

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES
MARCH 19, 2026
MONTPELIER RECREATION CENTER AND LIBRARY
HANOVER COUNTY
NOON**

I. CALL TO ORDER & WELCOME:

- A. Chair Lisa Sims called the meeting to order at 12:10 p.m. and established a quorum.
- B. Welcome Remarks: Mr. John Budesky, Hanover County Administrator, welcomed the Board to the Montpelier Recreation Center & Library, highlighting the facility as a shared community asset alongside a county park and cultural arts center. He noted the County's investment in high-quality programming and shared that a new regulation softball field will be dedicated in the coming weeks, including a community event featuring local first responders.

Mr. Budesky emphasized Hanover County's growing role in regional tourism, including hosting the upcoming Korn Ferry Tournament at The Federal Club. He announced the County's official tourism brand launch on April 8, which will include a new website, events calendar, and promotional platform, led by Director of Tourism, Ms. Rachel Smith. He expressed appreciation for the continued partnership with Richmond Region Tourism (RRT) and the importance of regional collaboration.

Ms. Taryn Andersen and Ms. Mars Abbott of Hanover County Parks & Recreation welcomed the group and offered tours of the facility following the meeting.

Chair Sims welcomed attendees:

- **Mr. Rick Butts**, Director of Sales, Omni Hotel (new Board member, replacing Mr. John Cario)
- **Ms. Elise Hrabe**, Destination Sales Manager, Richmond Region Tourism

Ms. Hrabe joins RRT from Virginia Crossing Hotel & Conference Center, where she served in sales and catering roles working with business, association, and travel clients. She brings strong regional relationships and industry experience and is backfilling the role previously held by Ms. Casey Armstrong, who has been promoted to National Destination Sales Manager.

- C. Announcements: Various announcements were made including:

- Mr. Troy Bell (Richmond International Airport): February passenger traffic expected to increase approximately 8%; new San Juan, Puerto Rico route launching March 26 with three weekly flights
- Mr. Todd "Parney" Parnell (Richmond Flying Squirrels): Opening Day at CarMax Park set for April 7; strong demand with more than 30,000 lottery entries for tickets
- Mr. Matt Robinette, Vice President of Visitor Experience: GalaxyCon expected to bring approximately 30,000 attendees to the Greater Richmond Convention Center
- Mr. Drew Molloy (Town of Ashland): Secretariat Day scheduled for March 28
- Mr. Will Dixon (Sports Backers): Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K on April 18 with approximately 27,000 participants expected

II. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. **MOTION** Minutes: The minutes of the January 15 meeting were reviewed. Ms. Susan Dibble moved to accept the minutes which were seconded by Mr. Todd "Parney" Parnell and passed unanimously.

- B. Staff Recognition: Chair Sims recognized **Mr. Mike Ritchie**, Director of Marketing & Creative Services, for 15 years of service to Richmond Region Tourism. Mr. Ritchie was commended for his leadership in shaping RRT's brand, digital presence, and major campaigns, including recent work supporting the Richmond250 initiative.
- C. **MOTION** Strategic Plan: Ms. Cassandra Gilbertson, lead consultant at MMGY NextFactor, presented the finalized Richmond Region Tourism FY27–FY29 Strategic Plan, developed through extensive stakeholder engagement, including focus groups, interviews, and Destination Next assessment feedback.

The plan outlines four key strategic priorities:

- Maximizing sales and marketing impact
- Strengthening regional alignment
- Advancing destination development
- Enhancing organizational effectiveness

The plan includes clearly defined initiatives, assigned departmental leadership, implementation timelines, performance targets, and intended organizational and destination outcomes to measure progress and impact. The plan is also designed to inform annual work planning, departmental priorities, fiscal planning, and budget development throughout the three-year planning cycle.

Richmond Region Tourism will maintain the Strategic Plan as a current and active management tool, with progress monitored regularly by staff leadership and reported to the Board at scheduled intervals throughout the FY27–FY29 period. These check-ins will allow the organization to track performance, evaluate progress against stated goals and outcomes, assess fiscal implications, and adapt implementation strategies as needed. The Board further noted that the organization's strategic planning cycle provides for the plan to be updated every three years.

The Executive Committee reviewed the Strategic Plan and recommended adoption by the Board. A concise one-page summary of the plan is available for reference on Zeck.

Mr. Todd "Parney" Parnell made a motion to adopt the Richmond Region Tourism FY27–FY29 Strategic Plan and affirm its use as the organization's current strategic management plan, with regular monitoring by the Board throughout the three-year planning period and future updates to occur at least every three years. Ms. Lori Waran seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- D. Governance Committee Update: Ms. Danielle Ripperton, Governance Committee Chair, reported that the Committee recently reviewed questions related to board composition and gathered feedback from board members and stakeholders. That information was shared with the Executive Committee for discussion at its March 9 meeting.

Since that time, Chesterfield County has notified RRT that it has withdrawn its nomination for the vacant Executive Committee seat and will be regrouping internally regarding next steps for its appointment. No action from the Board is needed at this time.

- E. President's Report: Ms. Katherine O'Donnell, President & CEO, introduced Ms. Jerrine Lee, Chief Growth Officer, to provide her Mission Moment:

Mission Moment:

Ms. Lee highlighted a recent familiarization (FAM) tour hosted for meeting planners. The experience emphasized the region's unique combination of history, culture, and modern amenities. Feedback from participants reinforced strong interest in bringing future meetings and events to the Richmond Region, underscoring the value of these relationship-building efforts.

Tourism Improvement District (TID) Update

Ms. O'Donnell provided an overview of TID performance and encouraged Board members to reference the **FY26 TID Mid-Year Report** on Zeck for additional detail.

Key highlights included:

- 135 incentives approved with a 67% conversion rate
- Continued success in securing association, corporate, and sports-related business
- Marketing campaigns generating more than \$1.4 million in tracked hotel revenue
- Strong return on ad spend, including a 10:1 ROI on the Drive December campaign
- New initiatives targeting World Cup travelers and expanded campaign efforts
- Growth in workforce development programs, including over 350 Hotel I Am Tourism Ambassador graduates (available in English and Spanish)

Organizational Realignment

Ms. O'Donnell presented an organizational realignment designed to support the FY27–FY29 Strategic Plan and strengthen operational effectiveness. She noted that recent staffing pauses were intentional to allow alignment with strategic priorities and the uncertainty related to budget considerations.

Ms. O'Donnell emphasized that the restructuring reflects a rebuilding effort rather than expansion, with no net increase in headcount and reduced overall salary expenses compared to the current fiscal year. The realignment is intended to improve collaboration, efficiency, and the organization's ability to execute the strategic plan.

Key updates include:

- Promotion of **Ms. Jerrine Lee** to **Chief Growth Officer**, a new role aligning Marketing, Sales, and Visitor Experience under a unified growth strategy. Her former role of Vice President of Sales will be advertised soon.
- Redistribution of responsibilities in lieu of refilling the Vice President of Administration role:
 - Promotion of **Mr. Mike Kerr** to **Director of Finance and Administration**, expanding his responsibilities to include finance, IT coordination, HR compliance, and administrative functions
 - Promotion of **Mr. Grantland Steele** to **Manager of Executive and Board Operations**, overseeing board governance, executive support, and internal operations coordination
- Promotion of **Ms. Morgan Kenley** to **Sports Events Manager**, managing the execution and logistics of sports events and supporting successful event delivery, backfilling a vacant role.

- Creation of a new community engagement-focused role to support programs, partnerships, and revenue generation, backfilling a vacant role and former contract grant writer.

F. **MOTION Financial Update:** Mr. Mike Kerr, Director of Finance, delivered the Financial Update:

Reserve Request – Technology Investment

Mr. Kerr presented a request to utilize up to \$100,000 from reserves to replace outdated staff computers, improving cybersecurity and operational efficiency.

Ms. Danielle Ripperton made a motion to approve the use of reserves. Ms. Ellen Robertson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Kerr presented the financial report through February, noting that overall financial performance remains consistent with expectations and aligned with the approved budget.

Revenue is largely received earlier in the fiscal year from jurisdictional funding, with expenses leveling out against income during the second half of the year as programs and initiatives are executed. As a result, the organization is currently experiencing a normal and expected spend-down of net income, with approximately \$400,000 in planned expenditures occurring since the previous reporting period shown in the delivered board packet.

Mr. Kerr also reported that:

- Financial operations remain stable and on track
- Asset and reserve balances remain strong
- Investment returns for the most recent period were approximately 3.17%, reflecting current market conditions

Reserves remain well above the required policy threshold, providing continued financial stability for the organization.

III. ANY OTHER BUSINESS & ADJOURNMENT:

- A. Any Other Business: Chair Sims highlighted upcoming meetings and events, including the RRT Foundation Awards & Annual Meeting on May 14 and the next Board meeting on May 21.
- B. Adjournment: With no further business to discuss, Chair Sims adjourned the meeting at 1:17 PM.

Attendees:

Rick Butts, Omni Richmond Hotel
Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy
Susan Dibble, Hanover County
Will Dixon, Sports Backers
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights
Kimberly Love-Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group
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
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond
Jordan Stewart, New Kent County
Nancy Thomas, InUnison
Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway

Guests Present:

Troy Bell, Capital Region Airport Commission
Kelly Franke, Town of Ashland
Bryonna Head, City of Richmond Economic Development
Dawn Miller, Henrico Sports & Entertainment Authority
J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County
Rachel Smith, Hanover County
Cassandra Gilbertson, MMGY NextFactor
John Budesky, Hanover County
Taryn Andersen, Hanover County Parks and Recreation
Mars Abbott, Hanover County Parks and Recreation

Staff Present:

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

Absent:

Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA
Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels
Brian Bald, Capital One
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp
Perry Miller, Richmond International Airport
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County
Jennifer Schofield, Kings Dominion
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership