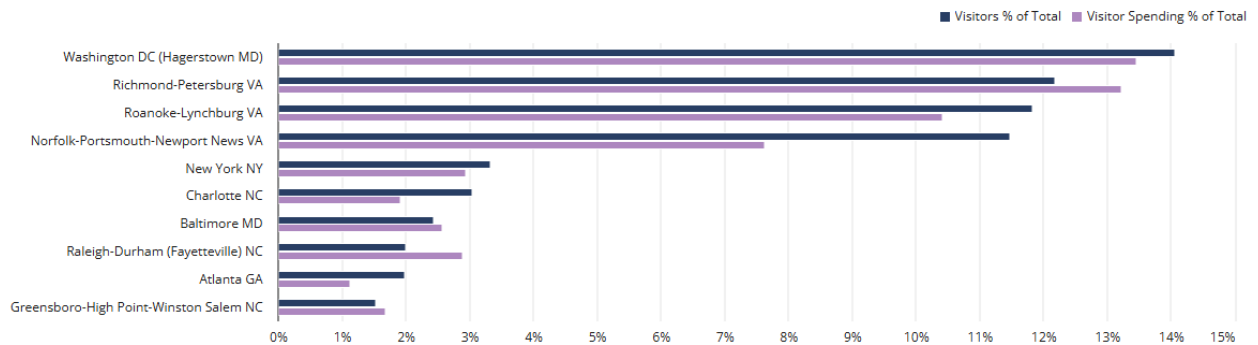
Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
April 2024	April 2025	% Change
35,566 visitors	38,151 visitors	+7.3 %
168 guide requests	145 visitor's guide requests	-13.6%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

March 2025

Top 10 Origin Markets by Visitation with their Spend





8,198 Sample Size



13% of Overall Restaurant Spend - \$78



Visitor Spend UP 11% over 2024
Hotel Occupancy UP 2%



15% of Overall Retail Spend - \$182



9% of Attraction Spend - \$70



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

Pamela Wagner and Kim Davidson – Presentation on The Arcadia Project

The building is on the other end of West Beverley. It is over 100 years old, originally built in the Italian Renaissance Revival style. There was a fire in 1936 and it has been completely rebuilt. It is a cornerstone of our community, a historic center piece. In the 80s, it was split into four screens as the Dixie movie theater. It has been sitting empty for many years. A big piece of taking on this project is that historic preservation. It will be historically preserved, but with a really beautiful modern twist that we are excited to bring. A layout of the building was shown. The former popcorn stand will be a café. There'll be space for events such as concerts, weddings, catering events and then there's room for classrooms. We hope to provide space to partner with many of you and other organizations throughout the valley to be able to provide educational spaces. For the event space there will be room for music, and dance. The programming will be driven by a survey where we asked the community what they thought should happen inside the space. And to our surprise, one thing people really missed was social dancing. There is a wooden floor, with all the hard wood donated by Blue Ridge Lumber's Tom Sheets. Shenandoah Latin Dance Club plans to dance there. We have space for pop up theater for small theatrical presentations. We've been working with Samantha on developing a tour bus lunch program where we can host a bus load of 55 people to come in, sit down, and have lunch with music, then be out within an hour to catch a matinee. We feel like it's a real opportunity to grow the tour bus visitation in Staunton. We have a very diverse board, including young people, and some of our younger members are figuring out how to create activities that will appeal to a younger audience. We know the power of the arts and what it attracts, as we see in other places. It brings in people from all over the region and local, to see a show, to be a part of an activity, and to dine and shop downtown. Ralph Cohen from the American Shakespeare Center once told Pam, you know, this could be like the Berkshires. We have all of the entertainment and the arts and the beauty of the outdoors and the hiking and the mountains and the restaurants, and we can see the potential for the arts as well as the economic vitality and historic preservation. We also have identified a gap in spaces to host parties and weddings, and we will be able to do standing room 145 and sit down like 70-75, subject to the fire department's approval. We have made considerable progress. Please check out our window as walk by for information. It's a huge project, everything from retiring the debt early on through donors to grants to remediate asbestos and planning grants and launching our capital campaign. The building is shovel-ready. We could start tomorrow, if everything comes in line regarding money. The general contractor is selected. The permits have been issued. We are ready to go. A considerable amount of money has already been put in to make that happen. From here on out, it is a \$3.6 million project. We have raised \$2.863 million that's money in the bank and grants, and specifically, \$1.6 million from the state of Virginia. We are 74% of the way there in fundraising terms. A huge portion of it has been done. The urgency is that the \$1.6 million from the state expires at the end of 2026, and it's about 10-month construction project. We need to

close the remaining gap here in the next couple months in order to make this ago. I think from your end, we are hoping to see as many collaborators in this room and others as possible to make this vision come to life. That might be through programming or that might be through word of mouth. If you know anybody that would love to invest in the history and culture and economy of our small town, please reach out. We have accepted donations of used equipment ... George Lucas donated a surround sound audio system that had been retired from Sky Walker ranch, and we're happy to have that, and we're open to used gear from anybody. We will be looking into the Violet Crown that is closing in Charlottesville, and we are going to investigate what's going to happen to their seats and equipment. We gladly accept in-kind donations. We will have Arcadia Presents, a music series and it'll happen at least once a month during Shop and Dine Out. Thank you for listening.

Sector Reports – Lodging

Samantha noted that overall in April, the majority from all sectors reported higher sales over last year, which was really encouraging. She reminded that traveler sentiment and traveler action can be different.

Michelle: Great April, a little backwards in rate but we expected that. We are filling weekdays and well as weekends. It is tour bus season, and it feels surprising because we are hearing the economy is doing one thing, but we are seeing another. It's a very positive outlook for us. We had a great Easter week, and also say people stay with us heading to or coming home from spring break.

Sector Reports – Restaurants

No report

Sector Reports - Retail

Sandi: Had a decent number of international visitors in April. Spring Break was all over the place this year. Saw a lot of families for a 4-day weekend. Seeing a lot of people here for the scenic train. Many have dinner before they head home. Sandi wishes there could be a sign at the train station encouraging people to visit the downtown shops and restaurants. There was a suggestion to ask Helios if there could be a sign placed on their property. Visitors do want more family friendly activities, and sometimes leave the area to visit child related activities.

Sector Reports – Attractions

Stephanie: May is slower than anticipated and we are pacing behind in ticket sales. Wednesdays and Thursdays we are offering local rush tickets at 50% off for those who live within an hour of Staunton.

Camille: Staunton Music Festival's Baroque fest had the same number of ticket sales, but a lot of new and younger patrons, which was exciting to see. Met one person that came from Vermont and spent the weekend.

Andrew: Concerned about the NEA announcements rescinding all of their funding for the year. Facing big economic challenges with rising costs of travel and facilities. Thinking of some kind of consortium with some of the local arts organizations to figure out how to do some advocacy and public awareness of these cuts. Mid-June is when staff and faculty begin to arrive, and June 26 is the festival kick-off.

Keith: MBU Commencement is next weekend. We are working on getting MBU gear for stores and restaurants to display, such as flags.

Staunton Shout-Outs

Pamela shouted out Molly Murphy, who did an amazing job at putting Staunton Jams together. The Sunday concert was phenomenal!

Old Business

VTC is resuming their media presence in Canada in July, and removing representatives out of Germany and Japan. Will continue having reps in Australia, France and the UK.

Molly updated on Staunton Jams. 10 venues, 25 performances over 3 days. All grass roots and community funded. Will be meeting in the next few months to regroup, establish by-laws, focus on becoming a 501c3. New partnership with Dr. Douglas Wright (Staunton Smiles) who sponsored 12 artists for free dental work. The idea came from a friend who is a doctor in NY and their mission is arts, music and wellness. Lots of health care providers and wellness professionals gather to help support livelihood of artists and musicians. Looking at October for a potential next Staunton Jams. Please fill out the feedback survey. Queen City Music Studios will also hold their Grand Opening May 23-24.

[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

Juniper Lane is expanding their vintage bridal salon down to the Wharf. Burrow and Vine will join forces with Juniper Lane on Beverley Street and have a storefront together. There will have vintage, second hand, collectible, garden and home décor. There will be a grand opening the end of May.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:50 am. Minutes: Kim Cormier