

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES  
MAY 12, 2022  
VIRGINIA CLIFFE INN  
HENRICO COUNTY, VA  
NOON**

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

- A. Welcome: Chairman Dan Schmitt called the meeting to order at 12:14 p.m., established a quorum and led the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. Chairman Schmitt welcomed the group and introduced Mr. John Vithoukas, County Manager, Henrico County. Mr. Vithoukas welcomed the group and acknowledged Mr. Dennis Bickmeier who was recently appointed as the Executive Director of Henrico County's new Sports and Entertainment Authority. Mr. Vithoukas also acknowledged Jack Berry and commended him on his recent Op/Ed in the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, titled "Tourism's Triumphant Return." Chairman Schmitt also introduced Janice Crafton, owner of the Virginia Cliffe Inn to bring greetings to the group. Katherine O'Donnell was acknowledged by the board as the winner of the RVA Power Women's Award for Hospitality.
- B. **MOTION** Minutes: The minutes from the March 24th meeting were reviewed. Mr. Pat Collins made a motion to adopt the minutes which were seconded by Mr. Jim Holland. The vote passed.
- C. Board Member Recognition: Chairman Schmitt recognized Mr. Dennis Bickmeier with a service award for his years of service to the board of directors (2011 – 2022).

**II. NEW BUSINESS:**

- A. President's Report: Mr. Berry updated the board on personnel changes and noted that Shelly Jiggetts was promoted to Visitor Experience Coordinator. Reed Patterson was hired as Convention Services Manager and started on May 9<sup>th</sup>. Carla Murray was hired as Senior Creative Marketing Manager and will start work on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Just today Erin Bagnell, Director of Marketing Communications has resigned to take a public relations position with a local firm.

Mr. Berry reviewed the financials through February and noted that there are only 8 weeks left of the fiscal year. Spending is still not at 100% but has improved with staff travel on the rise. Mr. Berry stated that he expects a surplus at fiscal year-end. The market trends through March were reviewed and for January, record occupancies were noted. Northern Virginia is rebounding with hotel occupancy and REVPAR while Williamsburg continues to lag. Overall central Virginia is doing very well and ahead of 2019 levels. Mr. John Cario remarked that April was a very good month and he acknowledged sports tourism events such as NASCAR in April and Jefferson Cup which occurred in March. Mid-week business is still soft, but he is seeing Altria and CoStar starting to have business travel return.

- B. **MOTION** Election of New Treasurer: Chairman Schmitt reported that the Governance Committee led by Ms. Lisa Sims has met and recommend that Ms. Bridgette Bywater be appointed as Treasurer to fill the role left vacant by Mr. Bickmeier. Ms. Nancy Thomas made a motion to approve appointing Ms. Bywater as Treasurer to fill out Mr. Bickmeier's term of 6/30/23. The vote was seconded by Ms. Lisa Sims. The motion passed.
- C. Tourism Awards & Annual Meeting Re-cap: Mr. J.C. Poma updated the Board of Directors from the April 27<sup>th</sup> Tourism Awards & Annual Meeting which was held at the Hilton Short Pump. A video on workforce which was produced for the annual meeting was shown. Mr. Poma introduced Mr. Jim Wilson, Vice President of Education and Workforce Development with Virginia Restaurant Lodging & Travel Association, to speak about workforce challenges in the region and how VRLTA is addressing them.

D. **MOTION DEI Statement for B2B Purposes:** Ms. Liana Acevedo, Co-Chair of the DEI Staff Task Force, presented a draft internal and external DEI statement for B2B purposes. The staff committee consists of 9 individuals that represent each department of the organization. The statements are as follows:

*INTERNAL*

***Richmond Region Tourism is committed to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion***

*Every day we passionately promote the Richmond Region to the world. We take pride in our roles because we know it's important to the community's quality of life, economy, and collective identity. Richmond Region Tourism's success is dependent on all employees, partners and stakeholders showing up as their authentic selves because their unique perspectives and experiences add value and make our work stronger. To effectively market the region, we're weaving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion into every aspect of Richmond Region Tourism's strategy and values.*

*Richmond Region Tourism's DEI Task Force, a group of team members focused on advancing DEI, is collaborating internally and externally to drive positive change, and helping to establish the organization's priorities.*

*Richmond Region Tourism is committed to growing and investing in DEI for the long term. Here are three current internal goals:*

- Educating staff and board members about the importance of a diverse, equitable and inclusive organization which improves the quality of life for our residents, partners, and visitors*
- Strengthening and providing equitable access to opportunities for employee professional growth and advancement;*
- Developing best practices that support responsible sourcing, equitable partnerships, and business impact across all departments, both internally and externally*

*EXTERNAL*

***You're welcome and valued in the Richmond Region***

*We welcome, value, and respect all people in our community. Every day, we invite visitors from diverse experiences and backgrounds to get to know our region better.*

*You are an important part of the Richmond Region's story. As the region's marketer and an advocate for the hospitality industry, Richmond Region Tourism is committed to developing a clear, honest, and positive image of our community that reflects everyone. We do this work intentionally and passionately, while ensuring Diversity, Equity and Inclusion drives every approach we take. Learn more about RRT's internal DEI goals.*

*Richmond Region Tourism's DEI Task Force, a group of team members focused on advancing DEI, is collaborating internally and externally to drive positive change, and helping to establish the organization's priorities.*

*We celebrate our region's diversity*

*Richmond Region Tourism introduces millions of people per year to the region through integrated marketing and public relations strategies. We focus on consistently sharing diverse voices from underrepresented groups in all our communications.*

*While there is always work to be done, we're proud to highlight diverse groups through community-driven promotional campaigns. The Richmond Region Tourism Foundation has continued to grow BLK RVA, an initiative to support local, Black-owned businesses by increasing tourism and broadening our collective understanding of our past and future. Our OutRVA program also has become a trusted resource to learn about the region's LGBTQ+ community.*

*Learning and advocating, together*

*Richmond Region Tourism uses its platform to educate and engage. Throughout the year, we facilitate sessions to help hospitality partners create more inclusive environments, such as accessibility, LGBTQ+ and safe sport trainings. We also regularly share and uplift resources to educate local stakeholders through email and social media.*

*We care about the people in our community. What recommendations do you have for building on our DEI commitments?*

The statements will be posted on our Transparency/Governance portion of our website and will also be used in client RFPs and in our client bid books. Mr. Jim Holland made a motion to accept the statements. The motion was seconded by Ms. Rita McClenny. The vote passed.

- E. Tourism Master Plan Initiatives: Jack Berry updated the committee on the progress with the headquarter hotel. The City of Richmond economic development authority continue to meet with representatives of the Greater Richmond Convention Center Authority Finance team to discuss the options for the hotel and land. Plans are underway for City Council to transfer the land to the economic development authority.

Mr. Tom Loftus reported that Richmond Region Tourism has been awarded \$2.4 million from Virginia Tourism Corporation's ARPA funds for DMOs. The RFP for the image campaign will be launched next week.

- F. Community Engagement Exercise: Chairman Schmitt distributed a Circle of Influence Worksheet to the board of directors and guests and asked them to consider the importance of leveraging their networks for the betterment of the RRT mission. Board members were given time to complete the document and urged them to leave it with staff. Any forms can be returned to J.C. Poma, Vice President of Community Relations.

Mr. Poma mentioned the local PR Report which was also distributed to the Board.

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

- A. Tourism Improvement Districts: Katherine O'Donnell reported that the Steering Committee met and has begun drafting a plan for the region and also assessing a minimum room threshold for participation in the TID. A meeting was held with the attorneys from the jurisdictions and so far, things look positive and on track for the development of the district. By the end of June, meetings will be held with hotels by jurisdiction and then work will begin to petition hotels. The goal is for 70% of the hotels in each jurisdiction to sign the petition to create the district. Work has been done to create a master list of all hotels and the list has been compared to tax records and the records of VRLTA.
- B. Other Business: Chairman Schmitt noted that the Board meeting dates in November have changed. A new date schedule was noted in the meeting packet. The floor opened to any roundtable announcements:
- Live horse racing in New Kent/Farmers Market opening
  - VCU Graduation
  - New hotel in Colonial Heights – Towne Place Suites
  - Chili Peppers Baseball returns
  - Crime and graffiti removal
  - Ashland's Train Day (April)
  - Summer Street Party's in Ashland
  - InUnison – new website (formerly Retail Merchants Association)
  - Valor Awards December 1<sup>st</sup>
  - Downtown events, Friday Cheers, Dominion Energy's Riverrock May 20 weekend
  - Center City Plaza and Coliseum demolition
  - Filming projects in the region
  - Anthem corporate run – Innsbrook
  - Fall Line Trail
  - Dory Stadium Opening
  - New Parks & Recreation Director named in Henrico
  - Embers at Steam Bell Works – Chesterfield County
  - Concert Series at Sportsplex
  - New hotels opening in Chester and three breweries in Chester
  - GRP – multiple projects in the pipeline and some big economic development announcements coming soon
  - Center of the Universe Concert Series – Hanover
  - Labor shortages and workforce issues
  - New show at Kings Dominion. Park opens full time in two weeks

There being no further business to discuss, the next meeting will be held Thursday, July 14th at Noon in New Kent County. The exact meeting location will be announced soon. The meeting adjourned at 1:55 p.m.

Attendees:

Kathy Abbott, Town of Ashland  
Bridgette Bywater, Kings Dominion  
John Cario, Richmond Hilton Downtown  
Pat Collins, TowneBank  
Rich Conti, Science Museum of Virginia  
Jim Holland, Chesterfield County  
Lester Johnson, Mama J's Kitchen  
Jen Kostyniuk, Dominion Energy  
Jon Lugbill, Sports Backers  
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp  
Patricia Paige, New Kent County  
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond  
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County  
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond  
Nancy Thomas, Retail Merchants Association  
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership

Absent:

Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels  
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA  
Angela Kelly-Wiecek, Hanover County  
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights  
Perry Miller, Capital Region Airport Commission  
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels  
Chris Tsui, EAT Restaurant Partners

Staff Present

Jack Berry  
Katherine O'Donnell  
Michelle Lovatt  
Tom Loftus  
Matt Robinette  
J.C. Poma  
Liana Acevedo

Guests Present

Karen Epps, Colonial Heights  
Matt Smolnik, New Kent County  
John D. Watt, Chesterfield County  
Dennis Bickmeier, Henrico County Sports & Entertainment  
Authority  
Angela Wright, Hanover County  
Jim Wilson, VRLTA  
John Vithoukias, Henrico County