

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES  
ZOOM VIDEO CONFERENCE CALL  
MARCH 18, 2021  
NOON**

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

- A. Welcome: Chairman-Elect Angela Kelly-Wiecek called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m., established a quorum and led the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. It was noted that Chairman Schmitt could not be present for the meeting.
- B. **MOTION Minutes**: The minutes from the January 21 meeting were reviewed. Ms. Lisa Sims made a motion to adopt the minutes which were seconded by Ms. Patricia Paige. The vote passed.
- C. VRLTA Legislative Tourism Update: Mr. Eric Terry, President of VRLTA presented a legislative update covering the following related topics:
- Restaurants and Taxation
  - ABC laws
  - Lodging and Tourism

Mr. Dennis Bickmeier thanked Mr. Terry for his leadership throughout the pandemic and with the issues during the General Assembly. The Board discussed the Go Virginia Region 4 training of hospitality employees to get them back into our industry.

**II. NEW BUSINESS:**

- A. President's Report: Mr. Berry reported on the financial summary through December. With six months of operation, the organization is \$900,000 to the good on the finance summary. Savings have been realized as travel is still down, however, advertising will increase this spring. A surplus of funds is expected at the end of the fiscal year.

The organization applied for two rounds of Payroll Protection Program loans and have been granted \$1,080,000. The proposed budget for FY22 was reviewed. We originally thought the funding jurisdictions would fund us at the 2% level of the hotel occupancy tax collections, but after recent discussions, all have agreed to fund at the current 1.75% level. Between the surplus savings in last fiscal year and this fiscal year, combined with the Payroll Protection monies, the next fiscal year should be in a good position. The final FY22 budget will be approved in July. Finances are secure and the surplus is healthy. Mr. Berry thanked staff for working on the payroll protection process and thanked TowneBank for their efforts.

**MOTION Conflict Disclosure**: The Executive Committee reviewed the disclosure of a potential conflict with RMC Events, Inc. Dan Schmitt, owner of RMC Events is Chairman of the board but was not present for the meeting today. Richmond Region Tourism contracts RMC Events throughout the year for services. Mr. Todd Parnell made a motion to accept the disclosure, seconded by Ms. Nancy Thomas. The vote passed.

- B. Market Trends: Mr. Berry reported that advertising will be ramped-up this spring with vaccines on the rise. Traveler sentiment shows that 85% of Americans are planning travel in the next 6 months, especially after June. Ms. Hendren reported that leisure travel will lead the recovery in our industry. A local advertising campaign will be launched in addition to our out of market advertising. Ms. O'Donnell reported that the local TV spots will be premiered on at our May 7<sup>th</sup> virtual Annual Meeting.

Mr. Berry reported on the trends through January. This January compares to a business as usual last January. Sporting events have kept things going. Jefferson Cup 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend is upcoming, and hotels are doing extremely well on the weekends due to this sports tourism business. Mr. Scott Jones commented that some modest increases have occurred for the weekends and during the weekday. He is very encouraged that hotel employees are now a part of the 1c group for vaccines. Mr. Jack Berry reported that a call for volunteers to help drive golf carts at the Richmond Raceway vaccine site will be distributed later today. This opportunity will be shared as the volunteer needs arise.

Ms. Katherine O'Donnell shared with the Board some photos from the recent A10 basketball tournament which demonstrated the use of the cutouts as fans in the seats as well as other amenities provided to the A10 by RRT to support the tournament.

C. Tourism Master Plan Update: Chair-Elect Kelly-Wiecek thanked all for the hard work being done in regard to the Tourism Master Plan. The chairs and staff liaisons made the following updates:

- Place Branding Co-Chairs: Angela Kelly-Wiecek & Lisa Sims and staff liaison Jennifer Hendren. Ms. Lisa Sims reminded the group that place branding is about storytelling and establishing some good research to be used. A destination image and perception research project are underway and will be ready by mid-May. Ms. Jennifer Hendren reported that a baseline of where we are in regard to image and perception in the region is being done by Longwoods International.
- Experience Development Co-Chairs: Dennis Bickmeier & staff liaison Matt Robinette reported. Mr. Bickmeier reported that the three focus areas are Cultural Tourism, Sports Tourism, and Adventure Tourism. The group has broken down into some subcommittees to have a tactical discussion to bring the three focus areas to life.
- Infrastructure & Investment Co-Chairs: Neil Amin & Ellen Robertson and staff liaison Dasha Runyan. Mr. Neil Amin reported that the group met and has been hearing about a lot of great projects that are happening in the region, most recently BridgePark RVA. Ms. Runyan reported that the presentations are allowing the group to learn more about the projects underway in the region. All board members were invited to attend their meetings.
- Industry Advancement & Advocacy Co-Chairs: Jim Holland & Brian Anderson and staff liaison Katherine O'Donnell. Mr. Holland updated the Board on the following topics that are being discussed by their committee:
  - Convention Center District Updates
  - Legislative Updates
  - Resident Perception
  - Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
  - Meaningful Meetings
  - Workforce Development
  - Industry Reopening

D. Downtown Taskforce Update: Ms. Lisa Sims reported that her Op/Ed was recently in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* regarding downtown reopening. The Mayor will officially announce a new Downtown Taskforce which will be led by the City's Parks and

Recreation, Venture Richmond and the Richmond Police Department. Safety, crime, graffiti, plywood over businesses, homelessness, cleanliness and perception issues will be of primary work. The footprint will be from Laurel down Broad Street to 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The taskforce will be announced at the upcoming Annual Meeting of Venture Richmond that will be held on Friday, March 19<sup>th</sup> virtually. A survey will be distributed to get resident and downtown worker perceptions. Next week a neighborhood walk will occur. All businesses between 10<sup>th</sup> & Laurel will be touched.

### III. OTHER NEW BUSINESS:

- A. Chair-Elect Kelly-Wiecek reported that the next meeting will be May 20<sup>th</sup> and with the increase of vaccines, she is hopeful that we can move forward to plan an in-person meeting in May. A Roundtable session was held, and the following topics were discussed:
- Additional funds for Rebuild Virginia
  - Vaccine distribution at Richmond Raceway and throughout the region
  - Sports and Entertainment venues to possibly reopen soon if the Governor drops the 1,000 person cap
  - Baseball to reopen on May 4<sup>th</sup>
  - Ft. Clifton in Colonial Heights will hold the annual Arts and Crafts Festival over Mother's Day weekend
  - Richmond Raceway 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – events throughout the year and will include 5k and 10k races
  - Track laps for charity
  - ChamberRVA's InterCity Visit to Columbus OH will be moved to next year and a new city will be announced for this fall - October 5-7.
  - Shop local, buy local from retailers
  - RIC update – March traffic picking up. Southwest announcing a non-stop route to Chicago Midway April 12
  - Marathon numbers for the fall are tracking ahead of the 2019 registrations
  - Dominion RiverRock will be a virtual/hybrid pop-up event festival along various points on the James River
  - Friday Cheers will be held on Brown's Island in May & June and to be announced soon
  - Here in Hanover Campaign – LOVE sign at the Courthouse area

*(noted that director Perry Miller was absent from the meeting and director Jim Holland left the meeting prior to the Direct Flight Campaign discussion)*

- B. Direct Flight Campaign/Promotion: Mr. Brian Anderson updated the board on the direct flight campaign. The promotion that highlights direct flights to Richmond is gaining momentum. Greater Richmond Partnership alongside Richmond Region Tourism is working on the promotion. The timing of the promotion has been orchestrated along with the reopening and advertising for the spring. Ms. Hendren reported that since the new direct flights were released from the west coast markets, advertising has been focused to target those destinations. A landing page on our website has been developed and staff are working with West Cary Group locally regarding the paid media campaign.

There being no new business to discuss, the next meeting will be held May 20<sup>th</sup> at Noon and will possibly be in person. The meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.

Attendees: 20

Kathy Abbott, Town of Ashland  
Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels  
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA  
Dennis Bickmeier, Richmond Raceway  
Bridgette Bywater, Kings Dominion  
Pat Collins, TowneBank  
Rich Conti, Science Museum of Virginia  
Jim Holland, Chesterfield County  
Scott Jones, Richmond Region Hospitality Association  
Angela Kelly-Wiecek, Hanover County  
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights  
Jen Kostyniuk, Dominion Energy  
Jon Lugbill, Sports Backers  
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp  
Patricia Paige, New Kent County  
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels  
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond  
Tom Silvestri, Retired, Richmond Times Dispatch  
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond Dawn Miller, Henrico County  
Nancy Thomas, Retail Merchants Association

Guests Present

Eric Terry VRLTA  
John D. Watt, Chesterfield County  
Dawn Miller, Henrico County  
Angela Wright, Hanover County  
Doug Smith, Colonial Heights  
Troy Bell, Capital Region Airport Commission  
Scott Zaremba, Chesterfield County

Absent: 4

Lester Johnson, Mama J's Kitchen  
Perry Miller, Capital Region Airport Commission  
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County  
Chris Tsui, EAT Restaurant Partners

Staff Present

Jack Berry  
Katherine O'Donnell  
Michelle Lovatt  
Jennifer Hendren  
Dasha Runyan  
Matt Robinette