



Tourism Advisory Board

March 12, 2026 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 Sector Reports

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

10:05 am Staunton Shout-Outs

10:10 am Old Business

10:15 am New Business

10:20 am Adjourn

Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

February 12, 2026 9:30 am

Caucus Room, City Hall, First Floor

Board Members/City Staff Participating:

Brad Arrowood – Vice-Mayor, City Council and SDDA Interim Director

Stephanie Cabacoy – American Shakespeare Center

Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South

Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism

Sheena Logan – Sales and Marketing Manager

Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean

Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library

Ross Williams – Frederick House

Board Members/City Staff Absent:

Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon

Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival

Brian Gearhart – Heritage Hospitality

Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute

Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia

Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum

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. Robin von Seldeneck made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Stephanie Cabacoy. All others were in favor.

Virginia Garden Week – Laura Nordstrom

Laura Nordstrom of the Garden Club of Virginia presented details on the [Staunton House & Garden Tour](#), part of the statewide Historic Garden Week.

Event Details

- Date: Saturday, April 18, 2026, 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
- Format: Shuttle tour departing from Gypsy Hill Park (Quick’s)
- Three homes on tour: Fraiser Home, Shuey Home, and Battin Home.
- Master Gardeners and Bill Frazier will offer programs at the Golf Pavilion during the tour
- Tickets: \$40 in advance (on sale the following Monday at 10:00 AM); \$50 day-of. Also available: \$200 statewide full-tour pass via Flower Scout

Economic Impact

- Statewide: 24,000+ visitors to 29 Virginia communities; estimated economic impact of \$2.5M over the week, total impact exceeding \$4.5M (measured in partnership with Virginia Tourism Corporation)
- Local: Staunton typically attracts 700–1,300 visitors on tour day
- Note: More visitors attend garden tours nationally than Disneyland and Walt Disney World combined (78 million annually)

Local History

The statewide garden tour concept was founded by Emily Pancake Smith, a Staunton resident and early president of the Garden Club of Virginia. The Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library has been a restoration garden since 1933. A major restoration of the library's boxwood garden (500+ boxwoods

removed due to blight since 2016) is underway; an announcement is expected soon. Deneen Brannock will speak about restoration gardens at Woodrow Wilson in March.

Opportunities for Downtown Businesses

This year, rather than offering a box lunch on-site, tour attendees will be directed into downtown Staunton for lunch and the afternoon. Businesses can engage in the following ways:

- Provide rack cards, menus, or brochures for inclusion in attendee gift bags
- Share QR codes and website links to be featured in Garden Week social media and the tourism itinerary blog
- Create garden-themed specialty items (floral cocktails, special menu items); notify organizers ahead of time so they can be featured
- Display posters in shop windows

SDDA offered to promote participating businesses through their channels. Guidebooks (55,000 statewide) and local brochures (2,000 copies) are being distributed to area businesses.

Enterprise Zone update – Jessica Blythe

Enterprise Zone Update

- All Enterprise Zone boundary and incentive amendments received state approval
- ~800 letters mailed to businesses in the zone; GIS map updated; most of the downtown footprint is included
- Redesigned website StauntonBusiness.com is live with all incentives outlined
- Group workshop being planned for interested businesses; individual applications will be available on the website shortly

Five Enterprise Zone Incentives

- Large industry incentive — machinery investment and job creation
- Small business job creation incentive
- Marketing support grant
- Technology support grant
- Façade renovation grant

SDDA Update – Scotty/Brad

SDDA

- Retro Rendezvous — February 27: Free event celebrating 1920s–1950s glam/vintage/retro style. Begins at The Frenchman with Hot Mamas; moves to The Junction at 9:00 PM. Businesses encouraged to display flyers.
- Galentine’s Night — February 13: Hosted by Ovid & Lane; specials and activities across downtown including the Wharf, Central Avenue, and Beverly Street. Approximately 30 businesses participating.
- Taste the Town — March 1–7: Marketing push for downtown restaurants, eateries, breweries, and cafés. Pilot toward a future full Restaurant Week. Contact SDDA via Instagram or email to participate.
- MADCON (Music, Art & Design Convention) — April 10–11: Inaugural year; Valley Subaru as presenting sponsor. Full schedule set; website live. Targeting professional creatives and serious hobbyists. Aligned with a potential ‘Staunton Arts Month’ designation for April.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

Activities:

