



Tourism Advisory Board

October 9, 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 Brooke Buffington – MBU Student Employment/Internship Opportunities

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

September 11, 2025 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, First Floor

Board Members/City Staff Participating:

Brad Arrowood – Vice-Mayor, City Council and SDDA Interim Director
Jessica Blythe – Assistant Director of Economic Development
Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South
Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)
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
Jessica Williams – Sales and Marketing Manager
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Board Members/City Staff Absent:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center
Brian Gearhart – Heritage Hospitality
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Corrie Park – City Council Liaison
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro

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 Stephanie Cabacoy seconded the motion. Introductions were made around the room.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Activities:

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured [A Closer Look Inside the Staunton Music Festival](#), [Virginia Craft Beer Month](#), [Last-Chance Long Weekend in Staunton](#)
- [Made of Magic](#) campaign
- Launched the [Local Culture Pass](#) for Staunton residents
- Samantha Johnson attended the Mid-Atlantic Tourism Public Relations Association’s (MATPRA) Annual Marketplace, meeting with dozens of travel writers and content creators
- Jessica Williams attended the Virginia/North Carolina/Maryland Motorcoach Association’s Meeting, planning group travel to Staunton



- Samantha, alongside Morgan Smith, Josh Knight, Amanda DiMeo, Jessica Blythe, and Scotty Tiernan, led new MBU students through Downtown Staunton
- Samantha and Jessica Blythe, Economic Development, partnered to share Staunton collectables during Summerfest
- Jessica Williams and Kim

Cormier launched a new Events & Business Listing experience on VisitStaunton.com

- Attended the Gypsy Hill pool groundbreaking
- Jessica provided meeting welcome packets for the GFWC Conference hosted at Hotel 24 South
- Attended the opening of Sama-Sama Int. Cuisine
- Attended the WWPL Visitor Center Renaming Ceremony
- Attended the Board Meeting for the Shenandoah Valley Travel Association
- Meetings Attended: VADMO, 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	AVE
31-Aug	<u>These First-Time Homeowners Couldn't Afford to Buy in the Big City. So They Left.</u>	The New York Times	141,172,665	\$ 1,305,847.15
15-Aug	<u>The Best Vineyards In Virginia For A Picturesque Wine Tasting Vacation, According To Research</u>	<u>MSN.com</u>	104,713,925	\$ 968,603.81
19-Aug	<u>This Legendary Restaurant Has The Most Beloved Fresh-Baked Pies In VA</u>	AOL	30,383,090	\$ 281,043.58
31-Aug	<u>Mountain Towns To Visit This Fall</u>	Southern Living	14,344,064	\$ 132,682.59
31-Aug	<u>Fall Foliage Train Rides</u>	Southern Living	14,344,064	\$ 132,682.59

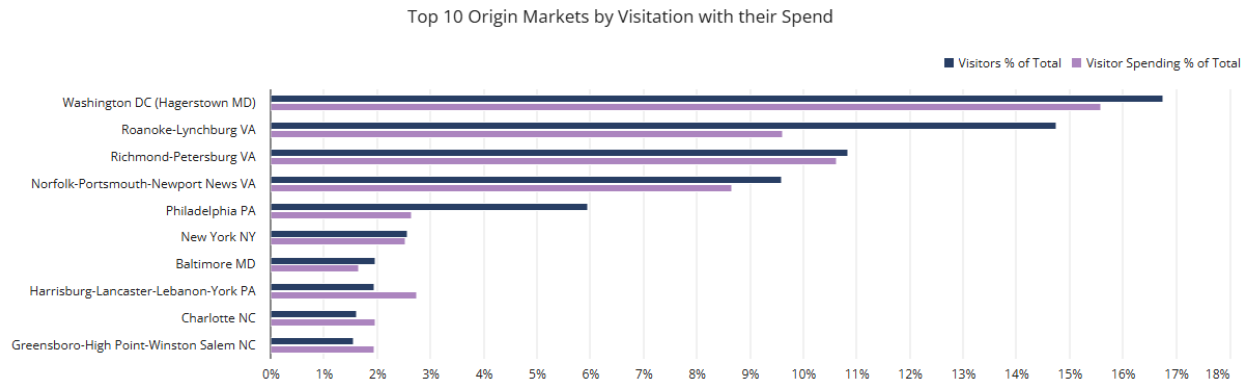
12-Aug	<u>A New Stage for the Theater That Gave America Shakespeare in the Park</u>	Bloomberg	17,180,335	\$ 158,918.10
28-Aug	<u>Where to Eat, Drink, & Stay in Staunton During Queen City Mischief & Magic</u>	NewsBreak	17,070,968	\$ 157,906.45
28-Aug	<u>Last-Chance Long Weekend in Staunton</u>	NewsBreak	17,070,968	\$ 157,906.45
26-Aug	<u>QCMM's 10th anniversary in September to include changes in activity, parking at Wharf Lot</u>	NewsBreak	17,070,968	\$ 157,906.45
19-Aug	<u>Staunton Music Festival hits all the right notes as performers gather for 2025 season</u>	NewsBreak	17,070,968	\$ 157,906.45
14-Aug	<u>Tickets for upcoming fall excursions behind N&W No. 611 now available</u>	NewsBreak	17,070,968	\$ 157,906.45
14-Aug	<u>Frontier Culture Museum celebrates 250 years of American independence</u>	NewsBreak	17,070,968	\$ 157,906.45
19-Aug	<u>This Legendary Restaurant Has The Most Beloved Fresh-Baked Pies In Virginia</u>	Southern Living	14,344,064	\$ 132,682.59
20-Aug	<u>Virginia's Quaint, Friendly Little Town Is An Unexpected Antique Paradise Full Of Vintage Charm And Thrift Finds</u>	Islands Magazine	6,513,332	\$ 60,248.32
19-Aug	<u>This Legendary Restaurant Has The Most Beloved Fresh-Baked Pies In Virginia</u>	Yahoo! Life	5,317,813	\$ 49,189.77
26-Aug	<u>10 Stunning Mountain Towns In Virginia Where Life Moves At A Slower Pace</u>	Family Destinations Guide	1,228,085	\$ 11,359.79
14-Aug	<u>Tickets for upcoming fall excursions behind N&W No. 611 now available</u>	Trains	715,170	\$ 6,615.32
31-Aug	<u>They Couldn't Afford Homes in the Big City. So They Left.</u>	DNYUZ	565,426	\$ 5,230.19
26-Aug	<u>QCMM's 10th anniversary in September to include changes in activity, parking at Wharf Lot</u>	The Augusta Free Press	535,346	\$ 4,951.95
19-Aug	<u>Staunton Music Festival hits all the right notes as performers gather for 2025 season</u>	The Augusta Free Press	535,346	\$ 4,951.95
06-Aug	<u>Staunton Music Festival 2025: Experience The Fusion Of Historic And Contemporary Music In Virginia</u>	Travel And Tour World	453,860	\$ 4,198.20
25-Aug	<u>This Day in History: Woodrow Wilson establishes National Park Service</u>	WHSV-TV	310,711	\$ 2,874.08
25-Aug	<u>Marino's Lunch to be featured on popular YouTube show</u>	WHSV-TV	310,711	\$ 2,874.08
18-Aug	<u>Staunton Music Festival returns to downtown</u>	WHSV-TV	310,711	\$ 2,874.08

20-Aug	<u>Queen City Mischief and Magic prepares for year 10</u>	News Leader	93,373	\$ 863.70
16-Aug	<u>Iconic Staunton restaurant, Marino's, to be featured on America's Best Restaurants Roadshow</u>	News Leader	93,373	\$ 863.70
15-Aug	<u>15 Reasons Why Everyone's Falling In Love With The Shenandoah Valley</u>	Housely	56,439	\$ 522.06
31-Aug	<u>Historic steam locomotive to run fall foliage excursions</u>	The Northern Virginia Daily	55,380	\$ 512.26
29-Aug	<u>Historic steam locomotive to run fall foliage excursions</u>	Daily News-Record	53,787	\$ 497.53
04-Aug	<u>Akuma-Kalu Njoku, the man behind the famous Igbo Village in the U.S. - Face2Face Africa</u>	Blackfacts	24,945	\$ 230.74
14-Aug	<u>Frontier Culture Museum celebrates 250 years of American independence</u>	WMRA-FM	11,738	\$ 108.58
28-Aug	<u>Arts & Culture in Virginia's Blue Ridge</u>	The Roanoker Magazine	7,379	\$ 68.26
19-Aug	<u>8 scenic autumn train rides in & around Virginia</u>	The Good Information Foundation	1,154	\$ 10.67
			456,102,094	\$ 4,218,944.34

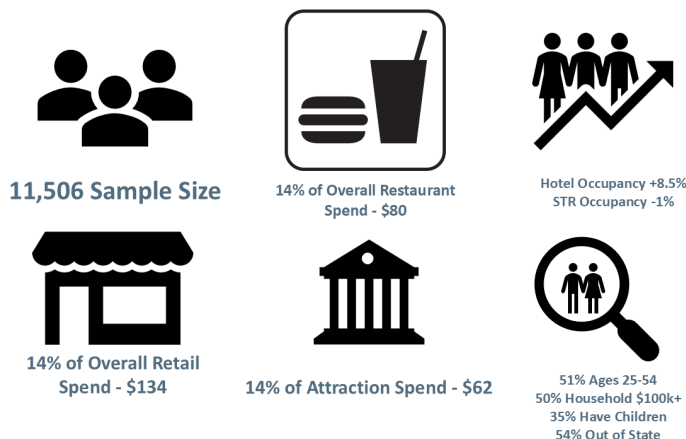
Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
August 2024	August 2025	% Change
96,940 views	111,028 views	+14.5 %
151 guide requests	129 visitor's guide requests	-14.6%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending – July 2025



*D.C. Visitation & Spending grew by 1.5%. Roanoke visitation continued to grow. Philly market grew by 4%



Samantha: Two recent articles in the New York Times, and Samantha thanked Dave Metz for bringing the one about relocating to Staunton. The other article was the 50 Top Restaurants in America, with Maude and the Bear being the only restaurant in Virginia to make the list. Two group tours of 50 each coming towards the end of the month, and will have time to explore on their own. Anyone that would like to provide material or discounts, please see Samantha. Zartico data shows a return of DC to Staunton, with Roanoke continuing nice growth. Philly market grew 4%, and we will be piggybacking on VTC efforts there. Will do digital, connective TV and commercials. VTC events grant is due today at 5:00 pm.

QCMM Update – Sarah Lynch

Sarah: Everything is at the printers, and have added some cool new items for guests to enjoy, including a greenhouse to walk through (Prof. Sprout), Bloomaker dipping Amaryllis bulbs in wax (free), a duck race, and smoke bombs at the Weasley Wedding when the baddies crash the wedding. There are 10 vignettes set up in the old Grand Building and an animatronic 3 headed dog. Samantha noted we had 2-3 other articles on Staunton since the Virginia Living writer experienced QCMM last year. Robin mentioned people come through WWPL and say they first discovered Staunton through QCMM and come back now to visit. Amy Lessley encouraged anyone that is available to come volunteer. There was discussion on where business owners and employees could park. There are characters that have huge social media followings that are coming from the Midwest to participate this year.

Sector Reports – Lodging

Michelle: July occupancy was up 8.5% over 2024. Short term rentals were down 1%. Augusta was excellent for Hotel 24 South, up 5% in occupancy and about 2% in rate. Backwards 1% on food and beverage revenue. Not as many conferences. Up in rate 100% in September is flat to last year, and food and beverage is flat to last year. Strong week Labor Day week which is unusual, and saw a lot of last-minute bookings. Very busy for October and November looking up to last year. A lot of people coming for the trains. Conference of 124 in town next week Tu-Th and on their own for dinners.

Ross: For July, occupancy was down but rate was up. As a whole, probably down about 5%, primarily due to election year and DC is a huge market for us. August has been great. October is looking solid with a wait list for the 3rd weekend. Have a few rooms for QCMM if anyone is looking, Dropped two night minimum.

Sector Reports – Restaurants

Sarah: One anonymous restaurant reported increase month over month and year over year, with notable visitation from DC. For Baja, Augusta was great and Summerfest was great. Baja saw a lot of Charlotte people, with one group being primarily in their 70's looking relaxed, tan, in shorts and pulling people in off the street. Ellie's Bubble Tea is now open.

Sector Reports - Retail

Sandi: 4 reports from retails and half reported higher sales month over month and year to date. NoVA, Richmond, NC, MD and FL stood out as high traffic markets. The Book Dragon had a lot of international visitors. Seeing people come from the Midwest as well. We were one of the stores that we are up double digits for both July, August, and ending that way for September and year to date. Doing a book fair for Riverheads schools and all three schools will be roaming around downtown on Saturday. All three principals will be present with story times and activities for the kids.

Sector Reports – Attractions

Robin: July was flat, but Augusta was up and overall, up 9% over last year. 34 states and 13 countries represented. Great speaker in series coming on Sept. 25, moved to Thursdays. His name is Charles Trueheart, and his father was Director of Mission to South Vietnam in the early 60's.

Paige: Down in August compared to July, but July includes summer campers (1000 kids). If including general admissions, we are flat. Year over year we are even, with construction considered. On Sept. 28 we are hosting Dr. Evan Friss who has written about the history of American book stores. He is a JMU professor. On Nov. 8, partnering with the Virginia Cider Association and Virginia Humanities to host a cider festival. Bringing in cideries across Virginia as well as authors who have written on the importance of apples and ciders to the development of the Shenandoah Valley. Free to attend for annual passholders, free to attend but cider tasting extra.

Camille: Romeo and Juliet opened last weekend, and Two Gentlemen of Verona opens tomorrow night. Ticket sales projections are great. Partnering with the SPCA and bringing shelter dogs on stage to increase adoption awareness. Were able to place 7 dogs in homes. 17 local businesses are featured in our program – thank you! Staunton Music Festival was tremendous. Donations are way up as well as ticket revenues. Had 6 completely sold-out concerts with 40 events total. Had 685 K-12 students to attend performances and rehearsals. Did special coupon codes for area colleges. Had 37 high school and college students come mid-week. A lot of new patrons, and a lot from DC and NoVA. Many mentioned looking for alternatives to the Kenndy Center to divert their money, giving and attendance. A lot commented this was the best year ever. Unable to bring 4 musicians from out of the country due to Visa problems - one from Finland, a pianist that has been here from the beginning.

Andrew: Echoed the issues with Visa problems, and anticipates 2026 may be worse. We hear from faculty at conservatories they are seeing a loss of students that didn't come back. Most seemed to have Visas not approved in time. Depressed applications somewhat. Also saw increase in donations and giving due to our messaging of funding uncertainties. 2026 is Heifetz Institute's 30th Anniversary, and planning to go even bigger. Have signed our contract with MBU for 2026. Using other facilities at Stuart Hall, Central UM Church, First Presbyterian as well. Trying to provides some transportation around town for students and looking for vehicle sponsors.

Keith: Family weekend at MBU Oct. 3-5. Homecoming weekend in Oct. 17-19. 40th anniversary of the Program for the Exceptionally Gifted at Mary Baldwin, as well as the 30th anniversary for the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership, both being celebrated at homecoming. Expecting a pretty good turnout, particularly from those programs. Mentioned MBU Signature Event season launch, and passed around program booklets.

Pamela: Arcadia Presents has been really well attended, and miraculously, none got rained out. Focusing on the Tri-Wizard maze for QCMM and then back in October on the 4th, the 11th and the 18th. The last one, the 18th, we're partnering with Shakespeare. We're doing a theatrical blood workshop to kids in front of the building.

Staunton Shout-Outs

Scotty Tiernan for Summerfest, manning it, getting volunteers, bringing people downtown and celebrating MBU!

Staunton Music Festival was phenomenal!

Camille's costume!

Everyone that comes to TAB and the engagement you bring! Tourism is so vital to this community and City!

Queen City Music Studios for handling the music for Summerfest, and their professionalism and knowledge!

The City of Staunton staff. We are so lucky to have the city government's support on all these events.

Old Business

Jessica Blythe: We are both expanding out boundaries and changing incentives on the Enterprise Zone. We will present to City Council on September 25 and they will vote on October 8th. It will get passed on to DHCD for approval. The expansion primarily focused on the West End. Deleting residential properties since they do not qualify for incentives. Enterprise Zone incentives vary from tax incentives to an added a marketing grant, a technology grant, and a facade renovation grant, so tune into Council in two weeks to learn more about that. Our proposed EZ is 800 acres, and we can amend both boundaries and incentives every 12 months. There are also state incentives with the EZ. Local incentives are funded by local dollars. Also exploring with Samantha creating a Tourism Zone, but challenge to that is funding. Also having ongoing Wharf Stakeholder meetings with an update at City Council on September 25th.

[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: The 611 Steam Train will be coming into Staunton every Saturday around 4:00 pm starting QCMM weekend and continuing through the end of October. The train is boarded in Goshen.

Brad Arrowood and Scotty Tiernan: Culmination this weekend of the SDDA Downtown Treasure Hunt with a Pirate Party at Sunspots Pavilion at 12:00 pm. There will be crafts, giveaways and other fun things. Upcoming Holly Jolly Open House meeting. SDDA Annual meeting is Sept. 17 at Staunton Steam Laundry in the clubhouse. Kelvin with DHCD will be in attendance.

Jessica Blythe: Spoke about International Parking Day, and said that JMU Architecture school students will be creating an installation in the Wharf parking lot, the part closed to cars. This goes along with the placemaking initiative and will remain in lace through December. There will also be a selfie station along with the picnic tables, beanbags, lights and rocking chairs.

Brian Fuller: Staunton Jams is Oct. 17-19. Thanks Scotty for printing out sponsor sheets and to past and future sponsors. Concentrating mainly on Beverley and reaching out to satellite venues.

Sarah: Mentioned the Enchanted Mushroom Festival in Churchville the weekend after QCMM.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned. Minutes: Kim Cormier