RICHMOND REGION TOURISM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES
JULY 16, 2026
CARMAX PARK
CITY OF RICHMOND
NOON

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

A. Chair Lisa Sims called the meeting to order at 12:18 p.m. and established a quorum.

B. Welcome Remarks: Chair Sims welcomed Ms. Shavonne Harding, Richmond Region Tourism's new Vice President of Sales. Ms. Harding has more than 13 years of destination sales experience, including roles in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Chicago and Pittsburgh.

Chair Sims recognized RRT's summer interns, Ms. Auyrea Clark and Ms. Ashley Brown. Ms. Clark is participating through the City of Richmond Youth Engagement Program, and Ms. Brown is serving as the BLK RVA/OutRVA intern. Ms. Clark's City of Richmond mentor, Mr. Khari Patterson, was recognized.

Mr. Anthony Oppermann, General Manager of the Richmond Flying Squirrels, and Mr. Ben Rothrock, Chief Operating Officer, welcomed the Board to CarMax Park.

Mr. Oppermann shared that CarMax Park hosted 52 events during its first 90 days of operation, including 28 non-baseball events. He described the facility as a year-round, multiuse entertainment venue and highlighted the recently announced WinterWorld, which will transform the ballpark with seasonal attractions from November through early January.

Mr. Odie Donald, Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Richmond, discussed the importance of regional collaboration and the relationship between public safety, infrastructure, economic development and tourism. He provided updates on the City's Multi-Agency Coordinating Center, state funding secured for Richmond priorities, planning surrounding the Greater Richmond Convention Center and future hotel development, and the expansion of the City's youth employment program.

C. Announcements: Various announcements during lunch were made including:

- **Mr. Jordan Stewart, New Kent County,** announced that the New Kent Festival of Racing will take place on August 1. She encouraged attendees to monitor event information for any weather-related schedule updates.
- **Ms. Rachel Smith, Hanover County,** shared that the Hanover Tomato Festival welcomed more than 13,000 attendees, including visitors from across the East Coast. She also highlighted the upcoming Voices of Freedom event on August 15, focused on the origins of religious freedom in America.
- **Mr. Will Dixon, Sports Backers,** shared that the upcoming Richmond Marathon was sold out and highlighted the upcoming Ashland Half Marathon and 5K. He also noted Richmond's improvement in the American Fitness Index from #40 to #20.
- **Ms. Dawn Miller, Henrico Sports & Events Center,** reported that more than 500,000 visitors had passed through the facility during the first six months of the year. She also shared that tickets for the Korn Ferry Championship Tour would go on sale the following week.
- **Ms. Kimberly Love-Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group,** announced that Love's Public Kitchen is now open for lunch and dinner in the former Lillie Pearl location on Grace Street.
- **Ms. Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corporation,** shared positive statewide tourism and lodging performance, noting that Virginia was outperforming national averages in key hotel metrics. She also highlighted Northern Virginia's continued recovery and its positive impact on statewide results.

- **Ms. Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond,** highlighted the museum's recent renovations and encouraged Board members to visit the refreshed space. She also announced the museum's first adult play night, scheduled for September 2.
- **Mr. Perry Miller, Richmond International Airport,** reported continued passenger growth and highlighted new and returning air service, including Tampa and Cancún. He also announced that Richmond International Airport had received recognition as the most efficient airport in North America within its category.
- **Ms. Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond,** highlighted major downtown investments, including CoStar's new riverfront campus and Virginia Public Media's new Broad Street headquarters. She also announced that Venture Richmond will lead a Broad Street visioning process and provided an update on the $30 million Brown's Island improvement project, noting that construction was more than halfway complete and remained on time and on budget.
- **Mr. Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA,** discussed regional economic development advocacy and emphasized the importance of tourism and the data center industry to the region's economy. He noted the industry's role in creating construction and high-paying jobs while acknowledging the need to address concerns related to infrastructure, energy and water use.

II. **NEW BUSINESS:**

A. **MOTION** Minutes: Mr. Brian Anderson made a motion to approve the May 21, 2026, meeting minutes. Mr. Parney Parnell seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

B. NSDA/TBEX Recap: Ms. Heather Crislip and Ms. Sandra Wheeler of the Richmond Forum, along with Mr. Danny Bonifas, Mr. Matt Robinette and Ms. Carla Murray of Richmond Region Tourism, presented recaps of the National Speech and Debate Tournament and TBEX North America.

Ms. Crislip and Ms. Wheeler discussed the Richmond Forum's work to expand speech and debate programs throughout the region. Since launching the initiative, participation has grown from a limited number of schools to approximately 90 percent of the region's public high schools, with added growth in middle-school programming.

The National Speech and Debate Tournament welcomed approximately 13,000 registered attendees, including students, coaches, judges and spectators from across the country. The event utilized seven regional schools, 58 hotels across five localities and generated at least 13,480 room nights, with added hotel information still being collected. Preliminary estimates indicated approximately $11.6 million in economic impact. More than 400 community members filled 726 volunteer shifts. The presenters noted that all 50 states were represented and that the event created significant activity for regional hotels, restaurants, attractions and transportation providers.

The Richmond Forum and RRT emphasized that the event proved the region's ability to execute a complex, community-supported national event. Representatives also reported that discussions were underway regarding the tournament's potential return to Richmond in 2030.

Mr. Robinette and Ms. Murray provided an overview of TBEX North America, which brought approximately 250 to 300 professional travel content creators to the Richmond Region. All seven participating jurisdictions hosted creators through more than 20 pre-conference tours and additional partner-led experiences.

The event produced new regional group tour itineraries, photography, video and other marketing assets. Preliminary results included 48 creator appointments, more than 250 Instagram posts using the TBEX Virginia hashtag, approximately 100 creators posting stories, more than 50 permanent posts and numerous collaboration requests. The presenters noted that content and earned exposure would continue to develop over the coming months.

C. Financial Update: Mr. Mike Kerr, Director of Finance and Administration, delivered the Financial Update through June 30, 2026:

- RRT received $11,171,276 in revenue against a planned budget total of $11,263,369, or 99.18% of plan.
- All seven jurisdictions and the Greater Richmond Convention Center had paid their annual contributions in full.
- TID revenue runs in arrears, with nine monthly transfers received for July through March, and will true up during the FY26 audit.
- Total expenditures were $9,344,181, or 83.89% of plan, up from 70.74% during the previous reporting cycle. Some year-end expenses, including National Speech and Debate and TBEX, have not yet been posted.
- Lines of interest included:
    - Payroll and related staffing expenses at 85.24%, reflecting positions held open during strategic plan and budget funding discussions. One additional payroll cycle remained to be posted.
    - Insurance at 65.39%, due to an RFP that resulted in improved property and casualty coverage at lower premiums. An additional premium refund was expected.
    - Amortization at 0%, which will be adjusted during the year-end audit close.
    - Workforce development at 58.04%, with year-end projects expected to absorb a portion of the remaining funds.
    - Visitor center signage at 9.76%, reflecting limited replacement needs during FY26.
    - Certain travel lines were above budget because staff covered additional events while positions remained vacant.
- Mr. Kerr reported that FY26 audit preparation was underway with Harris, Hardy and Johnstone, with draft statements expected to be submitted to the audit firm in late July or early August.
- RRT's current and reserve assets totaled $7,102,363 as of June 30, 2026, with a blended point-in-time return of 2.84%, down from 3.16% during the previous reporting cycle.
- Assets included TowneBank Money Market and checking accounts, eleven laddered Principal holdings and a First Citizens Bank money market account. RRT remained above its reserve policy floor of 20% of the current-year budget.
- Mr. Kerr noted that returns declined slightly as second-half operating expenses drew down cash balances and interest rates softened. Two Principal certificates of deposit were renewed in June at 4.00%, with another tranche expected to be secured in July. These renewals will help forward returns on assets.

Mr. Kerr then presented the Richmond Region Tourism Foundation financial update. The Foundation ended FY26 with approximately $284,319 in revenue, $284,433 in expenditures and a preliminary net operating loss of approximately $114. Total assets were approximately $329,252 as of June 30.

Mr. Kerr presented the Foundation's proposed FY27 budget, balanced at $133,500. He explained that the Annual Meeting would occur in FY28 due to a scheduling change, the RVA Sports Awards had concluded after five years, and the Power of Tourism Breakfast had been added to the FY27 budget.

MOTION: The Richmond Region Tourism Foundation Board recommended approval of the FY27 Foundation budget. As the recommendation came from a standing committee, no second was required. The Board approved the FY27 Foundation budget unanimously.

D. President's Report: Ms. Katherine O'Donnell, President & CEO, delivered the President's Report.

MOU Update

Ms. O'Donnell reported that RRT received a draft Memorandum of Understanding from the Class A Members in May. Following discussions among RRT leadership and locality representatives, RRT returned a redlined version in June. The document was being circulated among Class A Members for additional review and feedback.

Ms. O'Donnell reported there was broad alignment around strengthening communication, transparency, accountability, annual planning and reporting, and better demonstrating tourism's economic impact. RRT's feedback focused on preserving the regional tourism model while strengthening alignment with individual localities; establishing shared responsibilities between RRT and the Class A Members; protecting RRT's long-term financial and operational sustainability; and creating clearer governance and implementation procedures.

She noted that the original draft would create more individualized annual planning, designated locality liaisons, expanded locality-specific services and significantly enhanced reporting requirements. RRT hoped to complete the process by September so that a final document could be reviewed by the Board and legal counsel before the fall funding and budget-submission process.

Ms. Sims recognized the work of the locality representatives assisting with the process and expressed appreciation for their collaborative approach.

Strategic Plan Update

Ms. O'Donnell reported that RRT reformatted its organizational business plan, departmental work plans and incentive program to align directly with the FY27–FY29 Strategic Plan.

Staff completed the internal portion of a Stop, Start, Continue and Modify exercise outlined in the Strategic Plan. Finalization of the recommendations are being held until the MOU process provided greater clarity regarding future locality expectations.

Beginning in September, strategic-plan progress updates will be incorporated into the regular Board report.

Ms. O'Donnell also reported that the regional resident sentiment survey was in the field and asked Board members to share the survey through their organizations' communication channels.

Tourism Improvement District Update

Ms. O'Donnell shared preliminary FY26 TID results.

TID-funded leisure marketing campaigns produced strong returns. Expedia campaigns generated approximately 15,680 room nights, nearly $1.9 million in room revenue and approximately $6 million in estimated economic impact, representing a 48.2-to-1 return on advertising spending.

TID-supported sales incentives resulted in 95 definite or firm events from 165 approved incentives, for a closed conversion rate of approximately 67.9 percent. Recent contracting highlights included the North American Travel Journalists Association in 2027, Jehovah's Witnesses business beginning in 2027 and United Women in Faith in 2030.

Ms. O'Donnell reported that the TID approved a $1 million, three-year pledge toward the minimum revenue guarantee for a proposed nonstop Richmond-to-Dublin flight. The funding would only be used if the route launched and failed to meet agreed revenue targets. The TID also approved $250,000 in first-year marketing support should the route be secured.

The FY26 TID Year-End Report is scheduled for release in August and will provide a comprehensive summary of annual performance, program outcomes and TID-supported activity across marketing, sales, group tour and workforce initiatives.

Staff Update

Ms. O'Donnell announced that Ms. Ashleigh Wilson was promoted to Sports and Events Specialist, filling the role previously held by Ms. Morgan Kenley following Ms. Kenley's promotion to Sports Events Manager. Ms. Wilson will transition into the position once the Sales Coordinator vacancy was filled.

Ms. O'Donnell also announced Ms. Tameka Jefferson's promotion to Senior Manager, Cultural Tourism and DEI Strategy. In this role, Ms. Jefferson will lead cultural tourism, community engagement and DEI strategy; oversee BLK RVA and OutRVA; and strengthen partnerships with community, cultural and industry stakeholders.

RRT is also recruiting for a Community Engagement Manager to oversee I Am Tourism, Foundation programs, community engagement, grant fundraising and reporting, partner stewardship and program communications.

Ms. O'Donnell reported that RRT posted the open Vice President of Marketing position and planned to recruit a Sales Manager as part of the organizational realignment.

Mission Moment

Ms. O'Donnell reflected on completing two years as President and CEO and thanked the Board for its support throughout that period.

She described tourism as a force for good and noted that the National Speech and Debate Tournament and TBEX demonstrated the ability of tourism to connect residents, visitors, businesses and community partners. She recognized the RRT team's organization-wide participation in the events and shared that the experiences had reinvigorated staff and reinforced the purpose behind RRT's work.

E. Destination Brand and Experience Initiative: Ms. Jerrine Lee, Chief Growth Officer, presented the proposed Destination Brand and Experience Initiative.

Ms. Lee explained that the initiative would establish a long-term destination identity for the Richmond Region and create a shared foundation for future marketing, sales, website modernization, stakeholder engagement and regional collaboration. The destination brand would not be a new logo or slogan, but rather a clear articulation of what distinguishes the Richmond Region and the experience the destination offers.

The initiative directly supports the FY27-FY29 Strategic Plan, including goals to elevate regional brand messaging, establish a shared destination story, align locality and partner communications and modernize RRT's digital presence.

The proposed project included approximately $75,000 for destination-brand development and $45,000 for a website refresh. Approximately $25,000 in existing contracted website services would be applied to the project, resulting in a reserve-funding request of approximately $95,000.

Ms. Lee explained that the process would include stakeholder interviews, workshops and community input, including findings from the resident sentiment survey. The work is expected to take approximately 16 weeks, with the broader implementation continuing through FY27.

MOTION: The Executive Committee recommended approval of the Destination Brand and Experience Initiative and authorization to use approximately $95,000 in available reserves. As the recommendation came from a standing committee, no second was required. The motion carried unanimously.

III. ANY OTHER BUSINESS & ADJOURNMENT:

A. Announcements: Chair Sims reminded Board members that the BLK RVA Community Awards would be held on Friday, August 21, 2026, at the Hippodrome Theater.

Chair Sims announced that Mr. Jack Berry, former President & CEO of RRT, would be inducted into the Destinations International Hall of Fame and encouraged Board members to congratulate him on the recognition.

B. Adjournment: With no further business to discuss, Chair Sims adjourned the meeting at 2:00 PM.

Attendees:
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA
Brian Bald, Capital One
Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy
Will Dixon, Sports Backers
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights
Kimberly Love-Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp
Perry Miller, Richmond International Airport
Drew Molloy, Town of Ashland
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels
Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond
Jennifer Schofield, Kings Dominion
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond
Jordan Stewart, New Kent County
Nancy Thomas, InUnison
Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership

Guests Present:
Heather Crislip, The Richmond Forum
Odie Donald, City of Richmond
Kelly Franke, Town of Ashland
Dawn Miller, Henrico Sports and Entertainment Authority
Anthony Oppermann, Richmond Flying Squirrels
Khari Patterson, City of Richmond
Ben Rothrock, Richmond Flying Squirrels
Rachel Smith, Hanover County
Sandra Wheeler, The Richmond Forum

Staff Present:
Katherine O'Donnell
Jerrine Lee
Danielle Fitz-Hugh
Shavonne Harding
Matt Robinette
Carla Murray
Mike Kerr
Grantland Steele

Absent:
Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels
Susan Dibble, Hanover County
Rick Butts, Omni Richmond Hotel
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond
Mark Miller, Chesterfield County
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County