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured [2026 Staunton-Area Bucket List](#) and [Top 6-7 Kid-Friendly Winter Activities, Curated by Kids](#)
- Sales & Marketing Manager, Sheena Logan, met with over 20 motorcoach tour operators at the American Bus Association Marketplace
- Samantha is serving as Chair for the Virginia Association of Destination Marketing Organization’s spring & fall symposiums
- Attended the Shenandoah Beerwerks Trail retreat, which is entering into its 10th year of programming
- Attended BRITE’s State of Transit forum
- Held a number of strategy meetings with local partners for group sector growth, business expansions, and event planning
- Sheena Logan has been facilitating partner site-visits and planning sessions
- Director, Samantha Johnson, completed the Virginia Tourism Leadership Institute
- Meetings Attended: SGMP, VADMO, GART, VA 250, Wharf, SVTP, VSAE, SVTA, Virginia by Rail, Beerwerks, VRLTA

Public Relations

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

Date	Headline	Source	Reach	AVE
30-Jan	How Restaurants Get Crispy Salmon Skin — and Why High Heat Isn't the Answer	AOL	24,144,377	\$223,335.49
29-Jan	We Asked Southern Chefs Their Favorite Frozen Vegetables—And Their Answers Prove Fresh Isn't Always Better	AOL	24,144,377	\$223,335.49
14-Jan	13 Quaint Southern Cities Where You Can Retire on \$1,850 a Month (Or Less)	AOL	24,144,377	\$223,335.49
13-Jan	Small Town Beauty in Virginia	VOCAL	2,902,392	\$26,847.13
09-Jan	11 Cities In Virginia That Are Shockingly Affordable, And Still Under The Radar	Family Destinations Guide	1,724,883	\$15,955.17
06-Jan	What Flavors Will Dominate the Cocktail Scene in 2026? 30 Bartenders Weigh In.	VinePair	571,017	\$5,281.91
12-Jan	Staunton local brings Penny Press to city gift shop	WVIR	314,974	\$2,913.51

12-Jan	<u>Staunton woman advocates to preserve historic landmark in the Queen City</u>	WHSV-TV	311,018	\$2,876.92
09-Jan	<u>Staunton's Happy Birthday America named commemorative partner of VA250</u>	WHSV-TV	311,018	\$2,876.92
27-Jan	<u>This Classic Virginia Drive-In Keeps The Burger-And-Shake Tradition Alive</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
26-Jan	<u>11 Virginia Towns Every Southern Culture Lover Must Visit</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
26-Jan	<u>11 Places in Virginia Where History And Modern Life Collide</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
24-Jan	<u>This Restaurant In Virginia Is Hidden Inside A Historic Train Station</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
20-Jan	<u>Locals Recommend These 10 Virginia Small Cities With Big Personality</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
17-Jan	<u>Locals Support These 10 Family-Owned Restaurants In Virginia Year After Year</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
17-Jan	<u>Locals Say This Virginia Town Has The Most Charming Main Street</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
15-Jan	<u>A Farm-To-Table Restaurant In Virginia Locals Say Highlights Local Flavors</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
14-Jan	<u>9 Museums In Virginia That Make Learning History Surprisingly Fun</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
14-Jan	<u>Locals Escape To These 10 Quiet Virginia Towns Away From Tourists</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
12-Jan	<u>These 10 Virginia Towns Are Every Photographer's Dream</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
12-Jan	<u>These 10 Charming Old Towns In Virginia Are Perfect For History Walks</u>	Family Travel Forum	167,151	\$1,546.15
16-Jan	<u>Local tourism receives a financial boost from Virginia</u>	The River 95.3	14,361	\$132.84
TOTAL			80,588,606	\$745,444.67

Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
January 2025	January 2026	% Change
28,501 users	30,347 users	+6.48%
104 guide requests	91 visitor's guide requests	-12.5%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending

-December 2025-

Top Visitor Markets - Table

Visitor Origin Market	% of Visitors	Same time previous year
Washington DC-Hagerstown MD	20%	16%
Roanoke-Lynchburg VA	11%	13%
Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News VA	8%	8%
Baltimore MD	8%	3%
New York NY	6%	5%
Richmond-Petersburg VA	5%	11%
Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York PA	4%	2%
Philadelphia PA	3%	3%
Los Angeles CA	2%	1%
Charlotte NC	2%	2%

Top Spend Markets - Table

Visitor Origin Market	% of Visitor Spend	Same time previous year
Washington DC-Hagerstown MD	15%	15%
Richmond-Petersburg VA	11%	12%
Roanoke-Lynchburg VA	9%	10%
Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News VA	7%	9%
New York NY	4%	4%
Clarksburg-Weston WV	3%	0.2%
Baltimore MD	3%	2%
Bluefield-Beckley-Oak Hill WV	3%	2%
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Sarasota FL	2%	1%
West Palm Beach-Fort Pierce FL	2%	0.1%

Key Insights:

December 2025 brought notable shifts in Staunton's visitor landscape:

1. **Out-of-State Visitor Growth:** Out-of-state visitors increased from 56% to 70% of total visitation, representing a 14-point increase. This expansion of geographic reach demonstrates growing appeal beyond our traditional visitor base.
2. **Origin Market Shifts:** Washington DC-Hagerstown maintained its position as our top market, growing from 16% to 20% of visitors. Baltimore emerged as a new top-four market at 8% of visitors, while Roanoke-Lynchburg was down at 11%. Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News reached 8% of visitors.
3. **Spending Pattern Changes:** While overall visitor spending increased by 2 percentage points (from 10% to 12%), average daily visitor spend decreased from \$49 to \$46. However, Food & Beverage captured a larger share of visitor spending, rising from 43% to 53% of total spend.
4. **Accommodations Market Performance:** Washington DC-Hagerstown increased its share of accommodation visitors dramatically from 11% to 27%. New York grew from 7% to 9% of accommodation stays, while Baltimore entered the top markets at 6%.

What Does This Mean?

Staunton experienced an interesting dynamic in December: attracting more out-of-state visitors and increasing the percentage of overall spending from visitors, but individual visitor spending decreased slightly. The significant increase in Food & Beverage spending (both as a visitor activity at 49% and spending category at 53%) suggests visitors are prioritizing dining experiences during their trips. The emergence of Baltimore as a key market and the substantial growth from Washington DC-Hagerstown in accommodation stays indicates strong appeal among Mid-Atlantic travelers seeking overnight experiences.

Motor Coach & Group Sales

Sales & Marketing Manager Sheena recently attended the American Bus Association in Reno with two dozen motor coach operator appointments, generating strong enthusiasm for Staunton. She is attending Select Traveler Conference this weekend with ~30 additional appointments. Itineraries have been flowing out at a high volume. All partners are asked to have group rates available for 2026–2027 and to ensure group-friendliness is visible on their websites (Woodrow Wilson's group page was cited as a model).

Notable Highlights

- Marino's featured on America's Best Restaurant (YouTube); episode expected mid-April. Watch party being planned.
- Queen City Music Studio's Old Time Music Retreat drew ~70–90 musicians and 20 instructors from multiple states, filling downtown venues.
- Shenandoah Beerwerks Trail celebrated its 10th year with 20 participating breweries across the Valley.

January Data

- Website traffic: up ~6.5% in users
- Visitor guide requests: slightly down
- Weather significantly disrupted travel and hotel performance throughout the month

December Visitor Statistics (Most Recent Available)

- Out-of-state visitors: increased from 56% to 70% of total visitation (+14 points)
- Top market: Washington, DC — grew from 15% to 20% of visitors
- Baltimore: rose into the top four markets at 8% (up from positions 6–8)
- Roanoke: held relatively flat at ~11%
- Norfolk: ~8% of visitation
- Overall visitor spending: up 2% (comprising ~12% of the total); average daily spend decreased slightly from \$49 to \$46
- Food & beverage share grew from 43% to 53%
- DC accommodation spend grew from 11% to 27%; New York continued to grow

Spending Pattern to Watch in 2026

In 2025, Staunton led the Shenandoah Valley in visitation, but visitor spending showed trade-off behavior — heavy spenders in one sector (food, attractions, or retail) tended to spend less in the others in any given month. Staff are monitoring whether this pattern continues in 2026.

Regulatory Note — Styrofoam Ban (HB 1902)

Effective July 1, 2026, the single-use Styrofoam ban (cups, plates, trays, bowls) extends to all restaurants, food establishments, and grocery takeout. A one-year extension may be requested with justification. Penalty: ~\$50/day.

