

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES  
MAY 16, 2024  
JOLENE FAMILY WINERY  
12:00 P.M.**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

Board Chair Ms. Lisa Sims called the meeting to order at 12:21 P.M. and established a quorum. Chair Sims led the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

**II. WELCOME:**

- A. Chair Sims invited Mr. Rodney Hathaway, New Kent County Administrator, to give welcoming remarks. Mr. Hathaway welcomed board members and guests to Jolene Family Winery, a thriving local business owned by the Mikelaite family. Tourism is a major part of New Kent's economy, which includes attractions such as Colonial Downs, wineries, golf courses, and a soon-to-be cidery. Mr. Hathaway acknowledged that the meeting was the last for Jack Berry as President & CEO and he thanked him for his unwavering support over the years.

Ms. Sandy Lewis, Co-Owner and General Manager of Jolene Family Winery welcomed guests to the winery, a family-owned business, on the site of her childhood home. The winery has continued to expand its offerings since its first iteration as a garden center in the 1980s. The Destination Divas, a TV show airing on the Travel Channel, will film at the winery and showcase the region to a national audience.

Chair Sims welcomed guests Mr. John Moyer of the New Kent Board of Supervisors, Mr. Michael Ivey of Greater Richmond Partnership, Mr. Steve Halasz of Blue Room Research, and Mr. Mike Ritchie of Richmond Region Tourism, to the meeting.

- B. **MOTION** Chair Sims requested a motion to approve the March 21 Meeting Minutes. The motion was made, seconded, and carried by the board.

**III. NEW BUSINESS:**

- A. President's Report: Mr. Berry shared that Henrico and Chesterfield counties saw their greatest tax collections ever in March. Richmond Region Tourism had its busiest March in history. Mr. Berry deferred to Director of Finance, Mr. Mike Kerr to deliver the Financial Update, and Mr. Halasz, to share research trends.

Financial Update: Mr. Kerr delivered the Financial Update.

- He reviewed the current year-to-date, both income and expenses.
  - Income in excess of plan is \$1.93M through April 30<sup>th</sup>, providing a good buffer as expenses through June are incurred.
    - He reviewed the audit process for June 30, 2024, and RRT will again be working with Harris, Hardy and Johnstone.
    - Group insurance benefits costs are an increasing concern and options are being sought for placement. Renewal remains at 8/1/24.
- B. Research Insights Review: Mr. Halasz of Blue Room Research presented a Research Insights Review of the Richmond Region. BRR's team specializes in helping DMOs

(Destination Management Organizations) harness the vast amount of data available to create actionable solutions for their destinations. The Richmond International Airport (RIC) recorded record years in 2022 and 2023, and similarly elevated levels are expected this year. We are seeing growth in visitation, lengths of stay, and visitor spending. Geolocation data from Arrivalist anonymously tracks visitor spending and helps RRT market the region to the right audiences and in the right places. Hotel occupancy rates have flattened in 2024, but the average daily rate (ADR) is expected to remain high. Mr. Halasz's PowerPoint presentation has been sent to board members. BRR Research Trends will be featured in RRT's bi-monthly board reports.

- C. Governance Committee Report: Ms. Bridgette Bywater, chair of the RRT Governance Committee, discussed proposed amendments to RRT's Articles and Bylaws. She highlighted that political subdivisions or entities must be invited by the Board of Directors to apply for membership. For Class A members, approval requires more than a two-thirds majority of all Board members. Similarly, invited political subdivisions or entities need a majority approval from the entire Board of Directors. The Board has not established a formal application process for membership and will instead evaluate any potential new members on a case-by-case basis as determined by the Board of Directors. Additionally, new language has been incorporated into the bylaws to address RRT's limited liability.
- D. Tourism Improvement District Update: TID Governance Committee Co-Chair, Mr. Amin Neil shared the following updates:
- TID funds have enabled RRT to expand our presence at tradeshow and enhance our marketing efforts, positioning the region for greater success in the coming years.
  - In a pilot program, RRT will work with community partners to create new local events, in response to Board feedback.
  - A pilot housing stipend seeks to incentivize summer intern candidates by providing crucial accommodation support for at least 10 interns. The pilot program will expand next summer.
  - Innovative marketing tactics will promote economy hotels throughout the region.
  - The successful Black Travelers Campaign will now run year-round.
  - Four billboards will be placed in target locations to drive travelers to our hotels.
  - Group Tour Sales will increase the Richmond Region's brand awareness with a larger presence at industry shows and tradeshow.
  - Sales will launch additional FAM tours to showcase the region.

Director of Finance, Mr. Mike Kerr provided financial updates from the TID:

- TID Funds received in May followed a six-week lag, which is typical.
- TID received just under \$1M from jurisdiction hotels, the largest number to date.
- The new TID budget is a 12-month plan, up from 10 months in year one.
- Colonial Heights approved a 2024-2025 contribution amount of \$334,971.
- The 2024-2025 TID budget is balanced at \$8,500,226.
- Mr. Kerr detailed the budget expense line items and initiatives by department.
- By 2025, Reserve Funds should be no less than \$4.7M.

**MOTION** Chair Sims stated that the TID Governance Committee has made a motion to approve the submitted FY25 TID budget and workplan. The board unanimously approved, and the motion carried.

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

- A. Inspiration Campaign Update: Vice President of Market, Mr. Tom Loftus presented a video from Padilla Agency highlighting the massive success of their campaign and brand lift study. Those who saw the campaign showed a 23% increase in "very positive" perceptions of the region, with a 34% increase in being "very likely" to travel to the region. The campaign has received over 109M impressions, well over the expected 80M impressions. The ARPA funded campaign will close in five weeks, but Marketing will continue to work with Padilla for the rest of the year using RRT funds.
- B. Top Workplace Award: Mr. Berry proudly announced RRT's recognition as a *Richmond Times Dispatch* Top Workplace for 2024, the first Top Workplace Award in the organization's history. At the award ceremony on May 15<sup>th</sup>, RRT won the Benefits Award, which recognizes the organization with the best benefits overall.
- C. Roundtable Announcements & Adjourn: Chair Sims opened the floor to Board Members to provide important updates and upcoming events happening in the region.
- Mr. John Cario echoed the success of the biggest March on record and the NCECA city-wide convention.
  - Vice President of Community Relations, Danielle Fitz-Hugh, thanked board members for being among the 400 attendees at the Annual Meeting, the largest attendance ever. The GRCC (Greater Richmond Convention Center) will host Jack Berry's Retirement Celebration on June 20<sup>th</sup> from 5:00-7:00 PM. The BLK Awards and Gala will be held on August 23<sup>rd</sup> at the Hippodrome Theater from 6:00-9:00 PM.
  - Mr. Dan Schmitt announced Henrico County's \$60M commitment to buy land in support of affordable housing. Glover Park will expand with additional baseball fields, multipurpose fields, and has already been booked out for 37 weekends of athletic competition.
  - New Kent Director of Economic Development, Mr. Matthew Smolnik, will soon transition to his new role as County Administrator of King George County, about an hour north of the region.
  - Mr. Jim Holland announced that Chesterfield is accepting nominations for its inaugural class of the Chesterfield Sports Hall of Fame. A formal banquet for inductees will be held on September 12<sup>th</sup> at the Perkinson Center for the Arts and Education in Chester.
  - Ms. Bridgette Bywater shared Kings Dominion is open on weekends and will fully open on May 25<sup>th</sup>, while the water park will open on weekends beginning May 26<sup>th</sup>.
  - Ms. Rita McClenney announced new DMO leadership hires across the state. Ed Harris, CEO of Visit Lancaster in Pennsylvania will lead Visit Williamsburg. Todd O'Leary, Vice President of Marketing at Visit Sonoma in California will lead as CEO of Visit Alexandria. Samantha Johnson, Executive

Director of Prestonsburg, Kentucky Tourism will serve as the Executive Director of Visit Staunton. Sports tourism and luxury travel are up in Virginia, and Northern Virginia has seen a 50% increase in visitation.

- Mr. Perry Miller highlighted Richmond International Airports' record level years in 2022 and 2023 with continued success this year as more direct flight options open.
- Mr. John Moyer invited guests to attend the Taste of New Kent Festival on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and the Colonial Downs Festival of Racing on September 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Mr. Steve Trivett thanked RRT for partnering to host I Am Tourism in Ashland, and looks forward to the July 11<sup>th</sup> RRT Board Meeting, to be held at Studio 54 in downtown Ashland.
- Mr. Michael Ivey shared that Ms. Jennifer Wakefield is attending site visits with 3 consultants in the region to attract new business. Topsoe, A Danish global clean energy manufacturer will invest \$400M to build a factory in Chesterfield County.

Adjourn: At 1:48, the RRT Board and guests gave a toast to honor the career and legacy of Mr. Berry's 35+ years of dedicated service to the Richmond Region and adjourned shortly thereafter.

Board Present:

Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels  
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA  
Bridgette Bywater, King's Dominion  
John Cario, Richmond Hilton Downtown  
Pat Collins, TowneBank  
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond  
Jim Holland, Chesterfield County  
Jon Luginbill, Sports Backers  
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp  
Perry Miller, Capital Region Airport Commission  
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County  
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond  
Jordan Stewart, New Kent County  
Nancy Thomas, InUnison  
Steve Trivett, Town of Ashland  
Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway

Guests Present:

Robert Cappellanti, City of Richmond Economic Development  
Karen Epps, City of Colonial Heights  
Michael Ivey, Greater Richmond Partnership  
Sandy Lewis, Jolene Family Winery  
John Moyer, New Kent County  
Dawn Miller, Henrico Sports & Entertainment Authority  
Rodney Hathaway, New Kent County  
Matthew Smolnik, New Kent County  
Steve Halasz, Blue Room Research

Staff Present:

Jack Berry  
Danielle Fitz-Hugh  
Michelle Lovatt  
Jerrine Lee  
Katherine O'Donnell  
Mike Ritchie  
Matt Robinette (*zoom*)  
Grantland Steele

Board Absent:

Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy  
Susan Dibble, Hanover County  
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights  
Michael Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group  
Mayush Mehta, JP Hospitality  
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels  
Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond  
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond  
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership