

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES  
JANUARY 15, 2026  
HENRICO ADULT EDUCATION CENTER AT REGENCY  
HENRICO COUNTY  
NOON**

**I. CALL TO ORDER & WELCOME:**

- A. Chair Lisa Sims called the meeting to order at 12:17 p.m. and established a quorum.
- B. Welcome Remarks: Mr. John Vithoukas, Henrico County Manager, welcomed the Board and thanked Richmond Region Tourism (RRT) for convening the meeting at the Henrico Adult Education Center at Regency. Mr. Vithoukas highlighted Henrico County's investment in workforce development and career and technical education (CTE), noting the county's expansion of student capacity across multiple facilities.

Mr. Vithoukas recognized Mr. Mac Beaton, Director of Henrico Workforce & Career Development, and the students whose work transformed the Regency space. He emphasized the cost savings, quality outcomes, and long-term community impact of student-led construction and renovation projects, including the rehabilitation of residential properties now used by county employees. He underscored how these efforts are changing lives and strengthening the local workforce pipeline.

Mr. Vithoukas also provided an overview of the redevelopment of Regency Square, describing the transformation from a declining retail mall into a major mixed-use destination. He reported that more than \$500 million in private investment has been committed to the area, supported initially by county transportation investments. He highlighted the NOVA Aquatics facility as a nationally significant indoor sports venue that is generating substantial hotel demand and regional economic impact. Mr. Vithoukas noted that sports tourism has become a measurable economic driver for local governments, crediting Richmond Region Tourism for its leadership and regional impact. He concluded by expressing appreciation for RRT's work and emphasizing the regional benefits of tourism-driven economic activity across jurisdictional boundaries.

Mr. Beaton provided added context to the Adult Education Center at Regency, emphasizing the importance of creating adult-centered learning environments separate from traditional high school settings. He described how the 48,000-square-foot facility was completed by students over a ten-month period during post-COVID supply challenges, illustrating the strength of community partnerships and student capabilities. Mr. Beaton also highlighted Henrico's Hermitage Center for Technical Education as a model for integrated workforce training, event management, culinary arts, media, and hospitality education.

Chair Sims also welcomed guests and new representatives, including Ms. Leslie Perry of Henrico Adult Center, Mr. John Moyer, New Kent County Supervisor, Mr. Drew Molloy, Town of Ashland Council Member and new Town of Ashland representative for RRT.

C. Announcements: Various announcements were made including:

- Ms. Danielle Fitz-Hugh, Vice President of Community Relations, announced the upcoming RVA Sports Awards on January 31 and encouraged board members to contribute to the Silent Auction, to include a spirited beverage basket.
- Ms. Dawn Miller (Henrico Sports & Entertainment Authority) shared an update that the A-10 Women's Basketball Tournament is approximately seven weeks away, with single-session tickets going on sale the following Wednesday at 10:00 a.m.

- Ms. Bryonna Head (City of Richmond Department of Economic Development) announced the launch of a Shop Local program using a receipt-based rewards app, debuting February 10 with a “Love Shop Local” Valentine’s Day-themed campaign.
- Mr. Troy Bell (Richmond International Airport) announced the launch of nonstop service to San Juan, Puerto Rico beginning March 26 and previewed strong calendar year 2025 passenger numbers.
- Mr. Todd “Parney” Parnell (Richmond Flying Squirrels) announced upcoming milestones related to the opening of the new CarMax Park, including the official Opening Day on April 7, Mr. Parnell invited Board Members to attend Nutzy’s Block Party at CarMax Park on March 1, a community celebration tied to the opening, along with associated merchandise activity and presented Ms. O’Donnell with one of the first commemorative Flying Squirrels hoodies.
- Mr. John Moyer (New Kent County Board Member) announced that the Virginia Derby will take place March 14 and is nearing a full sellout.
- Mr. J.C. Poma (Chesterfield County) highlighted a collaborative summer youth engagement initiative—Summer Bingo Board and the Summer Bingo Bash—conducted in partnership with Ms. Danielle Ripperton (Children’s Museum of Richmond).

## II. **NEW BUSINESS:**

- MOTION Minutes:** The minutes of the November 20 meeting were reviewed. Mr. Todd Parnell moved to accept the minutes which were seconded and passed unanimously.
- Governance Committee Update:** Ms. Danielle Ripperton, Chair of the Governance Committee, reported that the committee met to review matters related to board appointments and bylaw compliance. During the review of a recent Class A appointment by Chesterfield County, staff and legal counsel identified a bylaw provision limiting Class A memberships to one elected official per jurisdiction.

Ms. Ripperton said that the committee determined this issue requires further review to ensure sound governance practices, transparency, and consistency with longstanding precedent. The Governance Committee will continue working with the Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and legal counsel, including Ms. Michelle McKinnon of McGuireWoods, to evaluate potential options. No action was requested at this meeting, and the earliest expected discussion by the full Board will occur at the March 19 meeting.

- Regional Funding Discussion:** Chair Sims provided a recap of regional funding discussions over the past year, particularly related to Class A member contributions. She reviewed prior Board action affirming that a contribution of 2% of transient occupancy tax collections constitutes the minimum level to maintain Class A membership.

Following extensive discussions among Class A Chief Administrative Officers, elected officials, and the Executive Committee, and with the goal of maintaining full Class A participation, a one-year compromise was proposed. For Fiscal Year 2027 only, Class A membership dues would be set at 1.75%, representing a reduction of approximately \$1.2 million from the previously approved FY27 budget.

Chair Sims noted that RRT leadership is preparing a revised FY27 budget reflecting this reduction and that programmatic impacts will be addressed at a high level. Strategic planning efforts have been temporarily paused pending added feedback from Class A CAOs and will be revisited at the March 19 Board meeting.

**MOTION** Chair Sims called for a motion to set Class A membership dues for Fiscal Year 2027 only at a minimum of 1.75% of transient occupancy tax (TOT) collections. Dr. Mark Miller moved to approve the proposal, which was seconded by Ms. Susan Dibble. Ms. Jennifer Wakefield and Mr. Rick Butts abstained from the vote. The motion carried.

D. President's Report: Ms. Katherine O'Donnell, President & CEO, reported on hotel performance for November, noting that the Richmond Region continues to outperform both the Commonwealth of Virginia and national averages. Year-to-date results show:

- Nearly 7% growth in room nights sold
- Over 7% growth in hotel revenue
- Increased occupancy and revenue per available room
- Stable and slightly increasing average daily rates

Ms. O'Donnell emphasized that these results reflect the continued impact of TID-funded year-round marketing and event recruitment.

#### **Staff Update**

Ms. O'Donnell provided a staffing update and reported that, since November, Richmond Region Tourism has experienced several staff transitions:

- Mr. Kevin Holland, National Sales Manager, left after being recruited to the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- Ms. Lauran Peoples, Director of Business Development and Sales Marketing, left to return to school.
- Ms. Deanne Ralston, Community Relations Coordinator, resigned.
- Ms. Michelle Lovatt, Vice President of Administration, retired.
- Ms. Sarah Beth Couvillion, Public Relations Manager, resigned to transition to a part-time role to focus on her growing family. Her position will be reposted and refilled in the coming weeks.

To support continuity within the sales team, Ms. Casey Armstrong was promoted to fill the National Sales Manager role. RRT is currently recruiting for a Destination Sales Manager to backfill Ms. Armstrong's former position. At this time, RRT is holding off on hiring replacements for the roles previously held by Ms. Lovatt, Ms. Peoples, and Ms. Ralston until the strategic planning process is complete.

E. Mission Moment: Mr. Matt Robinette, Vice President of Visitor Experience, shared a Mission Moment focused on preparations for TBEX, a major global content creator event scheduled for June 2026. The event will bring approximately 500 travel content creators to the Richmond Region, generating long-term international exposure. Mr. Robinette highlighted the cross-departmental collaboration needed to execute the initiative and its expected lasting economic and brand impact.

F. Financial Update: Mr. Mike Kerr, Director of Finance, delivered the Financial Update and referred Board members to the full detail contained in the financial report materials housed in Zeck.

Mr. Kerr noted that, due to the Board's action on Class A funding, the previously submitted Fiscal Year 2027 budget materials that had been transmitted to the funding jurisdictions will be revised and reissued to align with the updated dues level.