Sector Reports – Lodging

Lodging — Michelle

- December: Occupancy +4.6%; ADR +5.6%; RevPAR +10.9% vs. 2024. Short-term rental occupancy +19%; ADR +7%. Returned to 2019 performance levels.
- January: Ended flat (expected 12% gain lost to weather and one cancelled group).
- February: Minimal pickup; projected flat.
- March: Anticipating ~3% growth.
- April: Very strong group bookings.
- Upcoming: Virginia League of City Managers & Deputy City Managers in town February 18–19 (175 guaranteed for dinner; 150 daytime).

Lodging — Ross

- January started strong but ended flat due to weather. February looking positive.
- Staunton Music Festival spring concert series — April 25 weekend already sold out.
- Experienced a pipe break; one of five historic properties temporarily out of service.

Sector Reports – Restaurants

Restaurants - Sarah

- Mixed results from Google Form respondents — one up / one down month-over-month; one up / one down year-over-year.
- Virginia ABC data (reviewed day of meeting): up in January and up year-over-year overall.

Sector Reports – Attractions & Arts

Keith (Mary Baldwin University)

- Spring Signature Events Season launched — open to the community, covering a range of topics hosted at new campus neighborhoods.
- Upcoming: marimba concert (end of February); UC Berkeley biology professor presentation.
- Spring accepted student visit days (100–200 families each): Saturday, February 21 and Saturday, April 11.

Robin (Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library)

- Strong MLK weekend numbers; closed last 7 days of January due to ice/snow and potential removal damage to historic brick sidewalks. Reopening February 13.
- School groups and new group tours booking well.

Stephanie (American Shakespeare Center / Blackfriars Playhouse)

- January used for internal marketing ramp-up; no public shows or tours.
- Launching 'Shakespeare Saturdays' in February with tour + show packaging.
- Collaborative concert with Staunton Music Festival this Saturday — nearly sold out.
- Upcoming: 12th Night (next week), Hounds of the Baskervilles (following week).

Sector Reports - Retail

Retail - Samantha

- Four to five responses received. MLK Day provided a positive bump before the severe weather hit.
- Most were down month-over-month but up year-over-year. January was characterized as 'mixed.'

Staunton Shout-Outs

- City Public Works: Recognized for extraordinary storm response — days without rest, multiple equipment breakdowns, nine water main breaks. Special recognition for supervisor David Stover.
- Sarah: Provided meals for Public Works crews during the storm.
- Molly & Brian (Queen City Music Studios): Old Time Music Retreat brought great energy and foot traffic downtown.
- Kim (Tourism staff): Exceptional quality control, including catching and resolving a website event-listing issue proactively.
- Kathy Moore (Moore Public Relations): Ongoing PR support for the city and tourism partners.
- Sherry Brown (Ovid & Lane): Organized Galentine's Night (February 13) — ~30 participating businesses, specials and pop-ups citywide.
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Old Business

- Queen City Mischief & Magic: 2026 grant from Virginia Film Office confirmed. Still completing compliance documentation for 2025 grant.

- SDDA Holiday 2026 Theme: “Winter Magic” selected at the promotions committee meeting the prior day. Businesses encouraged to begin planning accordingly. Promotions Committee meets second Wednesday monthly, 9:30 AM at SDDA office; next meeting March 11.

[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/Other Business

Valley Women’s Weekend — First Weekend of March (4th Annual)

Celebrates women-owned and operated businesses. Registration forms live at ValleyWomensWeekend.com.

Earth Day Staunton — April 25 (20th Year)

11:00 AM – 3:00 PM at Gypsy Hill Park. ~40 exhibitors; family-oriented programming with wildlife demonstrations, hands-on activities, and environmental organizations. Rain location: Memorial Gym. Month-long activities planned. Downtown businesses invited to participate or sponsor. Website: EarthDayStaunton.org.

Additional Updates

- Baja: Valentine’s events Friday and Saturday; WQSV 10th Anniversary Party on February 21.
- Green Room: Honey Dew Drops concert — approximately 10–15 tickets remaining.
- Sweet Addie’s Café (Sweet Addie’s): Name change to reflect expanded coffee/espresso offerings. Valentine’s week special: savory and sweet waffle flight.

Best Practice Tip

When offering event-specific discounts, use fixed dollar amounts tied to minimum purchase thresholds (e.g., \$5 off a \$35 purchase) rather than percentage discounts. Easier to administer, easier to track, and better protects margins.

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