



Tourism Advisory Board

February 8, 2024 9:30 am

Caucus Room, First Floor, City Hall

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

9:35 am January 2024 Tourism Review

9:50 am Sector Reports

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

10:10 am Old Business

10:15 am New Business

- **Shop and Dine Out Downtown Update**
- **VTC Grants**

10:25 am Adjourn

Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

January 11, 2024 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
Gabe Glassmann - Mary Baldwin University
Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom)
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
Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia
Jeff Ramsey – Gibson’s Warehouse, Byers Street Bistro
Ross Williams – Frederick House

Others Present:

Breanna – Juniper Lane
June Collmer – Heifetz Retail Store
Owen Marshall – SDDA
Alisha McCoy – Frontier Culture Museum
Dave Metz- Downtown Resident
Maggie Ragon – Commissioner of the Revenue
Julia and Nick Sabin – Staunton Books
Juliette Swenson – CoArt Gallery
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 Stephanie Cabacoy and seconded by Gabe Glassman to approve the previous meeting minutes. The minutes were approved. Introductions were made around the room.

Airbnb Update – Maggie Ragon, Commissioner of the Revenue

The short-term rental online platforms are not interested in providing data. They're actually actively against providing data. We are unable to get any information from Airbnb, and they refuse to provide any information to anyone. We receive money from them every month for what they tell us is our Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) that we are due, but they will not tell us how many rooms were rented. The city has to assume they are giving the correct tax money, and there is no check and balance. We have fought against that for a number of years. There is one bill that has dropped already in the General Assembly where the intermediaries (hosts) would have to register with the Department of Taxation, and receive a number. They would not be allowed to list without the number, and by law, the Department of Taxation shares information with my office. We are supporting that bill. Airbnb is planning to put their own bill out, and Maggie has asked them to share it with her. They have not at this point. They have told me that the

intent of the bill is to have the Department of Taxation (at the state’s expense) create an online portal that they will provide data to, and then the Department of Taxation would provide the data to us that would go along with the funds. This means they want to write one check to the whole Commonwealth of Virginia (all 128 cities, counties, and 700 and some odd towns) and let the state figure it out. We will actively fight against that piece of legislation when it drops. To be clear, Maggie stated all the other intermediaries (Expedia, VRBO, HomeAway, Trip Advisor, etc.) comply and give the information to us, except for Airbnb. Maggie further explained it can be difficult to keep up with when trying to monitor, because hosts take the properties on and off Airbnb to rent long term. There will be 7 more units downtown, and the trend seems to be where you can walk everywhere. Some people seek to rent for work, training, etc. so it is not all tourism based. Every host is required to register and get a business license, and they due their due diligence in in tracking, but can never be sure 100% that there aren’t hosts out there not registered with the city. If there is only a bedroom or room being rented out, it is not assessed for tax purposes. If an entire unit is rented out, it is assessed. There is no inspection by the city in order to be able to be rented out. Finding rental properties has become a nationwide problem, because people are renting out on short term rental platforms. Maggie will keep the TAB updated with any new changes to legislation.

December 2023 Tourism Report – Jessica Williams

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

- December promotions included Unwrapping the Magic of the Holidays, Where to Find Santa, Bazaars and Markets, Ultimate Gift Guide, Navigating the Holiday Hours, Bringing in the New Year, and Staunton on Tap weekly special events.
- Sent out quarterly partner emails requesting holiday hours, specials, etc.
- Jessica Williams attended Travel Exchange International to promote a collaboration with other destinations along Amtrak called Virginia By Rail to international travelers.
- Met with Hotel 24 to discuss marketing & promotions for their 100th Anniversary.

Public Relations

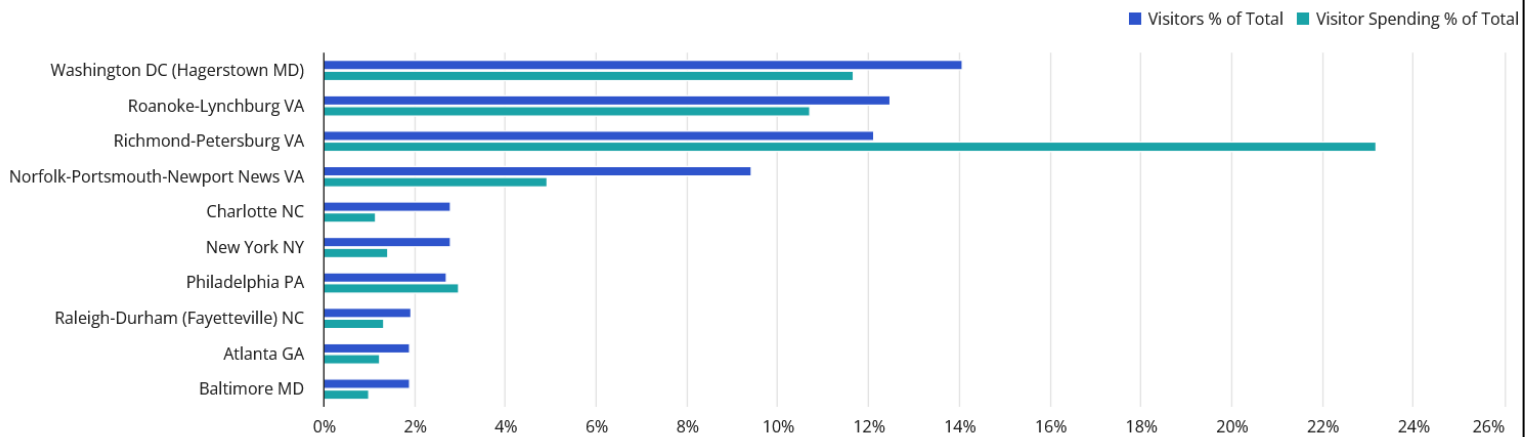
The following is a list of newspapers, websites, magazines, and television stations that published articles about Staunton:

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Dec. 01	<u>Historic Staunton Foundation To Have 48th Holiday House Tour</u>	WHSV-TV	342,395
Dec. 05	<u>Staunton’s Former Odd Fellows Hall On 119 E. Beverley Street Undergoing Renovations</u>	News Leader	66,899
Dec. 09	<u>These Towns In The United States Have The Best Main Streets</u>	World Atlas	4,657,141
Dec. 10	<u>11 Of The Most Quaint Small Towns In The Southern United States</u>	World Atlas	4,657,141
Dec. 11	<u>The Cozy Small Town In Virginia That Comes Alive Under A Blanket Of Snow</u>	Only In Your State	3,822,508
Dec. 12	<u>Virginia Breeze Hits Ridership Record</u>	Metro Magazine	15,107
Dec. 13	<u>12 Picture-Perfect Towns In Virginia</u>	World Atlas	4,657,141
Dec. 14	<u>All Aboard: 4 Enchanting Virginia Train Rides For A Cozy Holiday Experience</u>	The Dogwood	14,709
Dec. 15	<u>11 Best Towns In Virginia For A Winter Getaway</u>	World Atlas	4,657,141
Dec. 17	<u>13 Of The Most Underrated Towns In Virginia To Take A Trip To</u>	World Atlas	4,657,141

Date	Headline	Source	Reach
Dec. 22	The Largest Collection Of Cameras On Public Display Can Be Found In One Small Virginia Town	WTVR-TV	1,016,803
Dec. 22	Staunton Icon Marino's Lunch Gets New Lease On Life. The Restaurant Is Set To Reopen in 2024.	News Leader	106,674
Dec. 23	The 9 Best Cuts Of Meat To Dry Age	Tasting Table	10,189,450
Dec. 24	11 Of The Most Welcoming Towns In Virginia	World Atlas	4,657,141
		TOTAL	43,529,103

Website Visitation Website Traffic		
December 2022	December 2023	% Change
33,357 visitors	33,577 visitors	+0.66%
29 visitor's guide requests	79 visitor's guide requests 268 online travel guide views	+172%

Top 10 Origin Markets by Visitation with their Spend



Smith Travel Research (STR) Hotel Occupancy Report

Occupancy (%)	Year To Date												2021	2022	2023
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov				
This Year	40.6	45.9	54.1	60.9	65.8	65.6	61.0	60.9	60.8	67.4	53.5	50.3	59.5	58.0	
Last Year	39.6	42.9	51.3	63.8	64.4	65.0	65.0	64.2	67.3	71.7	58.1	35.2	50.3	59.5	
% Change	2.5	7.2	5.3	-4.5	2.2	1.0	-6.1	-5.0	-9.7	-6.1	-7.9	42.7	18.3	-2.6	

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Sector Reports - Lodging

Michelle: Occupancy was up 7% year over year. Average daily rate was pretty flat. Food and beverage revenue (which includes meeting space) was up 30% or so. January right now is in the black to last year,

both in occupancy and ADR. February is actually pacing up almost 10%, mostly because of the Commonwealth attorneys, as they have a couple of weeks of back-to-back conferences.

Sector Reports - Restaurants

Sarah: Baja was great in December around the holidays, but early December was like the doldrums. This was Sarah's most difficult year, trying to keep people employed at \$20/hr. that used to make \$12 and buy insurance, etc. In March they will need one more person in the kitchen. They are now open 7 days a week for dinner. They did drop Tuesday lunch. Jessica said Latin Soul had a soft opening last Saturday, and people seem to be enjoying it. Bijou has been some pop-ups but is now open regular hours in the old Magdalena space on W. Beverley. Sandi said Queen City Bistro tentatively plans to open early February.

Sector Reports - Retail

Sandi: Book Dragon had a pretty decent year, up double digits. Looking at doing some upgrades in the shop within the next couple of months. Still working on the book festival and will be sending info out soon to everyone. Marion's Candles reported sales up 14% over 2022. November and December were up thanks to the way Thanksgiving and Christmas fell, and he sees most of his customers coming from Charlottesville, Richmond/Tidewater, but also gets a decent amount from DC, NC, and SC. Heifetz moved to their new space, and 2023 was a good year for them. They now have a listening room with over 3000 albums and CDs, with some pretty rare. Seeing an increase in new customers every month. Queen City Gifts and Games said their November was better than July and September. December was OK, and January slow so far. Breanna from Juniper Lane is here, and said she was pleased with her 2023 being profitable. November was better than December, and she did nearly 20% of her sales in November vs. December. She is closed in January for remodeling and will reopen in February.

Sector Reports - Attractions

Stephanie: ASC crushed their Christmas Carol goals; it even surpassed pre-pandemic numbers. That's predominantly because they adjusted and added two layers of dynamic pricing. Even with the cancellations and modifications of the season, sales numbers were really strong. Spring shows are pacing along very well. The first show of Julius Caesar opens on January 25. Pride and Prejudice opens on February 1, and they are adding a specialty Valentine's Day performance. They typically don't do Wednesday performances during the season, but will be doing a Pride and Prejudice show on the 14th at 7:30 pm. For student matinees, they are sold out for Wednesdays and Thursday mornings the entire month of April. There will be busloads of kids in April and they are slowly beginning to see March pick up, being sold out on Thursdays. Also slowly beginning to sell out on the Wednesday mornings for March. They have an Executive Director and hopefully she will be able to attend the next TAB meeting. She is coming back from NY, and was here when ASC opened and was one of the first people to perform when the playhouse was built.

Robin: No numbers for the year as there has been a lot of illness in the offices, so things are a little bit behind. December, was ahead of last year by about 10% but did not meet our goals. They were hoping it would be a little better but it was more flat than they had hoped they would see in December. Looks to be an exciting spring with a lot of changes coming in the near future. For those of you who may remember, many years ago, the gift shop used to be on Frederick St. attached to the parking lot, and that will be moving back there. The building is currently being rehabbed and that will expand and have a visitor center as part of that as well. The building where the current gift shop and administration offices will become education space. There will be meeting rooms and a great location for the education staff to conduct all the great work that they're doing. We have a gala coming up in February, and Robin encourage everyone to come. They purposely planned it so that it would be beyond any kind of jump that might be seen with illnesses after the holidays.

Gabe: MLK events coming up, the 33rd Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Community Vesper Service with Dr. Edward Scott leading at Central United Methodist Church. Cynthia Tyson, previous MBC (then) president passed away. She was a game changer and really set the bar for the president's involvement. A live-streaming of her ceremony will be on Tuesday. Executive staff will be having a big strategic planning meeting. Thanks to Sandi for referring someone, the campus book store is back to being fully operational, M-F 10:00 a – 2:00 p.

Paige: Lantern Tours a big success despite staff members contracting Covid. They received their survey responses this past week, and everything was overwhelmingly positive. The week between Christmas and New Year's saw an increase in visitation with out of state guests, but basically on par with what they have seen in previous years. There was one day before they were due to have rain and saw over 200 guests, then the next day like 30 or 40. Toddler Time is scheduled for January 20, February 3 And February 17. It's \$3 for the toddler and \$5 for the parent. If anyone is looking for something to do with the little ones, please come.

Andrew: Hosted the Heifetz Ensemble In Residence and that went really well. Have resumed some touring activities for the first time since 2019. The big homecoming concert was at Francis Auditorium, and that's generally been a sellout. Attendance numbers returned this year and presented the same concert at Garth Newel. In the throes of application season now for the upcoming summer and applications are pretty much on track with where they were last year, which was a record setting year for applications. About two thirds of the applications come in the last three or four days. They are confident they're going to have another really strong class with a lot of international representation. Hear and Now concerts at Francis Auditorium will be March 3, April 7, and May 5, and they will be bringing back some of the HEIR with some of the top faculty as well. March 16 is Bach around the Clock, which is a full day, 12 hours of music at Christ Lutheran Church. Heifetz Institute will be June 14 to July 28. The week leading up to that June 14 is a busy one in town, so we can expect to see a spike in activity then.

New Business

Pam: In the process of selecting the contractors for the renovations on the theatre. Pam asked about the process for hiring a Tourism Director, and Sarah explained the hiring panel meets next week for interviews.

Juliette: Comprised an annual Arts Calendar that includes openings, exhibits and activities in the Arts Community in Staunton.

Christian: Up 14 % this year, and December was up 30% from last December. Sold a lot of train sets this year. Clarence from the former train store has been sharing his knowledge with Christian.

Michele: Virginia Main Street Director's conference will be here Jan. 17th - 19th at Hotel 24 and exploring the area with different stops like ASC and touring with Frank. Doing three door prizes. Any additional items for the welcome bags would be great. Could be up to 35 people. Back in September some of the board, staff and other members of the community met with the National Main Street organization for an overall strategic plan training and we finally received something in December. More information coming. Locals will be SDDA's focus.

Discussion of being a good neighbor and being a steward of our community. Make everyone feel welcome!

Adjourn

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:24 am.

Meeting minutes submitted by Kim Cormier.