Key highlights included the following:

- **GRCCA Agreement:** Mr. Kerr reported that the Greater Richmond Convention Center Authority (GRCCA) had paid one half of its FY26 agreement as reflected in the written report and has since fulfilled 100% of the FY26 agreement as of the day prior to the meeting.
- **TID Revenue Timing:** Mr. Kerr noted that Tourism Improvement District (TID) revenue is received in arrears. Transfers reflected in the report represent lagged collections. Mr. Kerr reported that an additional transfer tranche was processed the morning of the meeting.
- **Asset Mix and Interest Income Outlook:** Mr. Kerr reviewed the organization's asset mix and noted continued economic uncertainty. He said interest rates have declined and may continue to trend downward over the year, which could affect interest earnings.

### III. VRLTA UPDATE & ADJOURNMENT:

- A. VRLTA Update: Mr. Eric Terry, President of the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association (VRLTA), provided a legislative update from the opening days of the General Assembly session. Mr. Terry noted that the session is expected to be active and fast-moving, and he encouraged the Board to remain engaged on issues that may affect tourism, hospitality, and workforce development.

Mr. Terry shared that, in recent conversations with hoteliers, industry stakeholders continue to report strong benefits from the Tourism Improvement District (TID) and its positive impact on hotel performance.

Mr. Terry reviewed VRLTA's priority issues and areas of monitoring, including:

- **Labor and employment policy:** Mr. Terry discussed right-to-work legislation and related proposals (including "fair share" concepts), noting that VRLTA is taking part in the *Keep Virginia Working* coalition alongside statewide partners.
- **Sports tourism funding:** Mr. Terry highlighted that the outgoing budget includes \$5 million for the sports tourism fund and that VRLTA and partners will advocate for increased funding, citing growing competition from other destinations.
- **Restaurant industry pressures:** Mr. Terry described ongoing headwinds for restaurants, including softer demand, shifts toward lower-cost dining, declining alcohol consumption, and cost pressures that may be compounded by new mandates.
- **Human trafficking prevention:** Mr. Terry noted that existing training requirements for hotels are producing positive results. VRLTA is supporting efforts to expand requirements to short-term rental operators and to roll out training resources for restaurants.
- **Short-term rental oversight and tax compliance:** Mr. Terry discussed efforts to strengthen registration and tax collection consistency.
- **ABC and regulatory reforms:** Mr. Terry outlined ongoing discussions regarding the food-to-alcohol (MBAR) ratio and other ABC-related issues, including proposed changes to happy hour timing.

- **Workforce development and education:** Mr. Terry highlighted hospitality pipeline programs across Virginia, including ProStart, hospitality and tourism management curricula, community college initiatives, scholarships, and internship support.

Mr. Terry encouraged Board members to take part in VRLTA's Day on the Hill (January 26–27) and to continue advocacy on issues affecting the hospitality and tourism economy.

B. Adjournment: With no further business to discuss, Chair Sims adjourned the meeting at 1:32 PM.

Attendees:

Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels  
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA  
Brian Bald, Capital One  
Rick Butts, Omni Richmond Hotel  
Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy  
Susan Dibble, Hanover County  
Will Dixon, Sports Backers  
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights  
Mark Miller, Chesterfield County  
Drew Molloy, Town of Ashland  
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels  
Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond  
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond  
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County  
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond  
Nancy Thomas, InUnison  
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership

Guests Present:

Mac Beaton, Henrico Adult Education  
Troy Bell, Capital Region Airport Commission  
Kelly Franke, Town of Ashland  
Jim Ingle, Chesterfield County  
Bryonna Head, City of Richmond Economic Development  
Kimberly Love-Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group  
Dawn Miller, Henrico Sports and Entertainment Authority  
John Moyer, New Kent County  
Leslie Perry, Henrico Adult Education  
J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County  
Rachel Smith, Hanover County  
Eric Terry, VRLTA  
John Vithoukaskas, Henrico County

Staff Present:

Katherine O'Donnell  
Danielle Fitz-Hugh  
Mike Kerr  
Jerrine Lee  
Tom Loftus  
Mike Kerr  
Matt Robinette  
Grantland Steele

Absent:

Brian Bald, Capital One  
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond  
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp  
Perry Miller, Richmond International Airport  
Jordan Stewart, New Kent County  
Jennifer Schofield, Kings Dominion  
Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway