



Tourism Advisory Board

November 9, 2023 9:30 am

Caucus Room, First Floor, City Hall

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

9:35 am October 2023 Tourism Review

9:45 am Sector Reports

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

10:10 am Old Business

10:15 am New Business

10:20 am Adjourn

Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

October 12, 2023 9:30 am

Members/City Staff Present:

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center
Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon
Steve Claffey, Mayor – City Council Liaison
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library
Jessica Williams – Staunton Tourism

Members/City Staff Absent:

Greg Beam – SDDA
Gabe Glassmann - Mary Baldwin University
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro
Sheryl Wagner – Staunton Tourism
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Others Present:

Chris Auville – Harmony Harvest Farm
Angus Carter – Staunton Augusta Art Center
June Collmer – Heifetz Retail Store
Nick and Julia Sabin – Staunton Books
Annette Spencer – Tru by Hilton
Juliette Swenson (CoArt Gallery)
Christian Vames – Frontline Model Kits and Hobbies
Pamela Mason Wagner (Zoom)

Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. A motion was made by Robin von Seldeneck and seconded by Michele Davis to approve the previous meeting minutes. Minutes were approved. Introductions were made around the room. Sarah reminded all about the email she sent about board members reporting during sector reports, other participants reporting during new business, and the importance of keeping the meeting to an hour to respect everyone’s time.

September 2023 Tourism Review – Jessica Williams

The Tourism Department staff took part in the following promotional, networking, or administrative activities in September:

- September promotions included, September in Staunton: Festivals and Events, Art in the Park, Revolutionary War Weekend at the Frontier Culture Museum, African American Heritage & Multicultural Festival, Queen City Mischief and Magic, Virginia Scenic Railway's Shenandoah Valley Limited, Staunton for the Solo Traveler, Make Your Own Mocktails, Cocktails, Punches or Soaps at The Art Hive, Tips for the First Time Visitor to Staunton, and Staunton on Tap weekly special events.
- Arranged a visit for a social influencer (@bygollymisterollie) from Richmond, Virginia September 1-2.

- Sheryl Wagner presented to the Colonel Thomas Hughart Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution about the Virginia American Revolution 250 Commission (VA250) and our local VA250 committee meetings and activities on September 2.
- Organized a Staunton site visit for Paul-Marc Tour Company September 13-14.
- Retained a film crew to create a new tourism promotional video September 18-21.
- Sheryl Wagner attended the Virginia Women’s Municipal Leadership Institute September 20-22.
- Jessica Williams attended the CrowdRiff Seek, Explore, Experience (SEE) educational conference September 17-21.
- Provided welcome bags for the Virginia Risk Sharing Association’s (VRSA) Fall Forum conference in Staunton September 22.
- Decorated the Visitor Center as the “Room of Requirement” and assisted visitors during the Queen City Mischief & Magic festival September 22-23.

Public Relations

The following is a list of newspapers, websites, magazines, and television stations that published articles about Staunton:

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
25-Sep	<u>This 4-hour Vintage Train Journey Through Virginia's Shenandoah Valley Is One of the Best Ways to See Fall Foliage</u>	Travel + Leisure	14,172,765
28-Sep	<u>8 Restaurants Establishing The Shenandoah Valley As A Culinary Capital</u>	Southern Living	1,4047,314
29-Sep	<u>These Classic D.C. Restaurants and Bars Are Still Worth a Visit</u>	Eater	11,911,553
06-Sep	<u>12 Most Scenic Virginia Towns</u>	World Atlas	4,860,336
05-Sep	<u>14 Most Beautiful Small Towns In Virginia You Should Visit</u>	World Atlas	4,860,336
22-Sep	<u>Here’s When Colorful Fall Foliage Will Peak Around DC</u>	Washingtonian Magazine	1,417,572
14-Sep	<u>Virginia Scenic Railway Offering Excursions on the Iconic 611 Engine Through the Valley This Fall</u>	WWBT-TV	1,369,501
18-Sep	<u>Norfolk & Western No. 611 Arrives on the Buckingham Branch Railroad</u>	Model Railroader Magazine	712,165
29-Sep	<u>Final Preparations Underway for 611 Excursions</u>	WSLS-TV	633,051
28-Sep	<u>611 is Full Steam Ahead as Final Preparations are Made for Fall Excursions</u>	WSLS-TV	633,051
13-Sep	<u>611 Locomotive to Leave Roanoke for Fall Excursions</u>	WSLS-TV	633,051
25-Sep	<u>Five Must-Try Southern Apples</u>	Garden & Gun	430,991
28-Sep	<u>Preparations Under Way for Fall Excursions, as the 611 Rolls Again in Virginia</u>	WHSV-TV	379,317
28-Sep	<u>Historic 611 Locomotive Makes its Way to the Virginia Scenic Railway</u>	WHSV-TV	379,317
24-Sep	<u>Rain Doesn’t Stop Annual Queen City Mischief & Magic Festival</u>	WHSV-TV	379,317
24-Sep	<u>Queen City Mischief & Magic Festival Resumes Amidst Tropical Storm</u>	WHSV-TV	379,317
21-Sep	<u>Learn the History Behind the Iconic 611 Engine</u>	WHSV-TV	379,317
20-Sep	<u>Queen City Mischief and Magic Returns to Staunton</u>	WHSV-TV	379,317

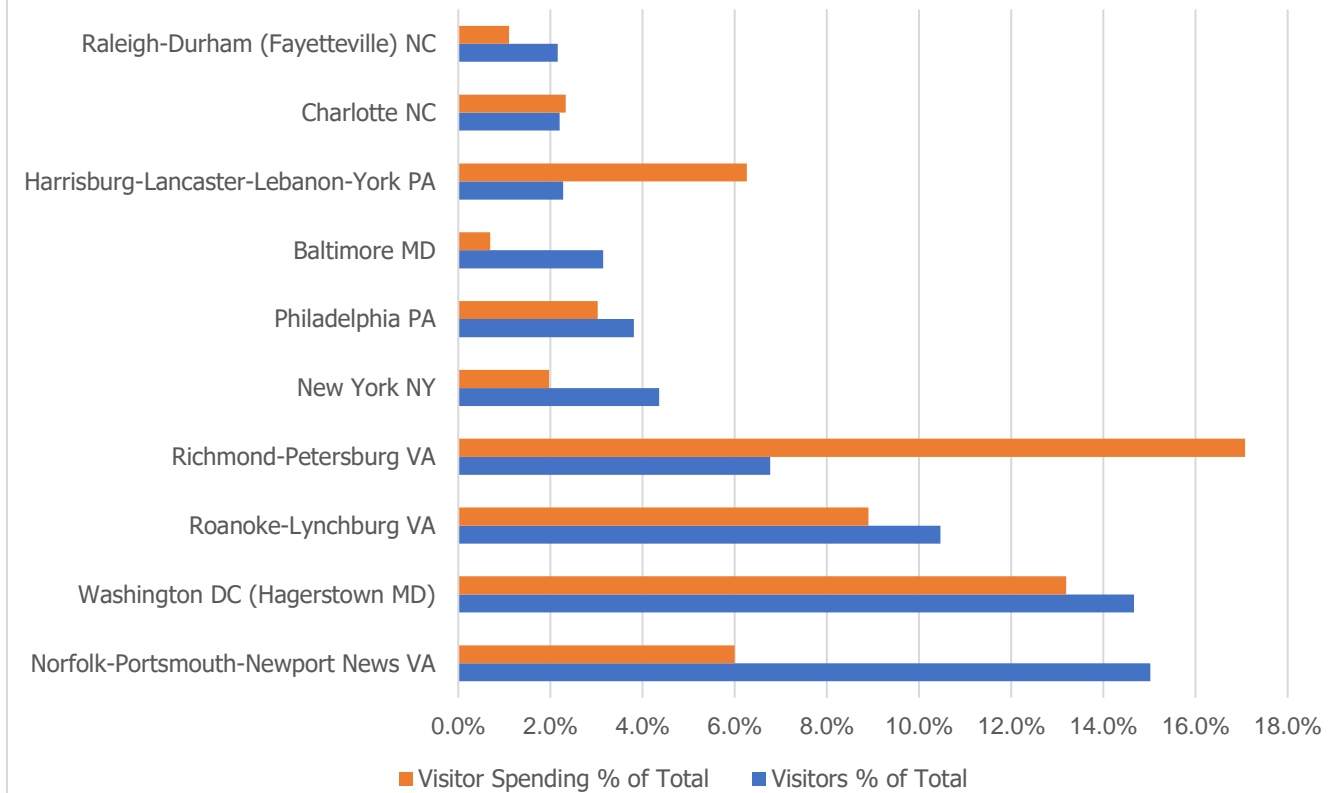
Date	Headline	Source	Reach
17-Sep	<u>Heritage Festival in Staunton Expands and Refreshes on Representation</u>	WHSV-TV	379,317
12-Sep	<u>Virginia Scenic Railway Offering Excursions on the Iconic Engine 611 Through the Valley This Fall</u>	WHSV-TV	379,317
23-Sep	<u>Mischief and Magic Fills the Streets of Staunton Despite Rain and Wind</u>	News Leader	225,489
13-Sep	<u>Chicano Boy Owner Justin Hershey Opening Wood-Fired Pizza Restaurant in Staunton</u>	News Leader	225,489
12-Sep	<u>Harry Potter Fans Get Ready for the 8th Queen City Mischief & Magic Festival in Staunton</u>	News Leader	225,489
10-Sep	<u>African American Heritage & Multicultural Festival Returns with New Name to Celebrate Cultural Traditions in the Valley</u>	News Leader	225,489
08-Sep	<u>Go Treasure Hunting at These Antique Shops in Shenandoah</u>	Northern Virginia Magazine	188,145
07-Sep	<u>Fun Awaits at These Fall Festivals in Shenandoah</u>	Northern Virginia Magazine	188,145
01-Sep	<u>Take a Foodie Road Trip on Route 11</u>	Northern Virginia Magazine	188,145
29-Sep	<u>Find Gifts and Goods from Shenandoah Artisans</u>	Northern Virginia Magazine	183,557
26-Sep	<u>Find Fine Dining at These Shenandoah Restaurants</u>	Northern Virginia Magazine	183,557
19-Sep	<u>Ride the Rails with the Virginia Scenic Railway</u>	Northern Virginia Magazine	183,557
18-Sep	<u>Where to Stay on a Trip to Shenandoah</u>	Northern Virginia Magazine	183,557
24-Sep	<u>12 Scenic Train Rides in the South</u>	StyleBlueprint	179,651
26-Sep	<u>Historic Steam Locomotive To Pull Scenic Excursions</u>	Daily News-Record	66,675
		TOTAL	61,202,233

Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
September 2022	September 2023	% Change
35,937 visitors	46,151 visitors	+28.4%
87,719 page views	116,654 page views	+33%
331 visitor's guide requests	158 visitor's guide requests	-52.2%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

September 2023



Smith Travel Research (STR) Hotel Occupancy Report

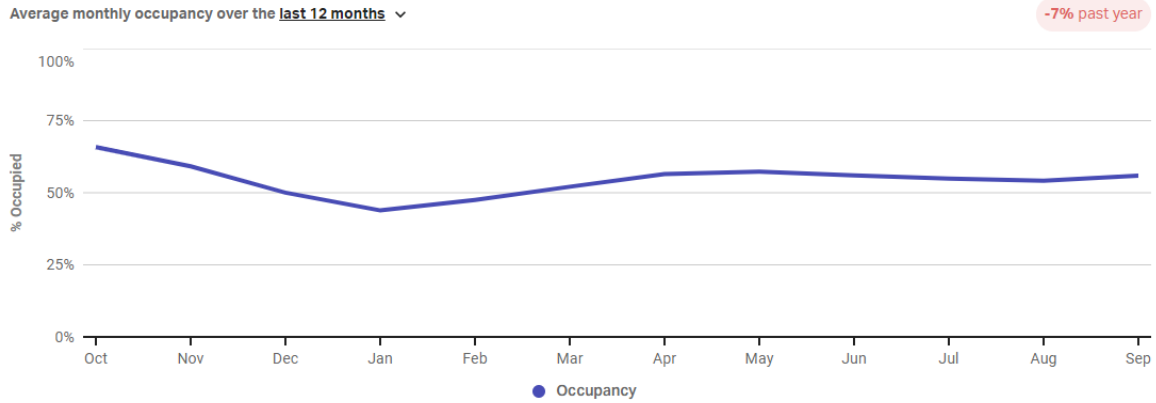
Occupancy (%)	Year To Date									2021	2022	2023
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug				
This Year	40.6	45.9	54.1	60.9	65.8	65.6	61.0	60.9	47.4	57.1	57.0	
Last Year	39.6	42.9	51.3	63.8	64.4	65.0	65.0	64.2	33.0	47.4	57.1	
% Change	2.5	7.2	5.3	-4.5	2.2	1.0	-6.1	-5.0	43.5	20.6	-0.3	

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Market Performance Details: Staunton

Listings Occupancy Revenue Rates RevPAR

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Robin said she believes it is a big trend in museums and cultural attractions to move away from printed guides and downloading them instead. Mayor Claffey asked Jessica about the film crew that was here in Staunton, and Jessica said it will be a video we can use for our website and other social platforms or promotions. We can also let others use if requested for conferences and groups. Sarah mentioned she has invited Maggie Ragon, Commissioner of the Revenue for the City of Staunton, to present on Airbnb, as she has been on the committee for state legislative task force for years.

Sector Reports

Lodging

Michelle: Flat for the month of September but up in ADR compared to last year. November is pacing behind on occupancy and ADR is flat. With the way Thanksgiving is falling this year, we lose that whole week unfortunately. December looks really strong with holiday parties. Hotel 24 South has access to CoStar reporting, which shows our area was ahead until June, and then started pacing behind. They are saying we're going to end 2023 with our occupancy down one point, and our ADR of 1.5%. They are also projecting 2024 occupancy to be up 5.1% and our ADR to be at 5.3% or rate to be at 5.3%. So, a total change of 10.6.

Sector Reports

Restaurants

Sarah: September was a fine month; we were closed for part of it for a wedding and QCMM recovery. QCMM was great! Parking was down 20% of normal on Saturday. We went on despite the rain, and Sarah said she would have hard numbers after she concludes the grant compliance and reimbursement. Redbeard was down overall year to year, with fewer tourists and with household budgets squeezed.

Sector Reports

Retail

Sandi: Some retailers said that QCMM sales were down. Sandi said she has observed people coming here for the experience, and not necessarily to buy all the character products, so most will have some to store away until next year. She believes the rain contributed to sales being down. Some didn't want to carry bags around in the rain, so she had a hold area for packages in her store. Heifetz is in their new retail space at 11 S. New St. Hear and Now Concerts are underway. On November 5th, Zlatomir Fung, a cellist, will perform. He was a Heifetz student for two summers and in 2019 he became the youngest

musician ever to win first prize gold in the Tchaikovsky competition. More people coming downtown than before and learning of new restaurants and shops. Biggest complaint still places not open Sunday or Monday mornings. Mondays are still some of Sandi's best days. Juliette added that First Fridays was a bust for Queen City Gifts and Games, CoArt and Words Matter.

Sector Reports

Attractions

Paige: September was up about 500 people, total revenue stayed the same (annual passholders, events). Up about 900 from August of 2023. Oktoberfest last weekend netted around 1,100 people. Everyone had a great time, biggest complaint was brats truck couldn't keep up.

Stephanie: Crushing fall goals! Showing Much Ado, Coriolanus, Hamlet. Seeing numbers close to 2019 numbers. Selling out most weekends. For Christmas Carol, already sold out for student matinees. For spring season, we will be doing Julius Caesar, Midsummer Nights' Dream, and Pride and Prejudice. Very excited to begin selling end of October and encouraging people to buy tickets for stocking stuffers.

Robin: Had a fantastic September! We were at 95% of where we were in 2019. Overheard at a conference that most attractions are at 60% of where they were in 2019. One concern is angry visitors, before they ever have even bought their tickets. Most people are not like that, but it is concerning for the front-line staff. Stephanie agreed, it has been a concern as of late with cross-gender casting, which they have done since the beginning. They put disclaimers on their tickets. Mayor Claffey recently attended a VML conference where this was discussed. It has been state-wide issue with hostile citizens. Mayor Claffey said he also heard glowing comments about Staunton and the downtown area. Sarah said there is a paying it forward movement beginning in DC and hopefully trending our way. Robin added they are discussing at WWPL civic engagement and what it means to be involved.

Old Business

Sarah: Lonely Planet is featuring QCMM this year in their printed and online guide. We had some correspondence with VTC after the event, and Kelly Williams from VTC attended QCMM. She posted a reel, and it was over 100,000 views in less than 24 hours. The Sched app had over 100,000 visits, and we hope it will become a sponsorship opportunity for us. Facebook had over 200,000 interactions for QCMM for the month of September. Sarah said if anyone had ideas on potential speakers for TAB please let her know. Pamela said they saw nearly 3,000 at the maze at QCCM, and their business was up 57%, perhaps because they were indoors. Sarah suggested that may have been the case for other potions classes and indoor activities as well. There were more people on the streets on Sunday.

New Business

Sandi talked about hosting a Literary Festival in October 2024. October is National Book Month, and the streets are still closed then on weekends. Sandi will share more info for anyone who would like to come to the next meeting at her shop. The goal is to have all of downtown who wants to participate to do so. Plans are to hold a ticketed event on Friday evening at a venue. The tentative date is October 19th, 2024. Authors will set up with other businesses outside. No name has been chosen yet. Would like to eventually expand it to screen writers, comic writers, etc. The Staunton Public Library is willing to host panels for conversation, or a how-to. Email questions to Sandi at thebookdragonshop@gmail.com.

Mayor Claffey asked for any thoughts on Shop and Dine Out for next season. Michelle suggested opening the garage alley so people can get to the hotel. Mayor Claffey said there had been a suggestion to have E. Beverley change direction when streets are closed, so traffic could turn off of Coalter to come down E. Beverley and have the ability to turn left onto S. Market. That would also be a visual highlight of Beverley Street. Sandi said it has been good for her business. Nick said his suggestion would be to do it year-round on the weekends. Sandi noticed there were more people that needed handicap accessible

ramps, etc. this year. Sarah said there was nothing allowed on sidewalks this year, and she is happy to hear this.

Pamela attended the Adam Campbell forum and he mentioned the possibility of regional tourism collaboration. He said Waynesboro has great outdoor activities, and we have indoor cultural arts. Jessica said Staunton is in a regional tourism program with Waynesboro and Augusta County call GART (Greater Augusta Regional Tourism). They meet quarterly, and have been in this program since at least 2007, and possibly before. Beerwerks was a brainchild of GART. There is also SVTA (Shenandoah Valley Travel Association) and SVTP (Shenandoah Valley Tourism Partnership). We are always working to collaborate and think regionally. We work to help visitors stay longer and explore more. Angus said they are talking about starting a regional Art Trail.

Nick said they are organizing a Halloween Fall Festival, and passed out small papers with QR codes that take you to the website. They are hoping to grow this each year. There are about 30 listings on the site so far, so please reach out if you would like to participate. They may also try cosplay events.

Paige asked if someone from Staunton Jams could come to TAB next year and discuss their plans. Pamela said there would be a stage in front of the Arcadia Building that is booked all day, along with satellite events.

Michelle said Virginia Banking Association will be here on Sunday with 60 people who are on their own for meals. On Monday night there will be over 100 looking for meals. Hotel 24 South is hosting their Thanksgiving Buffett this year with limited seating. Next year is their 100 year anniversary and we are starting to plan for that.

Adjourn

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:30 am.

Meeting minutes submitted by Kim Cormier.