

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES  
JULY 17, 2025  
CHESTERFIELD COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE  
12:00 P.M.**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

- A. Chair Lisa Sims called the meeting to order at 12:07 p.m. and established a quorum.

**II. WELCOME:**

- A. Welcome Remarks: Chair Sims introduced Dr. Joseph Casey, Chesterfield County Administrator, who welcomed attendees and highlighted several significant local developments, including an innovative Massachusetts-based facility investing \$4 billion in the area and the strategic co-location of Chesterfield County School Board and Chesterfield County Economic Development.

Dr. Casey noted Henrico and Chesterfield County's joint success in attracting the Virginia Commonwealth Games, projecting significant economic and tourism impacts. Additional exciting developments are planned at the River City Sportsplex, Southside Speedway, and a potential Ironman triathlon course leveraging local lake and road infrastructure.

Dr. Mark Miller, Midlothian District Supervisor, welcomed attendees to the district, highlighting Midlothian's strategic geographic position as the midpoint on the Eastern Seaboard. Dr. Miller shared plans for a welcoming gateway sign and pedestrian infrastructure improvements.

Chair Sims welcomed guests and interns to the meeting. Richmond Region Tourism's five college interns were recognized: Ms. Nakyiah Jones, a rising junior at Virginia State University supporting BLK RVA; Ms. Holden Habermacher, a University of Richmond junior supporting Community Relations; Ms. Vedika Krishna, a recent VCU graduate supporting Visitor Experience; and Ms. Isabella Wert, a rising senior at Virginia Tech supporting Destination Sales (unable to attend). Two student interns from the City of Richmond's Youth Works RVA program were recognized: Ms. Nyla Hanglan, a rising sophomore at NC A&T, and Ms. Laila Jackson, a rising junior at John Marshall High School.

Chair Sims introduced the following guests: Ms. Robin Chidester, Manager of Accounting; Ms. Jennifer Schofield, new Park Manager at Kings Dominion (replacing Ms. Bridgette Bywater); Ms. Kelly Franke from the Town of Ashland (replacing Ms. Martha Miller); Mr. Matt Mullen representing Mr. JC Poma and Chesterfield County; and Ms. Rebecca Street, GM of Allianz Amphitheater.

- B. Announcements during Lunch: Chair Sims invited Board Members and guests to introduce themselves and share important updates with the group:

- Mr. Neil Amin reported record-breaking hotel occupancy for July.
- Mr. Will Dixon shared that Allianz Richmond Marathon registrations are ahead by 10% compared to last year.
- Ms. Jennifer Wakefield of the Greater Richmond Partnership presented findings from recent perception research highlighting the Richmond Region's increasing attractiveness to corporate executives and site location consultants.
- Mr. Perry Miller of Richmond International Airport announced that June was the highest month ever for passenger traffic at RIC, surpassing May 2024's record. Cargo also increased by 5%.

- Ms. Nancy Thomas of InUnison reminded attendees of the upcoming Valor Awards on December 10, honoring first responders from across the region.
- Ms. Katie McConnell of the City of Richmond shared that Ms. Angie Rogers has been announced as the new Director of Economic Development, beginning in August.
- Mr. Brian Anderson of ChamberRVA discussed the Virginia Chamber's efforts related to the Right to Work campaign, including an educational initiative aimed at legislators and the public, and the need to raise funds in support.
- Ms. Danielle Fitz-Hugh, Vice President of Community Relations, noted that the BLK RVA Community Awards would be held on August 22, noting that four-top tables remained available.

C. Brown's Island Presentation: Chair Sims provided an update on the Brown's Island Improvement Plan, outlining significant enhancements aimed at accessibility, event infrastructure, and daily recreational use, including ADA-compliant entrances, restroom facilities, water access, river terraces, and an amphitheater pavilion. Ms. Rebecca Street from Allianz Amphitheater shared insights from recent successful events, including Dave Matthews Band performances, underscoring the Richmond Region's rising profile as an entertainment destination.

### III. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. **MOTION** Minutes: The minutes from the May 15 meeting were reviewed. Mr. Perry Miller motioned to accept the minutes which were seconded by Ms. Nancy Thomas. The vote passed unanimously.
- B. Staff Recognition: Chair Sims recognized Manager of Accounting, Robin Chidester, for obtaining her Certified Public Accountant (CPA) designation.
- C. President's Report: Katherine O'Donnell, President & CEO, outlined RRT's three-year strategic plan process in partnership with MMGY Next Factor, intended to clarify roles, strengthen collaboration, and prioritize future actions. The Senior Team recently attended the Destinations International (DI) Annual Convention in Chicago, where the updated "Destination Next Future Study" was released—offering key trends and insights to help guide destination organizations amid global change. The study's findings will help inform RRT's new strategic direction.

The strategic plan will include a forthcoming series of feedback meetings, including one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and surveys involving community stakeholders. A special extended board session will take place on September 18, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Greater Richmond Convention Center with the goal of presenting a finalized strategic plan for board approval at the November board meeting.

Ms. O'Donnell shared the latest market trends from Blue Room Research: The Richmond Region year-to-date hotel demand is up 5.5%, revenue is up 5.4%, and revenue per available room is up 2.6%, outperforming both Virginia and national averages. Short-term rental growth was strong, with May revenue up 34%.

**MOTION** Destination Marketing Accreditation – Code of Ethics: Ms. Jennifer Wakefield motioned to approve the DI Code of Ethics, as required for Richmond Region Tourism's re-accreditation through the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP). Mr. Perry Miller seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Personnel Committee Update: Chair Sims and Immediate Past Chair, Mr. Dan Schmitt, recently completed Ms. O'Donnell's annual performance evaluation. They shared that Ms. O'Donnell had met or exceeded all performance goals for the year. The Personnel Committee—composed of the current, past, and incoming board chairs—expressed appreciation for her leadership during a pivotal year. They noted that her upcoming goals for FY26 align with the new strategic planning process, emphasizing enhanced stakeholder engagement, regional collaboration, and measurable tourism growth.

Mission Moment: Ms. Fitz-Hugh delivered her Mission Moment, highlighting the success of the recent Proud Voices Familiarization (FAM) Tour where meeting planners and DMO partners took the Amtrak Pride Ride from Richmond to Washington DC. She shared how community partners and RRT staff created a welcoming and immersive experience for LGBTQ+ visitors, with positive feedback from Virginia Tourism Corporation. The FAM helped showcase the Richmond Region as an inclusive and supportive destination for all.

- D. Financial Update: Mr. Mike Kerr, Director of Finance, delivered the Financial Update, noting revenues have increased from approximately \$10.78 million to \$10.9 million, with expenditures also rising from approximately \$9.07 million to \$9.2 million. The current asset mix stands at approximately \$5.5 million, generating an average return rate of 3.1%. The upcoming fiscal year will close on July 31 and preparations for the fiscal year 2025 audit by Harris, Hardy, and Johnstone are expected to begin mid-September. The audit engagement letter has been signed, initiating pre-audit work with the firm. Fiscal year '26 support requests have been distributed.
- E. Governance Committee Report: Chair Sims delivered the Governance Committee Report on behalf of the newly appointed Chair, Ms. Danielle Ripperton. With Ms. Bridgett Bywater's departure from the board, the Governance Committee made the following recommendations:
- Ms. Susan Dibble be appointed as incoming Chair-Elect of the Board.
  - Ms. Nancy Thomas be appointed to fill the vacancy of Treasurer on the Executive Committee.
  - Mr. Perry Miller be appointed as a new member of the Governance Committee.

**MOTION** The motion from the Governance Committee to approve the appointments was seconded by Mr. Brian Bald. The motion passed unanimously.

Bylaw & Article Update: Chair Sims announced that the committee has been working on a comprehensive review and update of the organization's bylaws and articles of incorporation. A summary of the proposed changes is available in the board packet on pages 13 and 14, and the full redlined version was distributed via email. Board members were encouraged to review these materials ahead of the September board meeting, where a vote on the updated bylaws is expected. Legal counsel, Ms. Michelle McKinnon, is anticipated to join the meeting.

- F. Tourism Improvement District Update: Mr. Neil Amin, Tourism Improvement District (TID) Committee Chair provided the TID update, highlighting key outcomes since the May board meeting.

**Sales:** Two notable incentive approvals for major events include: The Fil-Nation Select Team 2025 Tournament of Champions, expected to bring 100 teams and 5,000 attendees over Labor Day weekend, with an estimated economic impact of nearly \$2 million and over 3,100

room nights; and the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) 2030 Conference, secured for March 2030 with 2,416 room nights and a \$2.1 million impact.

Five new booking incentives were launched to attract meetings of all sizes, including single-property and citywide events. Sales missions to Philadelphia, Nashville, and Atlanta produced promising leads, including Boys & Girls Clubs of America and the US Chess Federation. The "Six in the City" event in Chicago received the Best Booth Décor award. Recent FAM tours resulted in leads for Apex Lacrosse and the Alpha Phi Alpha national convention.

**Marketing:** Marketing efforts included a pivot from WorldPride activations at Union Station to Carvertise rideshare wraps and a "swarm" of branded vehicles at two Beyoncé concerts. A multichannel campaign launched to promote BermudAir's direct service, accompanied by a FAM tour introducing regional assets to travel media and operators. Marketing campaign results showed strong returns: Expedia (53.8:1 ROAS), Midweek (7.9:1), All Travel (8.2:1), and Black Travelers (4.4:1).

**Group Tour:** A themed FAM tour centered on Richmond 250 helped generate active leads from group tour operators. RRT implemented a new group tour booking process, designed to enhance hotel visibility and improve response coordination. A new partnership with Movement Marketing is targeting bank travel planners within the MARC region, and a set of RVA Americana itineraries is currently in development—spotlighting attractions like NASCAR, jazz, and other elements of the region's cultural heritage.

**Workforce Development:** the Hotel IAT program reached nearly 300 graduates this fiscal year, including the launch of a Spanish-language version. Seventeen applications were received for Workforce Housing Internship Grants, and \$55,000 in Special Event Grants have been allocated to support tourism-generating initiatives

### III. OLD BUSINESS & WRAP-UP:

- A. Any Other Business to Discuss: With no further business to discuss, Chair Sims called the meeting to adjourn at 1:21 p.m.
- B. Adjournment: Ms. Nancy Thomas motion to approve the meeting's adjournment, to which Mr. Neil Amin seconded. The motion approved unanimously.

#### Attendees:

Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels  
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA  
Brian Bald, Capital One  
Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy  
Susan Dibble, Hanover County  
Will Dixon, Sports Backers  
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights  
Mark Miller, Chesterfield County  
Perry Miller, Richmond International Airport  
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County  
Jennifer Schofield, Kings Dominion  
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond  
Jordan Stewart, New Kent County  
Nancy Thomas, InUnison  
Steve Trivett, Town of Ashland  
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership

#### Guests Present:

Joe Casey, Chesterfield County  
Kelly Franke, Town of Ashland  
Katie McConnell, City of Richmond Economic Development  
Matt Mullen, Chesterfield County  
Rebecca Street, LiveNation/Allianz Amphitheater at Riverfront

Staff Present:

Michelle Lovatt  
Katherine O'Donnell  
Matt Robinette  
Tom Loftus  
Mike Kerr  
Robin Chidester  
Danielle Fitz-Hugh  
Grantland Steele  
Holden Habermacher  
Vedika Krishna  
Nakyiah Jones  
Nyla Hanglan  
Laila Jackson

Absent:

Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway  
John Cario, Richmond Hilton Downtown  
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond  
Michael Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group  
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp  
Mayush Mehta, JP Hospitality  
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels  
Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond  
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond