



## **Tourism Advisory Board**

**January 11, 2024 9:30 am**

**Caucus Room, First Floor, City Hall**

- 9:30 am**    **Call to order, approval of past meeting minutes**
- 9:35 am**    **Maggie Ragon Commissioner of the Revenue – Airbnb Update**
- 9:50 am**    **December 2023 Tourism Review**
- 10:00 am**    **Sector Reports**
- **Lodging**
  - **Restaurants**
  - **Retail**
  - **Attractions/Arts**
- 10:15 am**    **Old Business**
- 10:20 am**    **New Business**
- 10:25 am**    **Adjourn**

# Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

November 9, 2023 9:30 am

## Members/City Staff Present:

Greg Beam – SDDA  
Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center  
Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon  
Gabe Glassmann - Mary Baldwin University  
Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean  
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro  
Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library  
Sheryl Wagner – Staunton Tourism  
Jessica Williams – Staunton Tourism

## Members/City Staff Absent:

Steve Claffey, Mayor – City Council Liaison  
Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South  
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute  
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia  
Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum  
Ross Williams – Frederick House

## Others Present:

Angus Carter – Staunton Augusta Art Center  
Owen Marshall – SDDA  
Justin McBride – Brisket Taco  
Natasha McCurdy – Queen City Gifts & Games (Zoom)  
Christian Vames – Frontline Model Kits and Hobbies  
Pamela Mason Wagner (Zoom)  
Michelle Waitier - SDDA

## Call To Order and Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order. A motion was made by Sarah Lynch and seconded by Robin von Seldeneck to approve the previous meeting minutes. The minutes were approved. Sheryl Wagner announced she would be leaving the Tourism Director position in Staunton, and has accepted the same position for Lexington and Rockbridge County, which is where her home is. Greg Beam led the group in thanking her for her years of promoting Staunton and said she has made a huge impact. Jeff Ramsey added she has done a tremendous job, and handled it with grace and dignity.

## October 2023 Tourism Review – Sheryl Wagner

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

- October promotions included, Virginia Wine Month, Staunton Pride Festival, Oktoberfest at the Frontier Culture Museum, Staunton Jams, The Last Banker’s Ball, Haunted Staunton, All Things Fall in Staunton, Last Chance This Season To Shop and Dine Out, Fall and Halloween Fun, 8 New Things To Do In Staunton, Santa’s Scenic Railway Tickets Now on Sale, and Staunton on Tap weekly special events.
- Hosted two social influencers (@historyinhighheels and @adayinthelalz) from Washington, DC October 27-29.

- Jessica Williams chaired the Greater Augusta Regional Tourism Board meeting on October 10.
- Hosted a travel writer, editor, and photographer from *Wake Living* and *Cary Living* magazines out of Raleigh, NC October 23-26.
- Sheryl Wagner graduated from the Virginia Women’s Municipal Leadership Institute October 20.

**Public Relations**

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

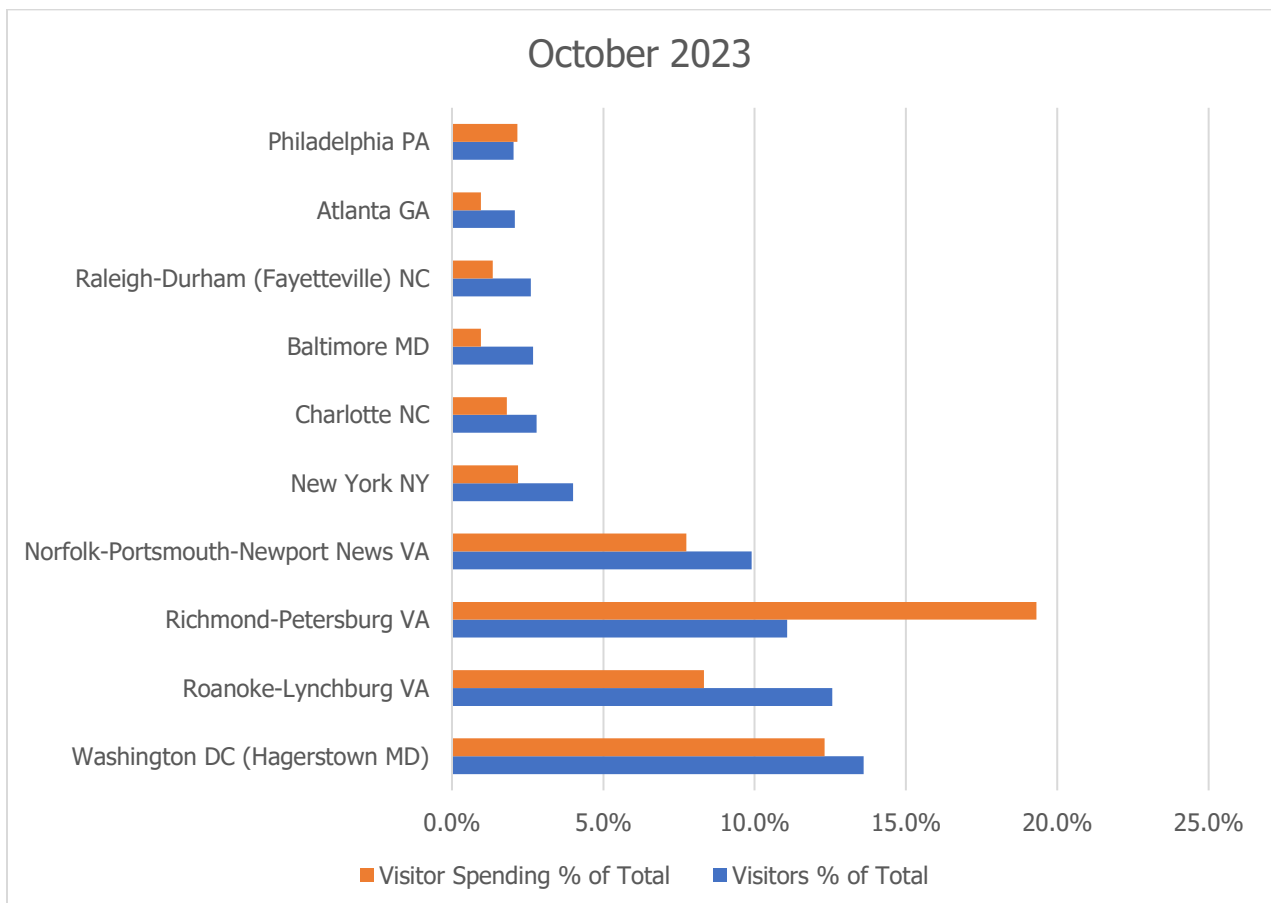
<b>Date</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Reach</b>
10/19/23	<u>I Converted A Sheep Barn Into An Airbnb With \$2,000. Now, I Manage Over 100 Listings. Here's How I Grew My Business And Weathered The Airbnb Apocalypse.</u>	Business Insider	40,592,797
10/02/23	<u>These Small Towns In Virginia That Come Alive In The Fall</u>	World Atlas	4,682,557
10/20/23	<u>9 Quaintest Small Towns In Virginia</u>	World Atlas	4,292,463
10/14/23	<u>9 Most Underrated Towns In The Mid-Atlantic</u>	World Atlas	4,292,463
10/04/23	<u>The 9 Best National Parks For Phenomenal Fall Foliage</u>	AFAR	1,387,930
10/30/23	<u>"Highest-Rated Wineries In Virginia, According To Yelp</u>	WRIC-TV	1,132,340
10/06/23	<u>In-Cab Experience Gives 611 Fans Once In A Lifetime Opportunity</u>	WDBJ-TV	816,081
10/10/23	<u>N&amp;W No. 611 Debuts For The Virginia Scenic Railway's 'Shenandoah Valley Limited'</u>	Model Railroader Magazine	725,464
10/03/23	<u>N&amp;W No. 611'S 'Dress Rehearsal' On The Buckingham Branch Railroad</u>	Model Railroader Magazine	712,165
10/05/23	<u>Return To The Rails: Why The 611 Steam Locomotive Is More Than Just A Train</u>	WSLS-TV	704,666
10/03/23	<u>Staunton, Virginia: The Shenandoah Valley's Best-Kept Secret</u>	Garden & Gun	430,991
10/13/23	<u>Staunton City Council Approves Brewery At Former Coke Plant</u>	WHSV-TV	330,756
10/02/23	<u>Hamlet Returns To American Shakespeare Center With Gender Swap Twist</u>	WHSV-TV	330,756
10/02/23	<u>Where To Celebrate Oktoberfest</u>	The Daily Progress	238,787
10/19/23	<u>Weekend Fun: Loudoun Farm Tour, Pride Of Baltimore, And Young Frankenstein</u>	Northern Virginia Magazine	222,730
10/19/23	<u>Pro Re Nata Expanding In Staunton</u>	WVIR-TV	186,692
10/13/23	<u>Staunton City Council Approves Brewery At Former Coke Plant</u>	WVIR-TV	186,692
10/25/23	<u>Historic Steam Locomotive Returns To Virginia Rails</u>	The Winchester Star	112,250
10/06/23	<u>Loveworks Sign Returns To Downtown For Staunton Pride Festival This Weekend</u>	The Augusta Free Press	89,447
10/06/23	<u>Frontier Culture Museum In Staunton To Celebrate Oktoberfest On Saturday</u>	The Augusta Free Press	89,447
10/24/23	<u>Queen City Bistro Set To Open In January On Staunton's East Beverley Street</u>	News Leader	87,668
10/10/23	<u>Map Exhibit At Frontier Culture Museum Tells The Tale Of Early American Immigrants</u>	News Leader	87,668

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
10/09/23	<a href="#">Steam Locomotive Makes Limited Appearance For Weekends Through November: The Streamlined 611</a>	News Leader	87,668
10/10/23	<a href="#">10 Must-Try Sushi Restaurants In Virginia</a>	PhillyBite	76,058
10/31/23	<a href="#">Talking With A Staunton Paranormal Investigator</a>	WVVA-TV	74,658
10/06/23	<a href="#">In-Cab Experience Gives 611 Fans Once In A Lifetime Opportunity</a>	WVVA-TV	74,658
10/25/23	<a href="#">Chasing The 611</a>	The News-Gazette	41,681
10/06/23	<a href="#">611 Excursions Officially Get Underway</a>	The News-Gazette	41,681
10/04/23	<a href="#">Goshen Gets Ready For Crowds</a>	The News-Gazette	39,066
10/30/23	<a href="#">Dixie Theater Renovation Means Show Will Go On In Staunton</a>	Virginia Business	37,866
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>62,206,146</b>

### Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
October 2022	October 2023	% Change
40,183 visitors	42,366 visitors	+5.4%
165 visitor's guide requests	114 visitor's guide requests	-31%

### Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending



## Smith Travel Research (STR) Hotel Occupancy Report

Occupancy (%)	Year To Date											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	2021	2022	2023
This Year	40.6	45.9	54.1	60.9	65.8	65.6	61.0	60.9	60.8	48.4	58.3	57.4
Last Year	39.6	42.9	51.3	63.8	64.4	65.0	65.0	64.2	67.3	33.8	48.4	58.3
% Change	2.5	7.2	5.3	-4.5	2.2	1.0	-6.1	-5.0	-9.7	43.2	20.4	-1.5

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### Sector Reports - Lodging

Jeff: Gibson's Warehouse has been crazy busy, weekdays and weekends. October was really good; we lowered the rates slightly but it got occupancy up. We are on Expedia and Airbnb, which traffic has been down on. Everything else has been up. January and February are generally not good, but that's when we refurbish and paint. Sheryl noted 2022 was a banner year – everyone wanted to get out after the pandemic, so 2023 may not have been as good. Jeff thinks the economy is slowing down as well. Jeff said the scenic trains have been really good for his business. Newsbreak is now in the former Pullman space, planning on opening a café, although they have not opened yet. There was discussion on this organization and the possible impacts on surrounding businesses.

### Sector Reports - Restaurants

Sarah: Redbeard is up 30% over last year. Mill Street Grill is rocking, but are still looking for kitchen help. Baja is right where we were last year, but closed Wednesdays. It's been a good few months.

Jeff: Bistro is up and doing great. Labor issues are still a problem, in all of his locations. Sarah mentioned that food prices are still up, but Jeff believes they have stabilized at least.

Justin: Down somewhat excluding QCMM, but normal according to other restaurants. Have made some staffing changes. For \$368, Justin was able to get 1.3 million impressions on digital advertising. Lake Monticello was the 3<sup>rd</sup> top location after Staunton and Harrisonburg. About 1/3 of ordering is online, and that is down some.

### Sector Reports - Retail

Sandi: First Fridays are good until around 6:00 pm, possibly due to how early it gets dark. Most visitors are coming from Tidewater, NoVa and WV. Some Pacific NW visitors as well as Europeans. Sheryl has some data from the scenic trains, and a lot are coming from the West and Pacific NW. Sandi said a lot of visitors came for the 611 Train. Sandi said people loved having the streets closed for Shop and Dine Out, and businesses were hoping to have them closed through Thanksgiving. Sheryl said the last survey indicated businesses wanted the streets open on weekends April through October. Sandi has visited Baby Opal, which is a great addition. Juniper Lane will be doing some renovations in January. A lot of Sandi's customers are buying Shakespeare books when they come to see the play. Sarah said the Blackfriars conference was great for business. Planning on a Plaid Friday event. Wintergreen and Massanutten visitors have been coming downtown. The Book Dragon is up double digits. First Fridays mediocre after 6:30 pm.

Greg: Some shuffling around of businesses, with two new spaces being sublet by the Hillmans, and a new store is coming in one of those.

## **Sector Reports - Attractions**

Paige: (via email) Lantern Tour tickets went on sale Nov 1 and we have sold about 45% of them already. October was fantastic for us; we were up a decent amount from October 2022. Almost 1/3 of our general visitation were 60+. Over the next few weeks, we will be rolling out our 2024 events, which includes our first VA250 event.

Stephanie: Fall season surpassed our goals by 46%, and the next two weekends are sold out for Much Ado and Hamlet. Christmas Carol mailer just sent out, so we have seen a huge bump in ticket sales with several nearly sold-out dates, with two levels of dynamic pricing. Spring season on sale with Julius Caesar, Midsummer Nights Dream and Pride and Prejudice. An official offer has been made to someone for Executive Director, and we are hoping by next TAB meeting they will be on board.

Gabe: Sir Trevor Nunn did several master classes with MBU students. MBU just relaunched their website, and there is now a call-out page for community members.

Robin: We've had another outstanding month, seeing visitors from all over the country. You may see some movement on E. Frederick St. as we are in the process of renovating the old gift shop with a new visitor center with gift shop in that building, and moving admin. offices there from the Coalter St. area. The building in between the museum and the Birthplace will become our education center. Very busy time with a series of moves. In February, we will hold our Full Moon Masquerade on February 24 at the Blackburn Inn.

Angus: We've been closed and preparing for Art for Gifts. The Andrew Davis exhibit killed it, which was not a surprise. Greg was able to get The Staunton Arts Alliance some flags which will go up soon.

Christian: Up 25%, trying to stock up for Christmas. Have trains coming in, including Lionel.

Natasha: Still learning, no hard numbers. October was really slow up until the Halloween weekend. 70% of sales from the entire month came from that weekend. Stocking up for Christmas.

Greg: Introduced Owen Marshall, the new Marketing Manager for SDDA.

## **Old Business**

Greg: The committee will be sharing out survey results of Shop and Dine Out from the participants. Please pass along any thoughts or ideas. Sandi saw more people who needed special accommodations out and about, due to the fixes that were made from the previous years. Families love the kids can play and wander. Also seeing more students from VSDB. We also need to make sure locals feel welcome and come to their own downtown.

## **New Business**

Sandi: The Queen City Word Fest will be held in October 2024, looking at Oct. 19 but waiting to confirm.

## **Adjourn**

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:26 am.

Meeting minutes submitted by Kim Cormier.