

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 16, 2025
CULTURAL ARTS CENTER OF GLEN ALLEN
12:00 P.M.**

I. CALL TO ORDER & WELCOME

- A. Board Chair, Ms. Lisa Sims, called the meeting to order at 12:15 P.M.

Welcome Remarks: Henrico County Manager, Mr. John Vithoulikas, welcomed attendees to the Cultural Arts Center of Glen Allen in Henrico County. He expressed gratitude to the Board for their contributions to regional tourism, particularly in sports tourism, which has led to an eight-percent increase in hotel taxes in Henrico and similar growth across the region.

Mr. Vithoulikas emphasized the importance of regional collaboration, citing examples like the response to the recent water crisis and the collective effort that created the Central Virginia Transportation Authority, which has significantly improved transportation infrastructure. He encouraged continued cooperation to maintain momentum, particularly as budget season approaches and tourism revenue is expected to benefit schools and services. In closing, Mr. Vithoulikas commended RRT for its focus on collective good and its vital role in strengthening the region's economic and tourism efforts.

Cultural Arts Center President, Ms. K. Alferio, welcomed attendees to Henrico County and expressed pride in the Richmond region's collaborative efforts to promote tourism, cultural events, and creativity. She highlighted the region's collective strength and her gratitude for its ongoing support. Alferio provided a history of the Cultural Arts Center, originally built as a school in 1917 and renovated in 1999. She highlighted its dual role as a vibrant arts hub, hosting exhibits, performances, and events, and as a revenue generator through space rentals for weddings and corporate functions.

Ms. Alferio detailed the center's impactful outreach programs, including art education for at-risk youth and incarcerated juveniles, as well as O.M.A. (Opening Minds through Art), an art-making program for people with dementia and their caregivers. All outreach initiatives are fully funded by corporate sponsors and county support, ensuring they are free to the community. Ms. Alferio invited attendees to explore the center's gift shop and galleries, underscoring the center's dedication to enriching the region through arts and culture.

- B. Roundtable Announcements & Board Member Update: Chair Sims invited Board Members to share any important updates:

Ms. Dawn Miller, HSEA:

- The Henrico Sports and Events Center recently celebrated its first anniversary with a Happy Hour reception. The center hosted a Cheer & Gear Donation Drive in partnership with ESPN Richmond, benefiting the Central Richmond Salvation Army, as well as the inaugural Battle of the Badges basketball game between Henrico's Police and Fire divisions.

Ms. Jerrine Lee, Vice President of Sales:

- The Sports team, in collaboration with Henrico County and Chesterfield County, has secured The Virginia Commonwealth Games for the Richmond Region in

2026, 2027, and 2028. The event has previously been held in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Mr. Perry Miller, RIC:

- o Reminded Board attendees that construction on the lower-level roadway at Richmond International Airport will continue for another three weeks. He recommended that guests pick up passengers upstairs to avoid congestion.

Ms. Bridgette Bywater, Kings Dominion:

- o Announced that the Richmond North / Kings Dominion KOA Holiday Campground received a prestigious award for its exceptional guest experience, welcoming atmosphere, and leadership in holiday programming. She encouraged attendees to visit the campground to see the award-winning offerings.

Chair Sims (Board Member Update):

- o Informed Board Members that Mr. Jim Holland of Chesterfield County will be stepping down from the RRT Board after many years of dedicated service. Chesterfield Board Vice Chair, Mr. Mark Miller of the Midlothian District, will assume the role, pending approval from Chesterfield County's Board.

Mr. Eric Terry, VRLTA:

- o Highlighted the importance of collective lobbying efforts, emphasizing that collaboration can amplify impact. He noted the General Assembly session would be extremely busy, with 2,000 pre-filed bills. VRLTA is closely monitoring issues such as data centers, energy, and labor concerns.
- o Invited attendees to share their lobbying priorities so VRLTA can incorporate them into its advocacy efforts. Discussion on "Right to Work" legislation is ongoing and remains a contentious issue, though the governor's veto offers some assurance.

Mr. Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels:

- o Reported a strong finish to 2024 for the region's hospitality revenue, citing Thanksgiving as one of the best in recent years, driven by sporting events.

Mr. Jon Lugbill, Sports Backers:

- o Announced that according to Running USA's 2024 report, Richmond's 10K has been ranked the fourth largest in the nation, the marathon as the 16th largest, and the CarMax half marathon as the 25th largest.

Mr. Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels:

- o A live camera feed is available at carmaxpark.com to view the construction progress at CarMax Park.
- o Hall of Famer John Smoltz will throw the first pitch at the season opener on April 4, 2025.
- o Season Two of the Parney Time podcast will launch next month, with David Justice as the first guest.

Ms. Martha Miller, Town of Ashland

- o Ashland had a successful holiday, particularly the Light Up the Tracks Illumination.
- o Hoteliers interested in building hotels in Ashland are advised to contact Ms. Miller.

Ms. Susan Dibble, Hanover County

- o Announced she has stepped down from her role as Vice Chair of the Hanover Board of Supervisors, now filled by Sean M. Davis.

Mr. John Cario, Shamin Hotels

- o 2024 was a strong year for Embassy Suites and the Greater Richmond hotel community.

- Richmond Region hotel staff demonstrated exceptional teamwork and support during the recent water crisis. Top of Form
- C. Tourism Legislative Priorities: Mr. Eric Terry, President of the Virginia Restaurant and Travel Association, provided an overview of the current state of the hospitality and tourism industries in Virginia and shared updates on initiatives and legislative matters. Key points included:

Industry Challenges:

- Restaurants face significant challenges, including rising food and labor costs.
- There is a need to support local restaurants and advocate for fair policies.

Legislative Updates:

- Success in opposing the elimination of tip credit and securing permanent approval for cocktails-to-go.
- Advocacy for transparency in short-term rental tax collection and expansion of human trafficking training to short-term rental platforms.
- Continued work on maintaining the dealer discount for credit card fees related to tax collection.
- Efforts to increase the state's Tourism Fund from \$5 million to \$10 million to support events and sports facilities.

Education and Workforce Development:

- Expansion of high school culinary and hospitality programs across Virginia to address workforce shortages.
- Approval of apprenticeship programs and efforts to establish verified internship opportunities to retain talent within the state.
- ProStart Competition for high school students to be held in February, showcasing culinary and restaurant management skills.

Future Events:

- Legislative Day on January 27th, featuring hospitality-focused discussions and receptions.
- Plans for the Governor's Tourism Summit to be held in Danville next year and potentially in Richmond in three years.

II. NEW BUSINESS

- A. **MOTION** Chair Sims requested a motion to approve the September 19, 2024, and November 21, 2024, Meeting Minutes. The minutes were motioned, seconded, and approved by the Board.

- B. **MOTION Financial Update:** Director of Finance, Mr. Mike Kerr, presented the Financial Update as of December 31, 2024. He directed attendees to the summary document in their packets, noting that it remains unchanged since its distribution.

The 2024 audit, previously presented to the board by Harris, Hardy, and Johnstone PC in November, was recommended for approval by the executive committee. The FY24 audit was approved as presented.

Following the audit's approval and the completion of Form 990 for the foundation, Mr. Kerr confirmed compliance with state gaming requirements, specifically regarding the board's oversight. He highlighted that Form 990, distributed to board members beforehand, fulfills key compliance needs, including Section B11A on page six.

Mr. Kerr also provided an update on interest rates, noting a slight drop in banking rates and projecting two 25-basis-point cuts in the calendar year 2025, as reflected in the 2025-2026 budget projections.

- C. **Governance Committee Report:** Ms. Bridgette Bywater, Chair of the RRT Governance Committee, presented proposed updates to the articles and bylaws:

Key updates included:

- Changes to membership applications for Class A and Class B members
- Addition to the Articles of Incorporation to address limits on liability and indemnification, a standard provision in similar documents
- Establishing procedures for replacing elected officials who are no longer serving in an official capacity

MOTION The Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws were motioned, seconded and approved.

Board Vacancy Update: Ms. Bywater provided an update on the vacant corporate board seat, noting that efforts are ongoing to find a replacement. Discussions with various organizations have taken place, and the Board is supportive of Capital One holding the corporate seat. The Governance Committee is working with Capital One to name a representative before the March meeting.

- D. **MOTION Closed Session:** Pursuant to Section 2.2-3711(A) of The Virginia Freedom of Information Act, Ms. Bridgette Bywater moved that the Board of Richmond Region Tourism go into closed session to review legal advice regarding the funding from the Class A members of Richmond Region Tourism. Ms. Nancy Thomas seconded the motion. The motion carried. Chair Sims excused all guests, and the Board entered the closed session at 1:00 p.m. The Board of Directors came out of closed session at 2:14 p.m.

MOTION Mr. Todd "Parney" Parnell motioned to formally acknowledge that two percent (2%) of the transient occupancy tax collections is the minimum financial contribution required to maintain Class A status as a member of Richmond Region Tourism. The motion was seconded by Ms. Susan Dibble. The motion carried. Ms. Jennifer Wakefield abstained from voting and after the meeting concluded, Mr. Neil Amin expressed a desire to change his vote to abstain.

III. Adjourn

A. Adjourn: With no further business to discuss, Chair Sims adjourned the meeting at 2:15 PM

Board Present:

Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA
Bridgette Bywater, King's Dominion
John Cario, Embassy Suites Hotel
Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy
Susan Dibble, Hanover County
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights
Jon Luginbill, Sports Backers
Perry Miller, Capital Region Airport Commission
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond
Nancy Thomas, InUnison
Steve Trivett, Town of Ashland
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership
Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway

Guests Present:

K. Alferio, Cultural Arts Center
Leonard Caballero, City of Colonial Heights
Gail Carey, New Kent County
Martha Miller, Town of Ashland
Dawn Miller, Henrico Sports & Entertainment Authority
J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County
Christiana Roberts, Cultural Arts Center
Eric Terry, VRLTA
John Vithoulkas, Henrico County
Angela Wright, Hanover County

Staff Present:

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

Board Absent:

Jim Holland, Chesterfield County
Michael Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp
Mayush Mehta, JP Hospitality
Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond
Jordan Stewart, New Kent County