



Tourism Advisory Board

September 11, 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 Sarah Lynch – QCMM Update

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

August 14, 2025 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, First Floor

Board Members/City Staff Participating:

Brad Arrowood – Vice-Mayor, City Council
Jessica Blythe – Assistant Director of Economic Development
Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center
Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum
Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism
Amanda Kaufman – Assistant City Manager
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library

Board Members/City Staff Absent:

Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival
Brian Gearhart – Heritage Hospitality
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Corrie Park – City Council Liaison
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. Introductions were made around the room. Sarah Lynch made a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes, and Robin von Seldeneck seconded the motion.

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 10: The Bones Are Good: The Secret to A Small-Town’s Revitalization](#), Episode 11: [Tangleroot: Author Kalela Williams on History, Healing, & Heritage](#), Episode 12: [Parks & Recollections](#)
- [Made of Magic](#) campaign hyper-targeting family travelers and the Charlotte market
- Visit Staunton was awarded a \$5,000 Vacation Starts with VA marketing grant from Virginia Tourism
- Samantha Johnson attended the Virginia Association of Destination Marketing Organizations (VADMO) July Board Meeting & Annual Retreat as a new Board Member & Vice President of Programming

- Samantha served as a judge for the Virginia Restaurant Lodging Travel Association (VRLTA) annual Ordinary Awards
- Jessica Williams and Kim Cormier have curated a new Events & Business Listing experience on VisitStaunton.com (launching in August)
- Samantha hosted workshops on Podcasting alongside Nomad Media for the Augusta County Library and a workshop of Grassroots Marketing for Heifetz
- Attended the new African American Historical Marker Ceremony at Montgomery Hall Park
- The Tourism team collaborated with ED and SDDA to meet with several new and potential businesses in Staunton to offer marketing, data, and resource support
- Jessica Williams facilitated deliveries of the Staunton Visitor Guide to numerous Visitor Centers throughout the region
- Attended VRLTA Shenandoah Valley Chapter regional meet-up in Massanutten
- 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-Jul	<u>Shenandoah Valley Limited 611 steam engine excursions return at Virginia Scenic Railway</u>	Yahoo! News	66,649,761
31-Jul	<u>A Closer Look Inside the Staunton Music Festival</u>	NewsBreak	
22-Jul	<u>Things to do in Staunton, Virginia: Best Weekend Trip</u>	NewsBreak	
09-Jul	<u>Partnership brings N&W 611 steam locomotive back into service</u>	NewsBreak	15,465,562
09-Jul	<u>Iconic 611 train to come back to Virginia this Fall</u>	NewsBreak	15,465,562
09-Jul	<u>Iconic 611 train to come back to Virginia this Fall</u>	WJLA-TV	1,163,685
22-Jul	<u>10 Postcard-Worthy Towns In Virginia That Feel Like A Hallmark Movie Set</u>	Family Destinations Guide	1,127,136
15-Jul	<u>This Fascinating Open-Air Museum In Virginia Is Perfect For Unforgettable Day Trips</u>	Family Destinations Guide	1,127,136
31-Jul	<u>G&G's Hot List: 30 New Restaurants to Try Now</u>	Garden & Gun	1,057,342
09-Jul	<u>Partnership brings N&W 611 steam locomotive back into service</u>	WDBJ-TV	790,187
11-Jul	<u>Norfolk & Western No. 611 to return to Buckingham Branch Railroad for fall excursions - Trains</u>	Model Railroader Magazine	588,413
09-Jul	<u>Norfolk & Western No. 611 to return to Buckingham Branch Railroad for fall excursions</u>	Trains	588,413
09-Jul	<u>Iconic 611 train to come back to Virginia this Fall</u>	WSET-TV	492,525

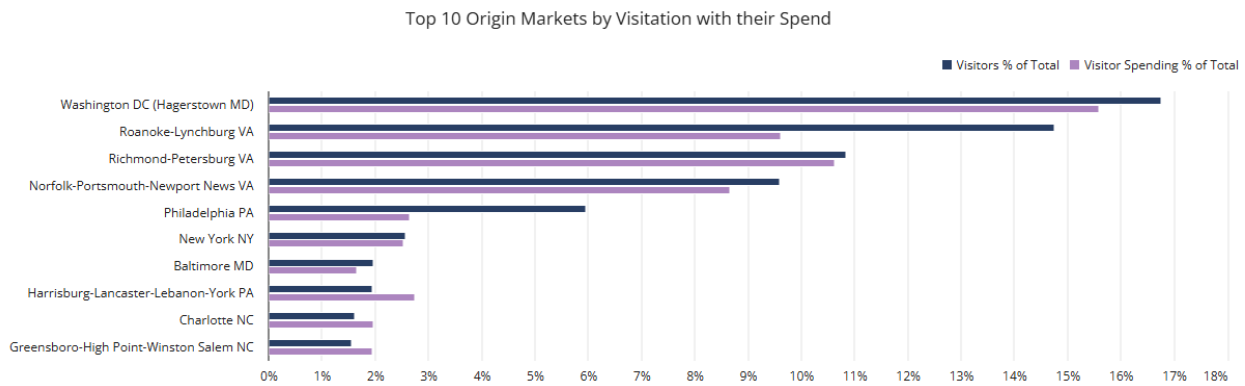
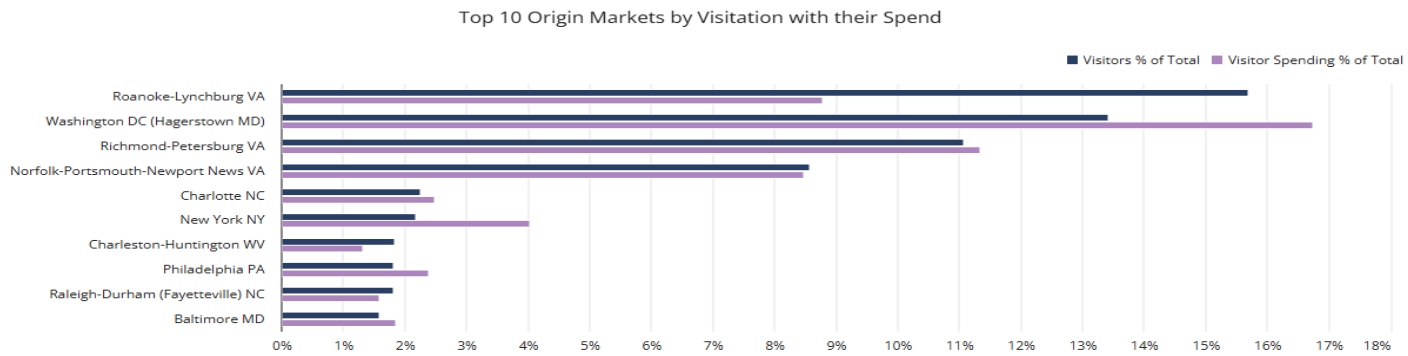
10-Jul	Historic N&W 611 steam locomotive returning to Shenandoah Valley this fall	WHSV-TV	407,002
09-Jul	Enjoy 360-Degree Views on the Virginia Scenic Railway's Newest Car	Northern Virginia Magazine	369,977
07-Jul	Find Cultural and Culinary Gems in Staunton, One of America's Best Small Towns	Northern Virginia Magazine	369,977
05-Jul	Frontier Culture Museum hosts historical Independence Day events	WHSV-TV	240,158
04-Jul	Crowds gather for Staunton's annual 'Happy Birthday America' Parade	WHSV-TV	240,158
10-Jul	Historic N&W 611 steam locomotive returning to Shenandoah Valley this fall	WVIR	206,239
05-Jul	Frontier Culture Museum hosts historical Independence Day events	WVIR	206,239
24-Jul	In Staunton: Shakespeare and Austen	World News	137,174
10-Jul	Experience Shakespeare Like Never Before at American Shakespeare Center in Staunton	World News	137,174
24-Jul	10 Scenic Stops Along the Appalachian Route You'll Want to Explore	Housely	83,916
14-Jul	Ribbons cut on new markers highlighting Montgomery Hall Park and African American history	News Leader	81,111
25-Jul	Commentary: Tourism: A local and national gift	The Northern Virginia Daily	65,390
24-Jul	In Staunton: Shakespeare and Austen	The Georgetowner	22,298
31-Jul	Tickets on Sale Now for Scenic Fall Train Rides in Virginia	Alexandria Living Magazine	19,630
07-Jul	The 10 Best Living History Museums in the Blue Ridge Mountains	Blue Ridge Mountains Travel Guide	9,776
18-Jul	A Dozen Spring Day Trip Ideas	Charlottesville Family	5,083
			107,117,024

Website Visitation


Website Traffic		
July 2024	July 2025	% Change
37,292 sessions	41,943 sessions	+12.5 %
169 guide requests	154 visitor's guide requests	-8.9%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending


-June 2025-




*D.C. returned to our top Visitor/Spending market. Roanoke visitation continued to grow. Philly market grew by 1%, though spending stayed the same MoM.




9,670 Sample Size




12% of Overall Restaurant Spend - \$78




**Hotel Occupancy +9.5%
STR Occupancy -3%**



12% of Overall Retail Spend - \$132



11% of Attraction Spend - \$63



**51% Ages 25-54
50% Household \$100k+
35% Have Children
54% Out of State**

Samantha:

- Soft opening today of Sama Sama, formerly Cossette
- The Frenchmen restaurant is scheduled to open in September in the former Pullman serving French Cajun cuisine
- There is a Boba Tea place planning to open on Beverley St.
- Atlas and Ember bridal boutique opened in the Wharf
- Staunton Music Festival launches tomorrow, bringing a lot of patrons from the DC area, some for the entire 10 days. Advance ticket sales and season passes sold really well.
- Working to schedule a 2nd symposium sometime this fall, will focus on marketing

- Outbound clicks (to local business websites) from VisitStaunton.com totaled nearly 250,000 last year
- Finished up Season 1 of the podcasts with over 5,000 listens
- Had 7.16 million digital ad impressions last year, with over 2 million impressions in the Charlotte area with the Made of Magic campaign. Had 5.7 million impressions from our content creators in Baltimore, DC and Charlotte.
- Working with two content creators currently and nailing down what markets to target now

SDDA SummerFest – Scotty Tiernan

Scotty, Creative Marketing and Events Coordinator for SDDA, spoke about SummerFest scheduled for August 23. It will be similar to a block party, with yard (street) games, live music, and the MBU marching band and squirrel mascot. It's meant to welcome MBU students to the downtown right after move-in days. Partnering with Queen City Music Studios to provide live music. Encouraging all businesses downtown to offer specials/discounts to students for this day and ongoing. Need volunteers, so please sign up to help. Will also be promoting SDDA's Treasure Hunt. WWPL will be having a garden retreat, and Ciders From Mars will be hosting a yard game. Amanda Kaufman reminded everyone that the picnic table painting in the Wharf will also happen this weekend. Samantha said she would be handing out Staunton pennant flags and frisbees. Keith Taylor said MBU decals are on the way for windows for businesses who want to display them. Heather Leonard has a meeting scheduled to discuss a program where MBU students can work in your business.

Sector Reports – Lodging

Michelle: From the STR report, for June, it was reported that occupancy was up 9.5% over 2024. ADR, up 3.3% and revenue up 12.8%. Short term rentals were up 3% and ADR up 38%. Michelle said she was actually flat in occupancy and ADR was up 3% for July, and they actually ended up 11% in occupancy and up 14% in overall revenue. It was a great month, but August continues to be flat to last year. Up until last week we were seeing a lot of people booking last minute.

Sector Reports – Attractions

Robin: Flat this month after experiencing some double-digit numbers, which were not really reflective of what's happening in museums nationwide with a decrease in numbers. Talking now to try to figure what we can do to get numbers back and to get people coming back into museums. We're still ranked, in this time of a lot of distrust, the number one community or group that can be trusted and just need to get people in the door. Robin shared her concerns about turnout for VA250 events.

Stephanie: July actually picked up for us once we realigned our schedules for closing in July. Right now, we're quiet in regards to the show, but very busy. The cast arrived last week. We have new collateral coming out for Romeo and Juliet and two Gentlemen of Verona and our new pirate ballad that will be released in October. One of the things that we have added to our brochure is a 50% Off if you mentioned the word rush. For any of the visitors who are in town on Wednesday and Thursdays let them know if they say the word rush at the door, we'll give them 50% off tickets.

Keith: Move-in week begins, and Keith reiterated the benefit of offering discounts to MBU students/staff.

Sector Reports - Restaurants

Sarah: Four restaurants reported. Zartico told us that the average restaurant spend in June was \$78 - this is by visitor over 50 miles away. The 4 restaurants reported an increase in sales month over month and year over year. Several of the establishments have released new menu items and offerings. Marino's is going to be featured on America's Best Restaurants. Several reported seeing stronger numbers from NoVA. Liz Pfeifer from Mill Street is the person opening the Frenchman, and she has a

strong restaurant background. The folks at Sama Sama are lovely, wonderful people. Baja enjoyed a nice increase last month.

Sector Reports – Retail

Sandi: The average retail spend in June was \$132. Most of the retail stores reporting had higher sales than June and higher or flat to 2024. Heifetz reported seeing visitors from 14 different countries. Seems to be a peaked interest in specialty and novelty retail, the visitors are not spending as in the past. Visitation from NoVA, Richmond, North Carolina and Florida stood out as high traffic markets. For the Book Dragon, We were up both June and July and also YTD. Our average spend is up about \$7 over last year. We did see a number of the international people. We off to ship their books for them. Sandi believes those coming from NoVA want to get out and go someplace where it's a little slower. We are seeing a lot more families. Many of the schools don't go back until Labor Day. We will likely be up double digits again. Retailers that I spoke to are getting ready for QCM and the holidays.

Staunton Shout-Outs

Shout outs to:

Samantha for the podcast series

Jessica and Kim for their work on Yodel and ITI Digital platforms

Briana for opening up Atlas and Ember

Molly Murphy for organizing musicians the way she does

Nikki and Adrienne

Old Business

Kim: Yodel is the new platform that scrapes websites and Facebook pages for your events, eliminating the need for you to submit them. It scrapes once every 24 hours. The events are searchable by date, category and key words. There is a QR code posted at the Visitor Center, and Kim passed around QR code posters for anyone that wanted them. Robin added that at WWPL they have a digital display of events, as they are trying to get away from printing everything.

Samantha: Explained ITI Digital and how it uses your Google listings to populate your listings on VisitStaunton.com. It pulls your pictures, hours and even a map. Please check your Google business listings to be sure everything is accurate.

[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.

New Business

Samantha: Please vote for Staunton in Blue Ridge Outdoors's Top Adventure Town contest.

Samantha: We are launching a local culture pass by including it in Staunton Parks and Rec's quarterly mailer that goes to over 13,000 homes in Staunton. This round features discounts for WWPL, ASC, Camera Heritage Museum and Staunton Music Festival. This is test run and we will go from here to see what other types of discounts can be included.

Samantha: Will be hosting downtown tours for new MBU students on August 22. Will have 5 groups to show around and take inside to businesses.

Samantha: Working on dates for the next symposium, and will be reaching out see dates that may work best for everyone.

Molly: Organizer for Staunton Jams and owns Queen City Music Studios. Working on an event for Aug. 24 in Waynesboro to bring music and magic to kids in Ridgeview Park with Hot Spot Collective. Also partnering with Polyface Farm to bring music to a sold-out retreat weekend there at the farm. QCMS is hosting a singing retreat weekend with Janie Rothfield Nov. 14-15. Also bringing back the Staunton Old Time Gathering, which will be the 2nd annual event for two dates – January and 30-Feb. 1 and Feb. 6-7. Partnering with Blu Point to do a few concerts there, and hosting Heather Leonard's band closing out SummerFest. Looking at Oct. 17-19 to hold Staunton Jams, which coincides with a bike festival and MBU homecoming.

Adrienne: Hiring a location manager. Samantha suggested reaching out to post with VRLTA.

Annie Hawkins: Starting a dark history tour (Valley Echoes) that focuses on history, true crime and weirdness. Doing 10 tours for 5 weekends in October. Previously led tours in Richmond for 10 years. Annie has a background in forensic anthropology, and assured everyone that the material for her tours is well-researched.

SDDA elections are coming up, and ballots will be mailed out next week.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:44 am. Minutes: Kim Cormier