

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES  
MARCH 21, 2024  
BEULAH RECREATION CENTER  
12:00 P.M.**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Board Chair Ms. Lisa Sims called the meeting to order at 12:13 P.M. and established a quorum. Following the welcome remarks, Chair Sims led the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

**II. WELCOME:**

- A. Chair Sims welcomed Dr. Joe Casey, Chesterfield County Administrator, to give opening remarks. Dr. Casey greeted RRT board Members and guests at Beulah Recreation Center, formerly Beulah Elementary School, now a community center housing Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation offices. Dr. Casey highlighted upcoming features: Richmond Magazine's article on Beulah Park with the region's first cricket pitch, River City Sportsplex expansion to 16 turf fields, and Daniel Park's baseball and softball facility upgrades, all contributing to Chesterfield's "Homefield Advantage."

Dr. Casey announced the inaugural Chesterfield Restaurant Week (March 29 – April 7), showcasing 39 local businesses. Board Member Mr. Michael Lindsey's three new restaurants, starting with ML Steak this month, were noted. Chesterfield County's recognition as a Top Place to Work by *Richmond Times Dispatch* was celebrated, highlighting its diverse and inclusive community of over 385,000 residents, with 20 newcomers arriving daily.

Chair Sims invited Chesterfield County Board Chair, Mr. Jim Holland, to deliver his welcoming remarks. Mr. Holland Welcomed RRT Board Members to the Dale District in the heart of Chesterfield. He reiterated the transformation of the Beulah Recreation Center and the beautiful new Beulah Elementary School. County residents have shown their appreciation for the improvements and new facilities. Mr. Holland emphasized the thriving partnership between Chesterfield and RRT, which greatly enhances quality of life for residents. In addition to sports facilities, two new hotels are in the pipeline, including a Hilton Hotel and Conference Center at Springline, as well as a planned hotel for the Courthouse Landing development.

Mr. Holland welcomed Mr. J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County's Executive Director of Sports, Visitation, & Entertainment. Mr. Poma introduced the county's tourism team: Mr. Neil Luther, Director of Parks & Recreation, Ms. Katie Hardell, Community Engagement & Special Events Manager of Sports, Visitation & Entertainment, Ms. Liz Hart, Digital Media Coordinator, and Mr. Matt Mullen, Sports Relations & Operations Manager. Mr. Poma debuted the Experience Chesterfield brand, highlighting the wealth of experiences visitors can have in the county. The new brand will aid RRT's efforts to amplify Chesterfield nationally as a premier sports tourism and outdoor recreation destination. A dedicated website for Experience Chesterfield will soon launch, with a focus on sports tourism and promoting hyper local stories.

Following the presentation, Chair Sims welcomed Ms. Statia Gibson, Senior Manager at the City of Richmond Department of Economic Development, as she replaces Ms. Tara Worden as the tourism liaison to the RRT board representing the City of Richmond. Also in attendance was Mr. Michael Ivey, Greater Richmond Partnership's VP of Marketing and Communications, who represented Ms. Jennifer Wakefield.

- B. **MOTION:** Chair Sims requested a motion to approve January 18 Meeting Minutes. Mr. Todd Parnell motioned to approve, to which Ms. Nancy Thomas seconded. The motion carried.

### III. **NEW BUSINESS:**

- A. President's Report: President and CEO of RRT, Mr. Jack Berry, shared recent awards presented to staff members during Women's History Month. Community Relations Manager, Ms. Tameka Jefferson was named one of Radio One's "804 Women Making History". Executive Vice President, Ms. Katherine O'Donnell and RRT Board Chair Ms. Lisa Sims were inducted into the 2024 class of Women Who Drive Richmond by *Richmond Times Dispatch* and Richmond Raceway. Director of Destination Sales, Ms. Liana Acevedo, and Vice President of Sales, Ms. Jerrine Lee, were recognized in the 2024 Smart Women in Meetings Class by Smart Meetings Magazine. Ms. Acevedo was named in the Rising Star category, while Ms. Lee was named in the Industry Leader category.

Richmond Region Tourism was named a 2024 *Richmond Times Dispatch* Top Workplace and will be recognized at their annual event on May 15<sup>th</sup>.

Financial Update: In place of Director of Finance, Mr. Mike Kerr, Mr. Berry delivered the Financial Update.

- Revenues are well ahead of budget YTD at \$8.7M versus total budget of \$9.0M.
- Expenses are in line at \$6.2M actual versus \$9.0M for the year.
- Net Revenue, or "income in excess of plan" is \$2.4M through February 29, 2024, providing a strong buffer as expenses through June match up against the prepaid contributions and strong other income lines.
- Reserve Fund Policy Update: As part of the revision to the financial administration manual, the Reserve Fund Policy has been updated. The board received a copy of the original version and the revised version, as follows:

#### Operations Reserve Fund

- A. This fund is targeted to hold a minimum of 20% of the then-current total RRT operating budget.
- B. There is a long-term target goal of reaching 35% of the then-current total RRT operating budget.
- C. This fund is to be used for miscellaneous marketing opportunities, technology upgrades and any other special RRT program that is not sales incentive related during a given year.
- D. Available current-year budget resources should be considered before requesting use of this fund.
- E. Generally, this fund is to be used only in the event of such an economic downturn in hotel tax collections that management must ensure that the core operations/programs of RRT continue in challenging economic times.

#### Sales Incentive Reserve Fund

- A. This fund is targeted to hold a minimum of 5% of the then-current total RRT operating budget.
- B. There is a long-term target goal of reaching 10% of the then-current total RRT operating budget.

- C. This fund is to be used for sales opportunities not specifically identified in the current budget cycle. These opportunities are to include pop-up events or any other non-budgeted sales incentive opportunities that may arise.
- D. Available current-year budget resources should be considered before requesting use of this fund.

The Executive Committee received, reviewed, and moved adoption of this policy by the board. It was noted that the Executive Committee approved the foundation reserve policy at their meeting on March 11<sup>th</sup>.

**MOTION** Mr. Todd Parnell moved to adopt the updated policy, to which Mr. Pat Collins seconded. The motion carried.

Research Trends: Mr. Berry reported that RRT has partnered with Blue Room Research to provide more enhanced data collection. Hotel occupancy is flat, but the average daily rates remain high. On the weekend of March 2<sup>nd</sup>, GRCC hosted a high-profile rally for former President Donald Trump, with only four days' notice. The event was peaceful and the building team along with RMC Events and Richmond Police Department did an outstanding job. Mr. Berry described the other events that occurred throughout March such as Jefferson Cup weekends and noted that downtown hotels were getting \$800 as a nightly rate due to the number of visitors in the region. The A10 Women's Basketball Tournament was a tremendous success in Henrico's new Sports and Events Center. After Galaxy Con, the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts will move in and end the month with NASCAR. Competition is growing north and south of the Richmond Region. Kalahari Resort, a new venue in Spotsylvania, will open in the Fall of 2026 and the Raleigh Convention Center will be expanded. Williamsburg is also looking to create a sports venue very similar to Henrico's facility. The headquarter hotel project in City Center is critical to compete with the impending competition growth surrounding us.

B. Regional Economic Mobility Presentation: CEO of the Community Foundation for a Greater Richmond, Ms. Sherrie Armstrong, and Executive Director of PlanRVA, Ms. Martha Shickle, gave a presentation on efforts to improve economic mobility in the Richmond Region.

- The Richmond region is experiencing growth, but there are disparities in how residents benefit.
- Data shows deep inequalities in income, housing, health, etc.
- Leaders are learning from other cities' experiences:
  - Charlotte addressed low economic mobility after a national ranking exposed the issue.
  - Researcher Raj Chetty highlighted similar concerns in Richmond.
- Focus on multi-sector collaboration:
  - Sharing resources and strategies to create upward economic mobility.
  - Prioritizing those facing the greatest barriers.
  - Learning from cities like Kansas City's successful approaches.
- Income Inequality:
  - Richmond metro's GINI index (measure of statistical dispersion intended to represent the income inequality, the wealth inequality, or the consumption inequality within a nation or a social group) is similar to peers, but higher than the city itself.
  - Higher GINI index indicates greater income inequality.

- Economic Output:
  - Richmond's Gross Metropolitan Product (GMP) is lower than comparable regions.
  - Low GMP suggests fewer job opportunities and lower wages.
- Combined Impact:
  - High inequality and low output can create a cycle of poverty.
  - Low GMP can worsen income inequality.
  - Residents struggle to find good jobs and advance economically.
- Nationwide, the Southeast struggles with economic mobility, with Richmond slightly better positioned.
- We are learning from successful transformations in other cities, with a focus on creating a lasting positive impact for future generations.
- Building from Past Efforts
  - New Approach Necessary: We are building on what worked in the past, while acknowledging that a different approach is needed.
  - Foundational Principles: Focus on ensuring all residents share in prosperity/
- SIR conducted a meta-analysis of recent data reports, analyses, and surveys, which represent different sectors and jurisdictions.
- Key takeaways from SIRS
  - Organizations want to improve equity, inclusion, opportunity, quality of life and economic vitality for people living here.
  - Efforts and issues by sector or topic cut across geographic boundaries, requiring collaboration.
  - Similarly, municipality efforts cut across sectors and topics.
  - The increasing aging population needs more attention.
  - Education, housing, and transportation are top concerns across the region, but safety is a daily concern for marginalized and under-represented populations.
- Summary of Initial Reports: Reports are still being compiled, but this is a high-level overview.
  - One example: Youth mental health emerged as a major concern from the 2023 youth summit survey.
- Ongoing Input Needed:
  - Have we captured all voices? Who are we missing?
  - Are the identified issues still relevant? What else needs addressing?
  - How can we effectively engage community partners and residents?
- A survey of over 6,000 respondents from the Virginia Civic Engagement Index established community priorities by region. Central Virginia Top Priorities include:
  - Education – 53%
  - Health and Well-Being – 50%
  - Housing – 39%
  - Public Safety – 35%
  - Economic Security – 36%
- How your organization can get involved:
  - Invite us into your ongoing process.
  - Collaborate with us to message this work.
  - Hear all voices.
  - Appropriately and effectively engage to inform, design, and monitor the process.

- C. Governance Committee Report: Mr. Berry and Board Member, Ms. Bridgette Bywater, presented an update from the Governance Committee regarding jurisdictional membership in RRT.

Powhatan and Goochland Counties expressed interest in joining Richmond Region Tourism (RRT) in FY25. However, there are concerns about onboarding and offboarding localities creating disruptions. Mr. Berry reviewed the history of Class B membership (flat fee, voting rights) designed for smaller localities with an accompanying handout. He highlighted challenges experienced with Powhatan County's on-again, off-again participation. Considering the evolving tourism landscape and the workload involved, the Committee recommends declining new memberships. Ms. Bywater, on behalf of the Committee, recommended the Board vote to amend the bylaws to reflect this decision. Discussion ensued amongst Board Members, ultimately concurring with the decision to reject new memberships at this time, and to begin the bylaw and article amendment process.

**MOTION** Ms. Nancy Thomas motioned to approve the recommendations, to which Mr. Todd Parnell seconded. The motion carried.

- D. Tourism Master Plan – Unlocking Local Brilliance: In advance of the meeting, Board Members were presented with categories of various intellectual capital resources that can enhance our appeal for meetings and events. They were tasked with thinking of any individuals/organizations they know of that would fit into one of these categories that they'd be willing to introduce to RRT. The categories included:

1. Educational Institutions: universities and colleges with renowned faculties and research centers specialized training institutes or academies that offer unique programs, collaboration opportunities with academic experts and researchers. Example: VCU Health Systems is a leading expert in cancer research.
2. Industry Experts: presence of key industries and corporate headquarters, specialized clusters of businesses, such as technology parks, innovation hubs, and industrial zones, and access to skilled professionals in sectors like finance, technology, healthcare, and more. Example: Altria Group, Inc, Dominion Energy, WestRock.
3. Innovation and Start-up Ecosystem: incubators and accelerators supporting entrepreneurship, presence of successful startups and scale-ups, and opportunities for collaboration with innovative companies. Example: Lighthouse Lab, Activation Capital.
4. Healthcare and Biotech Facilities: world-class medical facilities and research hospitals, biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies, and opportunities for medical conferences and collaborations. Example: Virginia BioTechnology Research Park.
5. Technology and Digital Infrastructure: availability of high-speed internet and tech-friendly infrastructure, smart city initiatives and technology-driven solutions, and tech parks and innovation districts. Example: CapTech, CoStar.
6. Local Innovations and Traditions: uniqueness in local products, crafts, or traditions, local festivals and events that highlight creativity and innovation, and opportunities to incorporate local flavors into events.
7. Association, Cultural Groups, and Professional Organizations: industry-specific associations, cultural groups, and professional networks, conferences and events organized by local professional groups, and opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange. Example: Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Richmond Chapter, Richmond Chapter of Project Management Institute (PMI).

Vice President of Sales, Ms. Jerrine Lee led the meeting exercise and allotted five minutes for Board Members to buddy up with members near them and discuss/rank the individuals and organizations they feel would be the most responsive to having a discussion with the RRT Sales Team. After the exercise, Ms. Lee will follow up with appropriate Board Members for introduction to set up a meeting.

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

- A. Tourism Improvement District: Executive Vice President, Ms. Katherine O'Donnell presented high-level updates from the Tourism Improvement District.
- Business Development Updates:
    - Three New Tradeshows for the Destination Sales Team: Northstar IPEC, Association Express, and Connect NYC: 62 total appointments.
    - R&G Business Development Solutions: Contracted vendor that research and cold call potential customers and provides the RRT Sales Team with referrals. 39 referrals provided since February 1, 2024. (2) leads for 2025, (1) city-wide and (1) small meeting for 2025.
    - Launched 'Earn More in 2024' Meeting Planner Incentive: For city-wide conventions and small meetings. Results: 1 booking for a small meeting; Virginia Dept of Criminal Justice Services – August 2024 | 250 total/125 peak rooms
  - Other TID (Tourism Improvement District) Sales Projects:
    - RRT Professional Industry Association Membership Grant Application: TID Hotel Staff can now apply for a Professional Industry Association Membership Grant that allows them to:
      - Gain access to additional resources
      - Increase networking opportunities
      - Opportunities for professional development
  - TID Leisure Marketing Plan Update:
    - Always On: Overseeing 7 TID campaigns targeting qualified travel intenders, ensuring that our campaigns are always on:
      - Sojern Mid-Week and All Travel Campaigns
      - Adara Mid-Week and All Travel Campaigns
      - Trip Advisor Mid-Week and All Travel Campaigns
      - I Heart Media Campaign that is targeting our drive markets
    - Campaigns ready to be rolled out in April:
      - Black Travelers Campaign
      - Campaigns promoting the five jurisdictions part of the TID
  - TID Group Tour Plan Update: Group Tour Marketing and Trade Shows
    - New Group Tour Trade Shows & Expanded Brand Presence:
      - NEW Show & Gold Sponsorship – Heritage Clubs Peer Group
        - A Bank Travel Organization supporting Bank Travel Club Directors around the US
        - Represents +200 Bank Travel Clubs in 25 states with more than 1,000 regional & day trips annually
        - An estimated 45,000+ Bank Club members & over \$10,000,000 in travel sales
      - NEW Show – Connect RTO Marketplace

- Pennsylvania Bus Association Marketplace – Silver Sponsorship
    - Southeast Domestic Showcase – Exclusive Sponsor of the Buyer Appointment Book Cover
    - IPW 2024 – Exclusive Richmond Region Booth
  - FAMs:
    - Wheelchairtravel.org owner and influencer John Morris
      - Great exposure as the destination builds to host the Wheelchair Basketball National Championships
      - Created and promoted a Richmond wheelchair travel guide
    - Travel2America
      - Luxury group tour company interested in history; from the Netherlands
- B. Annual Meeting & Awards Breakfast: On Tuesday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, Richmond Region Tourism will host its Annual Meeting at the Greater Richmond Convention Center. An email has been sent to Board Members to register. Single tickets are \$100 and include breakfast. Partner Table Sponsors (set for 8 people) are \$1,000. As a table sponsor, you receive your organization name on event and table signage, event website, and program. Registration closes April 30. The following day, May 8<sup>th</sup>, OutRVA, in partnership with Side By Side, will conduct free LGBTQI+ Community Training at the Convention Center. The link to RSVP by Friday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> has been emailed to Board Members.
- C. Any Other Business to Discuss: Chair Sims opened the floor to Board Members to provide important updates and upcoming events happening in the region.
- Mr. Todd Parnell announced the Richmond Flying Squirrels first game of the season will be held on Tuesday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, and is expected to be a season-opening sell out for the 15<sup>th</sup> year in a row. In addition, work on the Diamond District continues.
  - Mr. Matt Robinette shared that RRT in partnership with Richmond Raceway will offer a free trolley shuttle service to explore Richmond on Thursday, March 28<sup>th</sup>. The four trolley stops include Topgolf, Kroger Grocery Store and Pharmacy in Carytown, Ten Thousand Villages in Carytown, and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.
  - Ms. Danielle Fitz-Hugh announced that I Am Tourism Ambassador Training will take place on Tuesday, March 26<sup>th</sup> at the Town of Ashland Town Hall. Registration closes on March 25<sup>th</sup>, and space is limited.
  - Mr. Steve Trivett invited guests to attend the Secretariat Day Statue Unveiling on Saturday, March 30<sup>th</sup> at 11 AM. Visitors can now take advantage of the new on-demand GRTC LINK Micro transit service in Ashland and Hanover County.
  - Ms. Nancy Thomas announced InUnison will deploy research from the state and local jurisdictions on April 28<sup>th</sup>.
  - Ms. Danielle Ripperton shared that the Children's Museum of Richmond and partners will host "I See Me Play", a free event at City Stadium on Sunday, April 28<sup>th</sup> for children up to 12 years old. The annual event focuses on making play more accessible for all children.

- Ms. Angela Wright announced that Hanover County is launching a new newsletter and economic development plan that includes tourism. Agricultural tourism has grown by 600% in the area.
- Ms. Bridgette Bywater invited guests to the Kings Dominion Opening Day on Saturday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>. A sneak preview for Season Pass holders will be held on Friday, the 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- Mr. John Cario shared news of a successful quarter at the Richmond Hilton Downtown. Ceramic art is on display with the NCECA Conference at the Greater Richmond Convention Center.
- Mr. Paulin Cheatham reported that Dominion Energy executed its annual Business Review in late February.
- Ms. Renee Haltom provided an update from the Federal Reserve Bank; interest rates were not lowered, but the recession continues to hold off. Inflation rates still need to come down for continued economic growth. On Wednesday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, the Richmond Fed will host District Dialogues: How is the Economy, Really? The series provides a public forum for community members to engage with experts on the most pressing economic issues facing the Richmond Region and beyond.
- Ms. Stacia Gibson attended an event with Business Facilities Magazine at the Omni Richmond Hotel, whose staff greatly enjoyed the Richmond Region. Director of Economic Development for the City of Richmond, Mr. Leonard Sledge is traveling to Japan and Italy in the coming weeks to drum up foreign investment opportunities.
- Board guest Mr. Michael Ivey reported that the Greater Richmond Partnership is sourcing RFPs from potential clients to create a new Strategic Plan for 2025-2030. Business development continues to pick up in Henrico County, as Tucker Door and Trim plans to open a \$10M manufacturing facility in the region.

D. Adjourn: With no further business to discuss, Chair Sims called the meeting to adjourn at 1:47 p.m.



Attendees:

Bridgette Bywater, King's Dominion  
John Cario, Richmond Hilton Downtown  
Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy  
Pat Collins, TowneBank  
Susan Dibble, Hanover County  
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond  
Jim Holland, Chesterfield County  
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels  
Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond  
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond  
Nancy Thomas, Retail Merchants Association  
Steve Trivett, Town of Ashland

Guests Present:

Sherrie Armstrong, Community Foundation for a Greater Richmond  
Joe Casey, Chesterfield County  
Statia Gibson, City of Richmond  
Katie Hardell, Chesterfield County  
Liz Hart, Chesterfield County  
Michael Ivey, Greater Richmond Partnership  
Neil Luther, Chesterfield County  
Matt Mullen, Chesterfield County  
J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County  
Martha Shickle, PlanRVA  
Angela Wright, Hanover County

Staff Present:

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

Absent:

Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels  
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA  
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights  
Michael Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group  
Jon Lugbill, Sports Backers  
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp  
Mayush Mehta, JP Hospitality  
Perry Miller, Capital Region Airport Commission  
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond  
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County  
Jordan Stewart, New Kent County  
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond  
Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway