



Tourism Advisory Board

November 13, 2025 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, 1st Floor

9:30 am Call to order, approval of past meeting minutes

9:35 am Georgi Tomisato – Robert Burns Supper Celebration

9:45 am Wharf Update – Josh Knight

9:55 am Samantha Johnson – Monthly Tourism Report

10:05 am Sector Reports

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

10:20 am Staunton Shout-Outs

10:25 am Old Business

10:30 am New Business

10:35 am Adjourn

Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

October 9, 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
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
Rachel Eavey for Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library

Board Members/City Staff Absent:

Brian Gearhart – Heritage Hospitality
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean
Corrie Park – City Council Liaison
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. Introductions were made around the room. Paige Hildebrand made a motion to approve the previous meeting minutes, and Camille Dierksheide seconded the motion.

Brooke Buffington – MBU Student Employment/Internship Opportunities

Brooke is the Associate Vice President for Career and Professional Development with MBU. She brought a handout about how to connect. Brooke is tasked with making sure students are ready for the world, post-graduation, and get great experiences at MBU that are aligned with their career goals. She spoke to the group about ways they could benefit as employers, utilizing the students, including internships, projects, and retail help. The platform Handshake is used, and businesses can post jobs or projects there. They meet with students to help them learn how to market themselves, coach them, do mock interviews, and discuss employer expectations. She mentioned the clothing closet that is specifically for professional wear and apparel. Brooke also left a handout of MBU’s signature events.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Activities:

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured [Staunton’s Queen City Mischief & Magic Festival Welcomes Magic and Fantasy Lovers](#), [Things to See and Do As the Leaves Change in Staunton](#)
- [Made of Magic](#) campaign launched in Philly
- Visit Staunton hosted travel writers from Esquire Magazine and Garden + Gun Magazine
- Samantha Johnson attended the VADMO Board Meeting

- Jessica Williams attended the Old Dominion SGMP Chapter Meeting, planning for meetings and conferences in Staunton
- Jessica attended the Small Market Meetings Conference in Buffalo, NY
- Samantha attended the Virginia Restaurant Lodging Tourism Association's (VRLTA) Fall Meeting
- New QCMM installation in the Wharf
- Samantha attended the final session for the Virginia Tourism Leadership Institute
- 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
10-Sep	<u>Our Favorite Restaurants and Industry Trends of 2025</u>	The New York Times	132,818,535	\$1,228,571
24-Sep	<u>Virginia's Most Renowned Fall Views Are On A 4-Hour Train Trip Open For A Limited Time Annually</u>	<u>MSN.com</u>	103,994,190	\$ 961,946
19-Sep-	<u>The most beautiful escapes to catch fall color</u>	<u>MSN.com</u>	103,994,190	\$ 961,946
11-Sep-	<u>This Beloved Train Ride Is Back for Fall— But You Only Have 5 Weekends to Catch It</u>	<u>MSN.com</u>	103,994,190	\$ 961,946
21-Sep-	<u>Scenes from the African-American Heritage & Multicultural Festival in Staunton</u>	Yahoo! News	55,646,663	\$ 514,732
28-Sep-	<u>10 Breathtaking Mountain Towns Perfect for Retirees on a \$2,500 Monthly Budget</u>	AOL	28,025,399	\$ 259,235
19-Sep-	<u>12 Scenic Train Rides in the South</u>	AOL	28,025,399	\$ 259,235
16-Sep-	<u>Here Are 10 of the Most Beautiful, Charming Small Towns in Virginia</u>	AOL	28,025,399	\$ 259,235
16-Sep-	<u>Escape to These Charming Mountain Towns in Virginia Before Fall Ends</u>	AOL	28,025,399	\$ 259,235
19-Sep-	<u>This Virginia Restaurant Is Worth the Trip, Says Our Dining Critic</u>	NewsBreak	17,990,759	\$ 166,415
16-Sep-	<u>The Postcard-Worthy Town In Virginia That's Made For A Wallet-Friendly Day Trip</u>	NewsBreak	17,990,759	\$ 166,415
11-Sep-	<u>Staunton's Queen City Mischief & Magic Festival Welcomes Magic and Fantasy Lovers</u>	NewsBreak	17,990,759	\$ 166,415
02-Sep-	<u>One Of Virginia's Most Underrated Towns Is A Scenic Hideaway With Trails, Music, And Local Flavor</u>	Islands Magazine	6,513,332	\$ 60,248
03-Sep-	<u>You'll Hit The Thrifting & Antiquing Jackpot In This Quaint Virginia Town</u>	House Digest	3,867,482	\$ 35,774

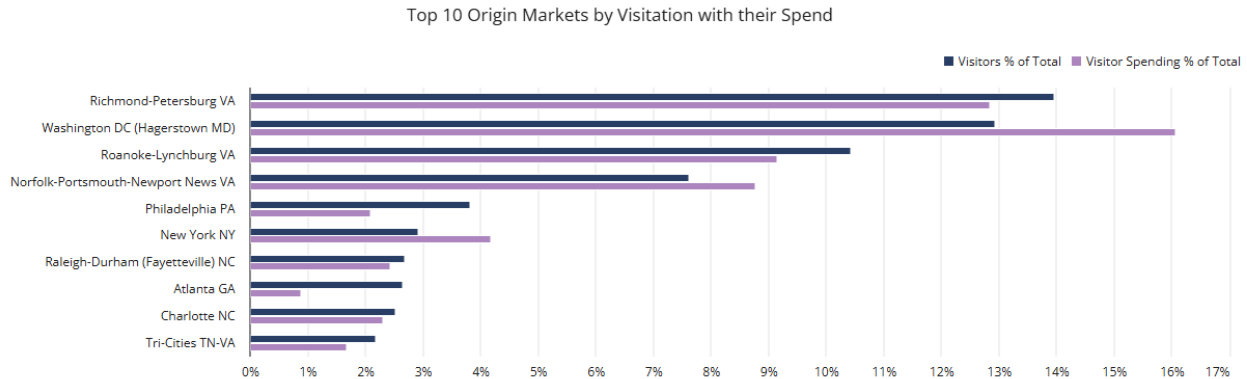
24-Sep-	Virginia's Most Renowned Fall Views Are On A 4-Hour Train Trip Open For A Limited Time Annually	Islands Magazine	2,594,254	\$ 23,997
16-Sep-	Escape to These Charming Mountain Towns in Virginia Before Fall Ends	Only In Your State	1,948,515	\$ 18,024
16-Sep-	Here Are 10 of the Most Beautiful, Charming Small Towns in Virginia	Only In Your State	1,948,515	\$ 18,024
23-Sep-	ROMEO AND JULIET Opens Fall Repertory Season at American Shakespeare Center	BroadwayWorld.com	1,175,195	\$ 10,871
19-Sep-	The most beautiful escapes to catch fall color	WFMZ-TV	1,083,944	\$ 10,026
09-Sep-	Our Staff's Restaurants of the Year, Plus Takes and Trends From 2025	DNYUZ	598,998	\$ 5,541
10-Sep	'The New York Times' Names This Virginia Restaurant as One of the Best in the U.S.	Northern Virginia Magazine	359,360	\$ 3,324
28-Sep-	The 10th annual Queen City Mischief and Magic Festival returns to Staunton	WHSV-TV	315,785	\$ 2,921
12-Sep	Your guide to festivals, events and more fun things to do around the region this fall	InsideNoVa.com	251,229	\$ 2,324
21-Sep-	Surprise ceremony at the African-American Heritage & Multicultural Festival in Staunton	News Leader	104,729	\$ 969
01-Sep	Historic steam locomotive to run fall foliage excursions	The Winchester Star	98,530	\$ 911
19-Sep	12 Scenic Train Rides in the South (Including the NEW Gulf Coast Route!)	StyleBlueprint	92,577	\$ 856
25-Sep	Virginia 611 Steam Engine Returns This Fall With Augusta County Trips	Country Herald	73,576	\$ 681
28-Sep	People pour in from everywhere for 10th annual Queen City Mischief & Magic festival	Daily News-Record	53,565	\$ 495
25-Sep	611 Steam Engine coming through Augusta County this Fall	Rocktown Now	44,413	\$ 411
17-Sep	'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' at Blackfriars Playhouse through 11/15	C-Ville Weekly	42,999	\$ 398
11-Sep-	One Virginia Restaurant Made the New York Times 2025 '50 Best' List — Here's Which One	Alexandria Living Magazine	39,041	\$ 361
02-Sep-	This Virginia Escape Is a Dream for History Lovers	Main Line Today	37,922	\$ 351
12-Sep-	Your guide to festivals, events and fun things to do around the region this fall	Fauquier Now	30,013	\$ 278
24-Sep-	Queen City Mischief and Magic marks 10 years in Staunton this weekend	The News Virginian	14,905	\$ 138
25-Sep-	Top Things to Do in Northern Virginia for Luxury Travelers in 2025	Iconic Life	9,179	\$ 85
24-Sep-	All Aboard!	The News-Gazette	8,552	\$ 79
			687,828,251	\$6,362,411

Website Visitation

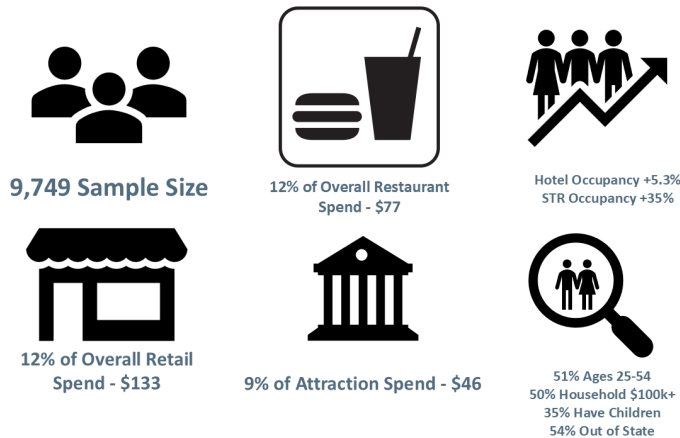
Website Traffic		
September 2024	September 2025	% Change
40,406	44,443 users	+10 %
167 guide requests	167 visitor's guide requests	0%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

-August 2025-



*Richmond grew to top market in August, increasing nearly 3% in spending and visitation. While DC visitation dropped, their overall spending slightly increased MoM. Roanoke has continued to be a steady presence, and Raleigh made an impression as our 7th overall market in August.



Samantha elaborated on the ad campaign in Philadelphia that we are piggy-backing on VTC's efforts. It has been steady in our top 10. We hyper targeted with our streaming ads and they are tracking 40% the agency benchmark. They will run through the end of November. We are working with our agency now to see if we could possibly budget to do something similar, targeting higher income households in DC since the federal shutdown. Samantha is curious about advertising via radio in DC since so many people are in their cars commuting. Other items of note:

- Hosted two national travel writers from Garden & Gun and Esquire
- Jessica has accepted another position outside of the city and her last day was yesterday. The job is posted for Sales and Marketing Manager.
- Will be pushing train travel in upcoming blog post. The 611 will be stopping in Staunton on Saturdays only. The downtown sees a lot of visitors that are here for Virginia Scenic Railway.

Brad mentioned the previous administration's infrastructure bill with the Cardinal potentially going to a seven-day service.

Samantha asked for an Economic Development update. Jessica Blythe commented the Enterprise Zone goes to City Council tonight for a vote, then off to DHCD for their approval, hopefully to launch in January. There will be education and marketing campaigns. They are continuing Wharf Stakeholder meetings and wharf area placemaking.

Samantha asked for an SDDA update. Scotty Tiernan spoke about the Christmas Parade application deadline of November 11. Trick or Treating downtown will be on October 25 from 11:00 am to 6:00 pm, and ask Scotty for a black cat for your window to identify you as a candy identifier. There are some great plans and a game-show type of event for Small Business Saturday, so contact SDDA if you are interested in participating.

Sector Reports – Retail

Sandi: QCMM was great and makes a huge difference for all of the businesses downtown. Most retailers are now gearing up for the holidays. Continue to push "Shop Local". Have seen families here on vacation in October as well as international visitors.

Sector Reports – Attractions

Paige: FCM was up month over month, but down year over year due to construction. Finance Dept. said they are not seeing as big of a decrease as anticipated. Have seen visitors from 32 states as well as international, primarily from Ireland, England and Germany. About 18% of visitors came from PA last month, which was interesting.

Rachael: Have seen a big increase in bus tours, and just yesterday a bus tour from New Zealand and Australia. Also had people a group of people from Brazil, back for their second time. We are trying to promote train travel as well, as Wilson came back to Staunton on the train. Amtrak has a page to submit local events. QCMM was really good, and we had great numbers with our Superstitions Tours.

Sector Reports - Lodging

Michelle: For August, occupancy was up 5.3% and ADR was up 4.9%. Revenue per available room was up 10.5% and short-term rentals were up 35%. September occupancy was flat for Hotel 24S, but up 5% in ADR. Overall food and beverage was up 10%. Tracking October to be up 6% in occupancy, which is likely our largest occupancy increase we've seen so far this year. ADR is up 5% over same time last year, and our total revenue is going to be up 15%, so a really good, strong month right now. November is our slowest pace it's been so we are actually flat to last year. In December, we're up 12% right now, and the Santa train tickets were supposed to go on sale yesterday. VSR is also doing a Santa train out of Louisa, as well as adults only themed rides. There are a lot of people that take the Steam train from Goshen and stay in Staunton.

Sector Reports – Restaurant

No report

Staunton Shout-Outs

Kate Simon for running around all over QCMM taking photographs, as well as taking photos of group tours for use in marketing.

Kim C. and Ginger T. for manning the merch table at Baja during QCMM!

Megan Owen for creating content for QCMM!

Public Works for all of their work during QCMM, S&D out and year-round !

Citizen University – highly recommend! 12 weeks long.

Old Business

Samantha: Wayfinding and placemaking efforts ongoing at the Wharf. While physical signage is being discussed we are moving forward with a digital wayfinding platform called Brighter. We will be able to also use it for things such as dessert or burger week, special things during the holidays, special challenges to move people through businesses, etc. Everyone will have a QR code that you keep at your point of sale. There will be challenges for people to participate in and check off, and receive prizes (like stickers) in some instances. Hopefully will be in place within the next month.

[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

Crucible is in the running to be named one of the top locally owned coffee shops by USA Today, so please vote.

Society of Governmental Meeting Professionals is doing a 50/50 raffle for \$5/ticket if you are interested, see Samantha.

Kate Nesmith spoke about her new role at the Arcadia Project, who is in the final stages of funding to start the renovation. Kate has posters for upcoming “Arcadia Presents” events. Partnering with ASC to do a theatrical blood workshop just in time for Halloween.

There is a sandwich board near the cigar shop that points toward the Wharf businesses. It belongs to SDDA, before the current administration. Farrah from Redbeard asked if one could be placed at the corner of Beverley and Lewis to point towards those Wharf businesses. Brad believes due to the issue at the Wharf he thinks the signage could be expanded.

The Veteran’s Day Parade is organized by Frank Strassler at Historic Staunton Foundation. It is November 8th at 11:11 am.

Staunton Pride is this weekend at Gypsy Hill Park with bands, food trucks, vendors and a fashion show.

WHSV is doing a shop small, local Christmas campaign. See Megan Owen if you are interested in participating.

Staunton Jams and Mary Baldwin homecoming is next weekend.

Frontier Culture Museum is partnering with the Virginia Cider Association and Virginia Humanities for a cider festival on Nov. 8 at the museum. There will be live music, author talks and living history demonstrations. Hopefully a good kick-off for future Cider festivals

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