



## **Tourism Advisory Board**

**August 14, 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 Samantha Johnson – Monthly Tourism Report**

**9:45 am SDDA - SummerFest Presentation**

**9:55 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

July 10, 2025 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, First Floor

## Board Members/City Staff Participating:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center  
Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon  
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South  
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival  
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum  
Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism  
Amanda Kaufman – Assistant City Manager  
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean  
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro  
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library  
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager

## Board Members/City Staff Absent:

Brian Gearhart – Heritage Hospitality  
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)  
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia  
Corrie Park – City Council Liaison  
Ross Williams – Frederick House

## Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. Introductions were made around the room. Sandi Carraro made a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes, and Camille Dierksheide seconded the motion. Sarah mentioned the clipboard being passed around for people interested in being on the ballot for the SDDA elections.

## Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

### Activities:

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured [From Brick Reds To Blue Ridge Blues: The Colors of Staunton](#), [Top Outdoor Adventures in Staunton This Summer](#), [Discover Staunton’s Summer Playlist](#), [Breakfast to Brews: A Day Of Dining in Staunton](#)
- Podcast Episodes Released: [The U is Silent; We Aren’t – Episode 8: Country Roads & Family Ties: Wilson Fairchild’s Life in Harmony](#), Episode 9: [Culture in Color: Noelia Núñez Blends Community, Mediums, and Mindfulness](#)
- [Made of Magic](#) campaign hyper-targeting family travelers and the Charlotte market
- Visit Staunton was awarded nearly \$20,000 in marketing grants from Virginia Tourism
- Samantha Johnson attended Virginia Tourism Leadership Institute in Smithfield

- Jessica Williams represented Staunton and the Shenandoah Valley at Blue Ridge Outdoor Magazine’s 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Event at Devil’s Backbone
- Jessica Williams attended the groundbreaking for Stone Ledge Cider in Augusta County
- Attended VADMO Executive Leadership meeting
- Attended VRLTA Shenandoah Valley Chapter Board Meeting
- Visit Staunton provided the Heifetz Music Institute with welcome packets for every student, faculty, and staff
- Attended Treehouse Juice Bar Ribbon-Cutting
- Tourism Stakeholder meeting to brainstorm new programming ideas for FY26
- Attended MidAtlantic Tourism Public Relations Association (MATPRA) Quarterly meeting in Quicksburg
- Segment on WHSV highlighting impact of tourism to region
- Ms. Williams attended SVTA annual meeting in Lexington
- Attended Civics in the Shade at WWPL and Augusta County Pride at Shenandoah LGBTQ Center
- 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
10-Jun	<a href="#"><u>Staunton celebrates the return of Pride Month</u></a>	USA Today	62893387
27-Jun	<a href="#"><u>Virginia’s Top 10 Summer Festivals and Events 2025</u></a>	Virginia Living	0
5-Jun	<a href="#"><u>7 Massive Flea Markets In Virginia That Are Almost Too Good To Be True</u></a>	Family Destinations Guide	1186381
4-Jun	<a href="#"><u>Photos: SENSE AND SENSIBILITY Opens At The American Shakespeare Center’s Blackfriars Playhouse</u></a>	BroadwayWorld.com	1128672
21-Jun	<a href="#"><u>9 Fun Cities In Virginia Where Retirees Are Living Their Best Life</u></a>	Family Destinations Guide	897135
18-Jun	<a href="#"><u>A Time-Travel Road Trip into Virginia’s Colonial Era</u></a>	Thrillist	881587
29-May	<a href="#"><u>‘Beer Hiking Virginia’ guide connects mountains to shore, hikers to brews</u></a>	The Virginian-Pilot	464121

7-Jun	<u>The Most Underrated Destinations In All Of Virginia, According To Visitors</u>	Explore	450639
5-Jun	<u>A Mountain Town with Global Flavor: A Weekend Guide to Staunton, Virginia</u>	Garden & Gun	338882
27-Jun	<u>Fairview Cemetery to be recognized as a Virginia historical marker</u>	WHSV-TV	240158
29-May	<u>'Beer Hiking Virginia' guide connects mountains to shore, hikers to brews</u>	The Daily Press	226704
27-Jun	<u>Fairview Cemetery to be recognized as a Virginia historical marker</u>	WVIR	172950
26-Jun	<u>15 Southern Events &amp; Happenings: July 2025</u>	StyleBlueprint	81686
19-Jun	<u>Juneteenth celebration comes to Staunton</u>	News Leader	66220
10-Jun	<u>Staunton celebrates the return of Pride Month</u>	News Leader	66220
17-Jun	<u>Virginia's Classical Voices Shine on 'A Local Touch'</u>	WHRO-FM	62394
5-Jun	<u>Staunton's Frontier Culture Museum is expanding with the addition of an indoor space</u>	News Leader	60062
30-May	<u>Staunton arts groups face federal funding cuts, uncertainty</u>	WVTF-FM	37114
18-Jun	<u>"Sense and Sensibility"</u>	C-Ville Weekly	35630
3-Jun	<u>On the Road Again: Four Scenic Blue Ridge Road Trips</u>	Blue Ridge Outdoors	30550
27-Jun	<u>18 Virginia attractions you can visit for free with Culture Passes</u>	The Dogwood	7835
14-Jun	<u>Train Lover's Guide: Best Destinations for Families Near Charlottesville</u>	Charlottesville Family	4139
2-Jun	<u>Step Back in Time: A Family Adventure at the Frontier Culture Museum</u>	Charlottesville Family	3849
			<b>69336315</b>

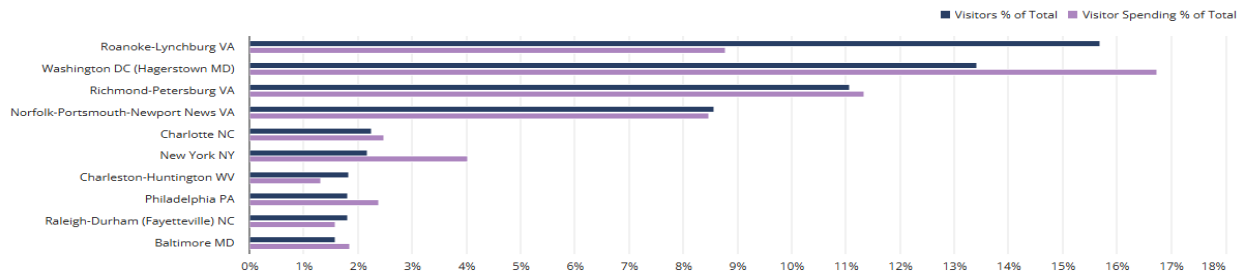
### Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
June 2024	June 2025	% Change
46,717 sessions	46,256 sessions	-0.99 %
169 guide requests	189 visitor's guide requests	+11.8%

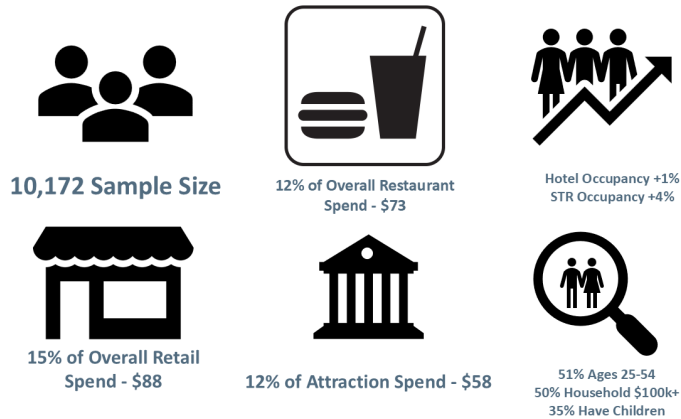
### Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

-May 2025-

Top 10 Origin Markets by Visitation with their Spend



Roanoke visitation grew by 4% but spending decreased 1% MoM. DC spending grew 2.5% MoM. Norfolk visitation dropped slightly but spending stayed flat. Increase in Charlotte spending & visitation



In addition to going over the monthly report above, Samantha added the breakdown of the VTC grants, where we received \$9,100 for the marketing leverage program to support the Made of Magic Campaign to go on out into the Charlotte market and then hopefully a little bit of the Philly market as well. We received \$10,000 to help support marketing for the group travel industry. Jessica will be taking that on with some marketing, and also trade shows and meetings that she attends for group travel and motor coach. Jessica spoke about attending the Blue Ridge Outdoors Anniversary at Devil's Backbone, and said the Shenandoah Valley was well represented. Samantha noted the Beerwerks Trail is coming up on its 10-year anniversary with almost 10,000 passport redemptions. Samantha also talked about other regional partnerships such as the Shenandoah Valley Travel Association (SVTA) and the Shenandoah Valley Tourism Partnership (SVTP). She mentioned the Heifetz students in town now (350 total additional people with students, staff and some parents), shouted out Burrow and Vine and Juniper Lane for their recent business merger and commended Robin for the Civics in the Shade event at Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library. Samantha further noted the Shenandoah Valley LGBTQ Center for stepping up to host the Pride event that was not permitted to be held in Augusta County. Jessica mentioned Virginia By Rail, a program that includes six destinations from Northern Virginia down to Lynchburg that promotes Amtrak travel and sustainability, as all six destinations are accessible by Amtrak train. Samantha mentioned notable PR such as Garden and Gun and Blue Ridge Outdoors magazine. She stated we had over 69 million impressions in June for PR, and website traffic was down just under 1%, so pretty much flat over last year, which is actually great to see. There was a shift in our top markets data from Zartico, with Roanoke coming in first. Overall visitation is up. We are seeing an increase of people, but we're seeing a decrease in spending. Grocery stores have become our second top spending for food and beverage for our visitors. People are staying with others. They're bringing more people into the house or the room, and then they're going to the grocery store because they want to be able to come to Staunton, but they can't eat out every single meal like they would have in years past. Overall attraction spend is staying steady, but now choosing one attraction and not visiting all.

People are engaging the most with our history-based content, as well as food and architecture. The average visitor spent \$73 on restaurants, \$69 on arts, entertainment, attractions and the average retail spend was \$166 per visitor. This is based on a snapshot of data. We are not receiving info on international visitors, and Samantha encouraged everyone to share their data with her. Samantha can reach out to Kelli Weaver our VTC rep to see if there is any info on international travelers for the Valley. Samantha spoke about our new Short Term Rental data platform. There is some longer-range booking, but many are closer in time and same day rentals. Sandi mentioned she sees a lot of people who stop in to Staunton while traveling somewhere else. There was speculation that traffic/construction issues on 81 push people into Staunton to stay. There was discussion about Visitor Guides, and Jessica said while requests are down in our shoulder seasons, there are still a good many being requested via our website or picked up at rest areas and welcome centers. It is also available for viewing online. Paige mentioned she regularly see visitors taking brochures at the Frontier Culture Museum's center. Josh Knight was commended for making the Wharf alternative parking map look nice.

#### **Sector Reports – Lodging**

Michelle: Just like as reported in May, occupancy was up nearly 1% over 2024. ADR was up 4%. Short term rentals were up 4% and ADR up 18% overall. VRBO had higher booking ratings than Airbnb. We are flat in occupancy but ADR was up. For July, we are up 11% in occupancy. WE usually don't see many same day bookings, but seeing more than ever now, even on weekdays. August is up for now, barely in occupancy, mostly in ADR. September and October are currently flat to last year.

Jeff: Gibson's revenue was pretty flat for the year. Their daily rate is down, but occupancy is up. Have seen increase in bookings during the week.

#### **Sector Reports – Restaurants**

Sarah: For those that reported on the Google Form, there was a decrease in sales over April and flat year over year. There were not a lot of people that reported. Visitors from Richmond, Charlotte and through traffic, New York to Florida corridor were reported.

Jeff: Up in January and February, then the parking lot issue happened. We were down 15% in June, but only down 6% YTD. Harrisonburg restaurant is flat but had a record year in 2024. Will work to make moves to increase sales, which is not always raising prices. Lexington restaurant had a record year last year, and up another 5+% percent there. We get a lot of college kids in Harrisonburg and Lexington.

#### **Sector Reports - Retail**

Sandi: Book Dragon was flat for June. If we take into account a date change for a new book, we would have been up for June. Seeing more visitors paying in cash, and once it's gone, it's gone. Seeing less campers than usual, and it could be because of some campgrounds that did not open this year with decreased staffing. Jonathan Wright noted the weather has also not helped for campers. They are down 20% in first time visitors, which has been a direct correlation to their sales. Not seeing as many from NoVA, because of their economy in turmoil. Others commented they are seeing an increase in cash sales. Jeff Ramsey said they are almost 100% credit cards. They often have to go to the bank to have cash on hand. He noted that when certain campgrounds raised their rates, people did not stay and they have since adjusted. They don't see the value in paying that much as a campground when they could go stay at a hotel for the same price. Jessica added that all the campgrounds in the SNP are reservation only now; you can't just stop I and get a camp site. Susanna said they are participants in Harvest Host, where people can overnight in their parking areas.

#### **Sector Reports – Attractions**

Robin: WWPL had a very good month 16% up in May, and up overall for the FY 9%, with 43-45 states represented in June. They have seen zero Canadians which is a first. People are interested in history, and a lot of what our country is dealing with right now is rooted back from 1912-1924. WWPL has had their

federal funding cut; not ongoing but grants, primarily one that would have allowed them to have the entire museum re-done. For now, they will be focusing on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor.

Camille: The Staunton Music Festival is August 15-24 and pass sales have gone really well. Pass sales are up 100-139%. The two biggest concerts are the Handel's Messiah, which is going to be staged, and the finale is the Magic Flute. She has under 200 tickets available for both of those events, which is really, really great. Season pass sales happened in December and January.

Paige: The FCM had a slight increase in month over month, mostly due to our summer camps but we were pretty much steady over year over year. Independence Day was up by about 100 people, and she thinks that's because they moved it from being on the fourth to the fifth, so that way we weren't competing with everything going on downtown or in the park. They had a pretty successful online campaign for Flag Day with a lot of good feedback. She mentioned the next VA250 local committee meeting is on August 6th from 1-2 pm at the Waynesboro Public Library. It's open to anyone, and they are talking about what's going on at the state level, but also what other organizations and the greater Augusta region is planning. Events will continue throughout 2031.

Stephanie: ASC is seeing similar trends to what everyone is saying that May is down, and now that we've opened our second show in June, a lot of things have been picking up. We did recently a 4th of July flash sale to help boost some of our numbers in July, which also was different this time around. Normally, she focuses only on one season of shows, the current season, but this time around, they added the fall show, so it's really helped stack our fall. They have seen an increase in Lexington visitors. Shifting some of our marketing strategy to Lexington to Roanoke area. They have definitely seen a dip in the NoVA people.

Keith: Shared a few dates- July 19<sup>th</sup> second orientation event for summer and expecting 150 incoming students for that, and previously they have brought 4-6 family members with them. Please spread the word to me if you plan on offering any discounts for that. August 8<sup>th</sup> is the start of move-in with ROTC, with August 21 being the actual big move-in. All staff and students will have an ID if you need to ask for ID to offer discounts. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram. Welcome stickers do work to bring students in for potential discounts.

### **Staunton Shout-Outs**

Frontline Models just celebrated 22 years.

Baja just turned 28.

In awe of Sarah Lynch after the last QCMM meeting.

### **Old Business**

Samantha: Share your email with Kim to receive meeting notifications and updates. Will be sending out VTC grant and partner information. Will be switching to the Yodel platform for automatic posting of your events to our website. Will be using ITI Digital to update your listings on our website through Google.

Sarah: Check your listing on VTC or add if you don't have a presence there.

[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**

Scotty: SDDA is working on SummerFest event for Augusta 23, geared toward MBU as well as the community. Please contact him if you have thoughts or ideas.

Pam: Hosting Heifetz students at Arcadia Project on July 19 and 26 at 7:00 pm

Camille: ASC is launching their print and business partnerships next week, and hoping to call on many of you to get your business in front of 73 performances and 15,000 potential patrons.

Sarah: QCMM posters are here today – please take what you need.

Jonathan: We have an “About Town” section on our website and contact Amanda at Redbeard if you’d like to be on there.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:46 am. Minutes: Kim Cormier