



Tourism Advisory Board

February 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 Laura Nordstrom – Virginia Garden Week**
- 9:45 am Jessica Blythe – Wharf marketing plan and grant program**
- 9:55 am Samantha Johnson – Monthly Tourism Report**
- 10:05 am Sector Reports**
 - **Lodging**
 - **Restaurants**
 - **Retail**
 - **Attractions/Arts**
- 10:15 am Staunton Shout-Outs**
- 10:20 am Old Business**
- 10:25 am New Business**
- 10:30 am Adjourn**

Tourism Advisory Board Meeting

January 8, 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

Sandi Carraro – Book Dragon

Camille Dierksheide – Staunton Music Festival

Robert Higgs – Barren Ridge Vineyards, Accordia

Paige Hildebrand – Frontier Culture Museum

Samantha Johnson – Director of Tourism

Sarah Lynch – Baja Bean

Robin von Seldeneck – Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library

Board Members/City Staff Absent:

Michelle Davis – Hotel 24 South (Zoom was malfunctioning)

Brian Gearhart – Heritage Hospitality

Andrew Greene - Heifetz Institute (Zoom was malfunctioning)

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. Sheena Logan was introduced as the new Sales & Marketing Manager. She has an extensive background in digital marketing and fundraising. Sheena is headed to Reno for the American Bus Association(ABA) trade show (largest motor coach trade show in country). She has been actively scheduling site visits with local businesses. Welcome Sheena! Introductions were made around the room. Stephanie Cabacoy made a motion to approve the minutes, seconded by Paige Hildebrand. All others were in favor.

Monthly Tourism Report – Samantha Johnson

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

- Staunton blog promotions featured [Top 10 Ways to Celebrate the Holidays in Staunton](#) and [Give the Gift of Going \(Staunton-Style\)](#)
- Winter Marketing Campaign refresh launched
- The U is Silent; We Aren’t featured by [The News Leader](#)
- Visit Staunton hosted travel writers from Virginia Living Magazine and Southbound Magazine
- Attended Virginia Tourism’s Strategic Plan Steering Committee meeting
- New Sales + Marketing Manager, Sheena Logan, has been facilitating partner site-visits and planning sessions
- Sheena Logan represented Staunton at the meeting of Society of Governmental Meeting Planners
- Facilitated Virginia Association of Destination Marketing Organization’s (VADMO) Drill Down webinar
- Attended the JDR Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
- Meetings Attended: SGMP, VADMO, GART, VA 250, Wharf, SVTP, VSAE, SVTA, 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
20-Dec	Four acclaimed chefs share the holiday dishes they cook for their own families	AOL	23,648,780	\$ 218,751.21
05-Dec	Virginia Christmas Train Rides At VSR!	NewsBreak	17,603,984	\$ 162,836.85
18-Dec	Huss & Dalton introduce Valley guitars	NewsBreak	16,712,801	\$ 154,593.41
11-Dec	5 Charming Virginia Towns That Go All-Out For Christmas, According To Visitors	NewsBreak	16,712,801	\$ 154,593.41
20-Dec	This Laid-Back Virginia Town Offers Cute Shops, Restaurants, & Shenandoah Valley Views	Yahoo! Life	14,125,650	\$ 130,662.26
20-Dec	Four acclaimed chefs share the holiday dishes they cook for their own families	Yahoo! Life	14,125,650	\$ 130,662.26
14-Dec	20 Best Fall Foliage Drives from New England to Virginia	Yahoo! Life	14,125,650	\$ 130,662.26
11-Dec	5 Charming Virginia Towns That Go All-Out For Christmas, According To Visitors	Islands Magazine	2,170,726	\$ 20,079.22
26-Dec	8 Picturesque Mountain Towns In Virginia That Feel Like A Cozy Hallmark Movie Set	Family Destinations Guide	1,200,754	\$ 11,106.97
16-Dec	12 Cities In Virginia That Are Perfect For Slow And Easy Day Trips	Family Destinations Guide	1,200,754	\$ 11,106.97
10-Dec	7 Massive Flea Markets In Virginia That'll Make Your Bargain-Hunting Dreams Come True	Family Destinations Guide	1,200,754	\$ 11,106.97
20-Dec	This Laid-Back Virginia Town Offers Cute Shops, Restaurants, & Shenandoah Valley Views	EXPLORE	426,638	\$ 3,946.40
19-Dec	Virginia Scenic Railway opens new hub just in time for the holiday season	WHSV-TV	361,541	\$ 3,344.25
02-Dec	Virginia Scenic Railway Adds New Louisa Station	Northern Virginia Magazine	338,403	\$ 3,130.23
01-Dec	Coming in 2026: Tidewater Current to connect Virginia Beach to the Shenandoah Valley	The Daily Press	217,519	\$ 2,012.05
15-Dec	Staunton restaurant one of Esquire magazine's Best New Restaurants	World News	160,459	\$ 1,484.25
19-Dec	Virginia Scenic Railway opens new hub just in time for the holiday season	WVIR	151,469	\$ 1,401.09
26-Dec	10 Virginia Historic Streets That Tell A Story	Family Travel Forum	130,116	\$ 1,203.57
07-Dec	8 Virginia Small Towns That Keep Showing Up on Travel Lists	Family Travel Forum	130,116	\$ 1,203.57
07-Dec	10 Virginia Villages That Transform Into Winter Getaways Every December	Family Travel Forum	91,556	\$ 846.89
03-Dec	9 Historic Virginia Villages Perfect for a Quick Day Trip	Family Travel Forum	91,556	\$ 846.89
15-Dec	Staunton restaurant one of Esquire magazine's Best New Restaurants	News Leader	73,793	\$ 682.59
09-Dec	Centennial celebration of President Wilson's Pierce-Arrow limousine	News Leader	73,793	\$ 682.59
01-Dec	Staunton's beloved Mrs. Rowe's restaurant closing its doors	News Leader	73,071	\$ 675.91
29-Dec	Virginia tourist attraction! Columnist shares train ride experience	The Progress-Index	56,076	\$ 518.70
14-Dec	20 Best Fall Foliage Drives from New England to Virginia	Guessing Headlights	4,729	\$ 43.74
26-Dec	Day Trips for Winter Fun 2025: Family Adventures Near Charlottesville	Charlottesville Family	2,656	\$ 24.57
			125,211,795	\$1,158,209.08

Website Visitation

Website Traffic		
December 2024	December 2025	% Change
80,310 sessions	82,566 sessions	+2.8%
100 guide requests	75 visitor's guide requests	-25%

Top 10 Origin Markets and Visitor Spending -November 2025-

Top Visitor Markets - Table

Visitor Origin Market	% of Visitors	Same time previous year
Washington DC-Hagerstown MD	22%	17%
Roanoke-Lynchburg VA	11%	14%
Baltimore MD	8%	2%
Richmond-Petersburg VA	8%	11%
Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News VA	8%	8%
New York NY	3%	6%
Philadelphia PA	3%	3%
Harrisburg-Lancaster-Lebanon-York PA	2%	2%
Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem NC	2%	2%
Nashville TN	2%	1%

Top Spend Markets - Table

Visitor Origin Market	% of Visitor Spend	Same time previous year
Bend OR	15%	2%
Washington DC-Hagerstown MD	14%	16%
Richmond-Petersburg VA	12%	14%
Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News VA	7%	9%
Roanoke-Lynchburg VA	7%	9%
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Sarasota FL	3%	1%
New York NY	2%	2%
Philadelphia PA	2%	2%
Portland OR	2%	0.1%
Charlotte NC	2%	2%

Key Insights:

- Out-of-State Visitor Growth:** Staunton saw out-of-state visitors increase from 55% to 62% of total visitors, representing a 7% gain. This shift toward a broader geographic reach indicates the destination is successfully attracting travelers from beyond Virginia's borders.
- Origin Market Shifts:** Washington DC-Hagerstown increased its share of visitation from 17% to 22%, solidifying its position as your top feeder market. Meanwhile, Baltimore emerged as a new top-five market with 8% of visitors (up from 2% in 2024). These markets also showed stronger accommodation usage, with Washington DC-Hagerstown representing 25% of accommodation visitors (up from 12%) and Baltimore accounting for 9% (up from 2%).
- Spending Performance:** Overall visitor spending contribution rose from 12% to 15%, while average daily visitor spend increased from \$49 to \$72. Food & Beverage maintained its dominance at 46% of visitor spend (up from 40%), and Gas & Service Stations held at approximately 25-28% of spending. The share of visitor spending directed toward local businesses remained stable at 23-24%.

What This Means

Staunton is successfully expanding its appeal to drive-market visitors, particularly from major metropolitan areas within a 2-3 hour radius. The growth in out-of-state visitors and the emergence of Baltimore as a significant feeder market suggest your marketing efforts are resonating beyond traditional markets. The increase in average daily spend indicates visitors are engaging more deeply with local businesses, particularly in dining experiences.

December/November Performance

- December typically lighter month; winter refresh campaign launched (runs through March)
- Website sessions up 3% despite AI challenges affecting web traffic
- Travel guide requests down 25% for December

Hosted Travel Writers

- Michael Upton (Virginia Living) - 25th anniversary of American Shakespeare Center, focusing on performers/staff who stayed and invested in community (spring publication)

2. Southbound Magazine writer - National story on walkable destinations (April publication)

Visitor Data (November via Zartico)

- Out-of-state visitation up 7% year-over-year
- Top Markets:
 - DC remains #1 (spending increased from 17% to 22%)
 - Roanoke #2 in visitation, #3 in spending
 - Richmond #2 in spending, #3 in visitation
 - Baltimore jumped to top 5 emerging market (8% visitation, up from 2% last year)
- DC represents 25% of accommodation sales (up 12% from previous year)
- Daily visitor spending: \$49 to \$72 per day
 - 46% spent on food & beverage
 - Remainder on gas and experiences
- Visitor spending = 24% of local spend

Sector Reports – Lodging

Samantha: November data

- Hotel occupancy up 6.2%
- ADR (Average Daily Rate) up 5.4%
- Revenue per available room up nearly 12%
- Every month in 2025 exceeded 2024 performance
- Short-term rental occupancy up 19%, ADR up 12%

Sector Reports – Restaurants

Sarah:

- Only 2 responses; mixed results
- Month-over-month slight decrease, year-over-year slight increase
- Santa Train extremely successful – brought multi-generational and extended families staying 2+ nights from places like Charlottesville

Sector Reports – Attractions

Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library (Robin):

- Up 8% for calendar year 2025
- Down only 2.3% from pre-pandemic 2019 levels
- December up 3%
- Anticipate exceeding 2019 numbers in 2026

Frontier Culture Museum (Paige):

- Down month over month and year over year
- December is always really rough w/ exception of lantern tours, but completely sold out
- Closed a few days due to snow

American Shakespeare Center (Stephanie):

- Not running Playhouse tours currently due to renovations (resume February 11)
- Installing handrails, re-evaluating wheelchair seating, rigging adjustments (ADA grant funded)
- Launched multi-season sponsorship program
- Valentine's Day concert partnership with Staunton Music Festival (February 14, 5-6pm, candlelit at Black Friars Playhouse)

Camille added: contact her for multiple season ad sponsorships. Christian had success with his coupon.

Staunton Music Festival (Camille):

- Season pass invoices due January 10
- New SMF brochure available
- Sponsorship program with Staunton High school band
- Partnership with ASC for Valentine's concert
- Made friends with Seth Diamond (foodbiker.com) while he was in town visiting Adam G. from the Visulite. Encouraged him to come back to Staunton.

Sector Reports - Retail

Sandy

- Book Dragon: up double digits both for year and December
- December hit-or-miss for other retailers
- Critical reminder: Businesses need hours and contact info on social media - customers actively searching
- Santa Train brought dressed-up families for photo opportunities
- December events well-received by locals and visitors

Scotty/Brad SDDA

- Really happy with how the Christmas Parade went. Kiwanis were a huge help.
- Staunton High School was well funded but needs instruments
- Robin applauded the Staunton Saturdays Downtown and other events SDDA created

Rob

- Retail hours concern: Many places not open Monday/Tuesday during Christmas season frustrated local shoppers
- Sama Sama putting out a new menu soon and will be doing some ticketed events
- Have participated in coupon exchanges on Accordia block

DORA Conversation

Current Status

- High priority for SDDA and City Council
- Multiple meetings discussing implementation
- ABC regulations creating challenges and mixed messages

Key Points

- Similar to Waynesboro's program
- Would allow 16 special event weekends per year
- Must run through non-profit organization
- Creates designated zones for open containers outdoors
- Cannot bring drinks into businesses (outdoor only)
- Fredericksburg has successful model

Concerns Raised

- ABC compliance and enforcement
- Training for participating businesses
- Customer confusion about where drinks allowed
- Potential fines for non-compliant businesses
- Not suitable for winter months

Action Items

- Brad and Scotty collecting questions
- Email questions to: stauntondowntown@gmail.com (subject: DORA)
- Planning focused roundtable meeting on topic
- Businesses need to decide if they want to participate
- Education and signage critical for success

Staunton Shout-Outs

- **Scotty:** Multiple recognitions for:
 - Finding possibility everywhere (mentioned book the Art of Possibility)
 - Working late installing displays for Staunton Downtown Holiday Window Walk which was gorgeous, despite being sick (recovering from pneumonia)
 - Stepping in to host travel writers on short notice
 - Wearing full fur coat during walkable tour
- **Window-sharing businesses:** Allowing holiday displays in windows
- **Travel writer feedback:** Staunton called "the most magical place" and "the place every other town should strive to be"

Old Business

Samantha:

Downtown Parking

- Construction in Wharf area ongoing
- Movement anticipated in March
- One-sheeter being distributed to hotels/front desks with parking navigation info

Event Information

- Will begin using QR codes for event calendar
- Laminated QR codes at Visitor Center front desk
- Allows visitors to scan and filter events by specific dates

- Evergreen solution (no weekly printing needed)
- Will distribute to businesses

Group Tour Itineraries (2026-2027)

- Need pricing updates within 1-2 weeks for group travel rates
- Sheena preparing for motor coach follow-ups after trade show
- 6-minute pitch meetings at ABA show
- Follow-up conversions happening January-February

PR Opportunities

- Still pitching 2026, now focusing on 2027
- Small window remaining for 2026 pitches
- Businesses should share new programming/developments for latter 2026 and 2027

[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.

<h2>New/Other Business</h2>

Valentine's Day Concert – Staunton Music Festival/ASC – Camille Dierksheide

- Love Songs, With and Without Words 5:00 pm at Blackfriars Playhouse

Restaurant Week – Brad Arrowood

- Early discussions through SDDA
- Popular with diners (excuse to not cook for a week)

Scotty Tiernan - SDDA

- Volunteer & Board Appreciation Event - January 16 (Friday), 5-8pm
- Open to current volunteers and those interested in volunteering
- Preview of 2026 plans

Arcadia Project – Pam Wagner

- Full construction starting - phased approach
 - Phase 1: Café, lobby, restrooms, event space (right side), back-of-house spaces (green room, catering kitchen, makeup areas)
 - Phase 2: Movie theater and upstairs rear classrooms (still fundraising)
- Applied for Main Street Grant for rear classrooms
- Marquee advertising: Only June available (all other months sold out)

Queen City Music Studios – Brian

- Neon Angel songwriter concert - January 17 (with workshop)
- 2nd Annual Staunton Old Time Music Gathering - January 29-30, February 1
 - 100 participants (mostly out-of-town visitors)
 - Public square dance at Trinity Church - Saturday night

- Friday concert at Blue Point (mostly sold out)
- Successfully drove restaurant traffic last year
- Robin & Linda Williams 3-night run sold out all shows before Christmas

Upcoming Groups/Conferences – Samantha

- Couple of groups coming up between now and Feb/March with 100-200 attendees that will have a Dine Around on their own

Beverly Street Gallery Changes – Juliette Swenson

- Beverly Street Studio School closed
- Robert Stewart continuing shows as "22 Gallery" (formerly ran shows at CoArt)
- Name change effective February 1

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