RICHMOND REGION TOURISM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES
MAY 21, 2026
HIDDEN WIT BREWING COMPANY
CHESTERFIELD COUNTY
NOON

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

A. Chair Lisa Sims called the meeting to order at 12:22 p.m. and established a quorum.

B. Welcome Remarks: Chair Sims welcomed attendees to Hidden Wit Brewing Company in Chesterfield County and recognized several guests, including Ms. Aubrey Lipscomb, Richmond Region Tourism's new Public Relations Manager, who joined the organization on April 15. Ms. Lipscomb brings communications and media experience from CVS Media Exchange and SiriusXM/Pandora Media, along with a strong connection to the Richmond Region and service on the board of the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Chair Sims also welcomed Mr. Steve Halasz, Founder and CEO of Blue Room Research, and Ms. Angela Oakes of Greater Richmond Partnership, attending on behalf of Ms. Jennifer Wakefield.

Dr. Joe Casey, County Administrator for Chesterfield County, welcomed the Board and highlighted Chesterfield's growth, regional tourism assets, and celebrated the continued partnership with Richmond Region Tourism. He discussed major investments including extension of the Powhite Parkway, growth near Magnolia Green, River City Sportsplex, "The Park" at River City Sportsplex, the Dutch Gap Park Master Plan, riverfront and natural asset improvements, and new basketball courts coming to Hidden Wit Brewing Company.

Ms. Kim Taylor, co-owner of Hidden Wit Brewing Company, welcomed the Board and thanked RRT for holding the meeting at Hidden Wit. She shared brief background on the business and noted its continued growth as a community gathering place with expanded programming, including music and events.

Chair Sims thanked Ms. Rachel Smith, Director of Tourism for Hanover County, for sharing "Virginia is for Tomato Lovers" stickers with attendees.

C. Announcements: Various announcements were made including:

• **Ms. Angela Oakes, Greater Richmond Partnership**, shared that GRP is working with human resources professionals and employers on talent attraction efforts designed to support regional workforce needs. She noted that this work helps communicate the Richmond Region's quality of life and supports broader business attraction and retention efforts.

• **Mr. Perry Miller, Richmond International Airport**, announced that new nonstop Cancun air service is expected to begin on January 8, 2027.

• **Mr. Rick Butts, Omni Richmond Hotel**, shared that the Omni had a great spring and is expecting a stronger than usual July, supported in part by sports tourism business.

• **Mr. Drew Molloy, Town of Ashland**, announced Ashland's Fourth of July Parade, scheduled from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

• **Mr. J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County**, shared that the upcoming Memorial Day weekend may be one of Chesterfield's largest ever from a visitation and activity standpoint. He also noted that Chesterfield will host a cricket tournament in partnership with the Central Virginia Cricket Association.

• **Ms. Amber Wallace, City of Colonial Heights**, attending on behalf of Mayor Greg Kochuba, provided an update on Live! Casino, noting that construction of the permanent casino is underway.

• **Ms. Rachel Smith, Hanover County**, highlighted the Hanover Tomato Festival set for July 10-11 at Pole Green Park, where the VA250 Mobile Museum Experience will be available to visitors, and also noted the County's Sounds at Sunset concert series.

• **Ms. Jennifer Schofield, Kings Dominion**, announced that daily summer park hours begin May 29 and that Soak City water park is opening for the season. She also shared that Kings Dominion will host events on June 6 and June 7 celebrating the one-year anniversary of Rapterra and noted that the park will offer expanded fireworks celebrations this year.

• **Ms. Jordan Stewart, New Kent County**, highlighted New Kent's campground assets, including Ed Allen's Campground and Cottages and Rockahock Campground & RV Park. Rockahock Campground will host Fourth of July fireworks on Friday, July 4, 2025, from 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

• **Ms. Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond**, announced that the public opening of the Children's Museum of Richmond following renovations is scheduled for June 27. She encouraged attendees to explore VA250 activations taking place at museums and cultural institutions throughout the region.

• **Mr. Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels**, shared that the Flying Squirrels are off to a strong season, including a 17–3 home record to date and leading Minor League Baseball in attendance. He noted that summer concerts will be hosted at CarMax Park and previewed future winter programming updates, including plans for an ice rink in the outfield. He also shared that Season 3 of the *Parney Time Podcast* is now streaming.

II. **NEW BUSINESS:**

A. **MOTION** Minutes: The minutes of the March 19 meeting were reviewed. Ms. Jennifer Schofield moved to accept the minutes which were seconded by Mr. Todd "Parney" Parnell and the minutes were adopted unanimously.

B. **MOTION** FY27 TID Work Plan & Budget: Ms. Katherine O'Donnell, President and CEO, presented the FY27 Tourism Improvement District Work Plan, noting that the TID is entering its fourth year with strong momentum and continues to serve as an important visitor-funded tool to drive visitation, increase hotel occupancy, and strengthen the Richmond Region's competitive position.

Ms. O'Donnell highlighted several FY27 areas of focus, including:

• Continued investments in destination sales and sports visibility, including CVENT Diamond Listing enhancements, Passkey exploration, Threshold360 and SkyNav immersive hotel and destination tours, refreshed sales and sports video assets, expanded tradeshow activations, and targeted outreach in priority markets such as Philadelphia and Atlanta.

• Major marketing initiatives, including a new 12-month golf tourism campaign connected to the TID's sponsorship of the Korn Ferry championship, continued investment in the Richmond Region 250 "Always Revolutionary" campaign, and a new Philadelphia Metro takeover campaign tied to America 250 activity. The Richmond Region 250 campaign will continue to build around four themes: revolutionary roots, voices, experiences, and ideas.

• Expanded group tour efforts, including continued participation in appointment-based tradeshows such as ABA Marketplace, NTA Travel Exchange, SYTA, Travel South International, and regional motorcoach association events. The plan also expands outreach to growth markets including Black cultural heritage travel, LGBTQ+ travel, accessible travel, family travel, and student travel.

• Continued development of ready-to-book itineraries, targeted FAM tours, and the Group Tour Incentive Program to help convert qualified leads into overnight Richmond Region bookings.

• Workforce development initiatives, including continued expansion of the Hotel I Am Tourism program through a digital training platform, concierge experience toolkit, immersive hotel staff FAM tours, and visitor itinerary playbooks. The plan also continues the Governance Incubation Grant program and includes broader hospitality workforce pipeline investments, including internship placements, customer service certification programs, tourism career partnerships, and first-year support for the Brightpoint Community College Hospitality Program.

Mr. Mike Kerr, Director of Finance and Administration, presented the FY27 TID Budget. Mr. Kerr reported that the FY27 TID Budget includes total income of $9,071,177, program expenses of $6,349,824, and $2,721,353 allocated to reserve/future campaigns. He noted that the reserve allocation is consistent with the TID's structure and provides flexibility for larger future opportunities, including major events, incentives, and campaigns that may require funds to be accumulated over time.

During discussion, a question was raised regarding the 30% reserve allocation. Staff explained that the reserve is part of the TID service plan requirement and is intended to ensure that the district has sufficient resources available for larger opportunities that may arise in future years, rather than requiring all visitor-generated funds to be spent in the year received.

Mr. Todd "Parney" Parnell moved to approve the FY27 TID Work Plan and FY27 TID Budget. Mr. Brian Bald seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

C. **MOTION** FY27 RRT Business Plan & Budget: Ms. O'Donnell presented the FY27 Richmond Region Tourism Business Plan, noting that it represents Year One implementation of the FY27–FY29 Strategic Plan. She explained that the plan uses a new board-facing format that aligns FY27 priorities with the organization's four strategic goals:

• Maximize Sales & Marketing
• Champion Destination Development
• Elevate Destination Alignment
• Advance Organization Impact

Ms. O'Donnell highlighted FY27 priorities, including:

• Elevating the Richmond Region brand through stronger storytelling, expanded targeted advertising campaigns, enhanced tourism niche strategies, and continued investment in sales and marketing alignment.

• Strengthening sales partnerships and customer feedback structures, including customer advisory boards, to help grow conventions, meetings, sports tourism, group tours, and leisure visitation.

• Advancing destination development and regional alignment efforts, including advocacy for downtown revitalization, support for a headquarters hotel, efforts to expand international air service, tourism and hospitality workforce development, regional collaboration councils, and the region's first resident sentiment survey.

• Strengthening RRT's long-term organizational capacity through jurisdictional Memoranda of Understanding and funding agreements, enhanced data and business intelligence strategies, operational and technology assessments, development of an organizational AI roadmap, and exploration of an organizational identity refresh.

Mr. Kerr presented the FY27 RRT Budget. He noted that the FY27 budget totals $10,513,673 in income and $10,513,673 in expenses, resulting in a balanced budget. He also reviewed the narrative version of the FY27 budget included in the Board packet, noting that it was developed to provide greater transparency, clearer descriptions of budget line items and serve as an educational tool on the breadth of functions performed through the RRT budget.

Ms. O'Donnell explained that the FY27 budget is smaller than anticipated due to $1.2 million in reduced jurisdictional funding, requiring reductions across several program areas. Budget reductions and work plan impacts included:

• Reduced conferences, trade shows, and professional development.

• No interns unless such roles are funded by external grants.

• A $300,000 advertising reduction, including the elimination of international advertising.

• Reduced photography, video, and research funding.

• Postponement of website and brand/logo redesign work.

• Reduced sales sponsorships and marketing, including no ESPN Radio and no co-marketing sports sponsorships.

• A one-year pause of the sports grant program for review.

• Elimination of the Spring Training FAM in Arizona.

• Sunsetting the RVA Sports Awards after five years.

• Cutting the JazzFest sponsorship.

• Ending the Mobile Visitor Center program staffed by 288.

• Elimination of two previously budgeted staff positions (HR and IT).

• Removal of the FY27 contribution to reserves.

During discussion, Board members expressed appreciation for the narrative budget format and the added transparency it provided.

A question was raised about the reduction in international advertising and how the organization would continue to pursue global opportunities. Staff noted that while the dedicated international advertising line was reduced, the organization would continue to support international opportunities through partnerships, sales efforts, and aligned regional initiatives where possible.

The FY27 RRT Business Plan and FY27 RRT Budget are presented as a motion by the Executive Committee and did not require a second. The motion passed unanimously.

D. President's Report: Ms. O'Donnell introduced Ms. Danielle Fitz-Hugh, Vice President of Community Relations, to provide her Mission Moment:

Mission Moment: Ms. Fitz-Hugh highlighted the recent Banana Ball game at CarMax Park on May 2. She shared that TID incentive dollars helped attract Banana Ball back to the Richmond Region and noted that RRT hosted local partners at the game so they could experience firsthand the community impact of RRT's work. The event served as an example of how strategic tourism investments support major events, generate regional visibility, and create shared experiences that benefit residents, visitors, and partners.

Ms. O'Donnell provided several organizational updates:

• **Class A Member MOU:** RRT continues to work with its Class A member localities on a regional memorandum of understanding to clarify roles, responsibilities, and funding expectations moving forward. A draft MOU had been received, and a meeting was scheduled the following week to review feedback and next steps. Additional updates will be shared with the Board at a future meeting.

• **Economic Impact Video:** RRT launched a new economic impact video at the recent Annual Meeting. The video helps tell the story of tourism's impact across the Richmond Region. A link to the video will be shared with Board members so they can distribute the video to their stakeholders.

• **Staff Updates:** Ms. Shavonne Harding has been hired as Vice President of Sales, backfilling the role previously held by Ms. Jerrine Lee. Ms. Harding previously served as Director of Sales with the Pittsburgh Tourism Office and currently lives in the Richmond Region. She will begin on May 27. Mr. Tom Loftus, Vice President of Marketing, will be leaving RRT on June 2, and the hiring process for the Vice President of Marketing role will begin later in the summer.

E. **MOTION** Financial Update: Mr. Kerr delivered the Financial Update through April 30, 2026:

RRT received $9,870,483 in revenue against a planned budget total of $11,263,369, or 87.63% of plan.

• Six of seven jurisdictions had paid their annual contributions in full. Henrico County was at 75%, with its fourth-quarter support expected to arrive shortly. The Greater Richmond Convention Center had paid its full annual budgeted amount.

• TID revenue runs in arrears, with seven monthly transfers received for July through January, and will true up during the FY26 audit.

• Total expenditures were $7,879,502, or 70.74% of plan, up from 56.09% during the previous reporting cycle. Most expense lines are still within range for this point in the fiscal year.

• Lines of interest included:

- Payroll and related staffing expenses at 72.19%, reflecting unfilled roles held open during strategic plan and budget funding discussions.
- Insurance at 53.31%, due to an RFP that resulted in improved property and casualty coverage at lower premiums.
- Amortization at 0%, which will be adjusted during year-end audit close.
- Workforce development at 19.24%, with year-end projects expected to absorb a part of remaining funds.

• The final wave of staff computer installations had been completed, and staff expressed appreciation for the upgrade. Mr. Kerr added that the FY26 audit preparation will begin later in the month.

• RRT's current and reserve assets totaled $7,830,365 as of April 30, 2026, with a blended point-in-time return of 3.16%, down one basis point from the prior period's 3.17%.

• Assets included TowneBank Money Market, TowneBank Checking, Principal CDs, and First Citizens Bank. RRT is still well above its reserve policy floor of 20% of the current year budget.

• Rates have softened slightly, while recent inflation reports may extend the current interest rate environment.

F. State of the Tourism Industry & Q1 Review: Mr. Steve Halasz, Founder and CEO of Blue Room Research, presented the State of the Tourism Industry and Q1 Review.

Mr. Halasz noted that while uncertainty continues to shape the national travel environment, the Richmond Region is well positioned because current consumer behavior favors drive-market visitation, shorter domestic trips, affordability, family-friendly experiences, outdoor assets, and cultural amenities.

Key highlights included:

• National travel demand is still strong, though travelers are booking closer to arrival, watching costs more carefully, and favoring domestic and drive trips.

• Richmond Region domestic person-trips reached 19.1 million in 2025, up from 18.3 million in 2024. Overnight trips also increased, from 6.9 million to 7.3 million, supporting hotel demand and visitor spending.

• Richmond International Airport passenger volume is still strong, with year-to-date pacing through March 2026 slightly ahead of 2025 and near 2024 levels.

• Hotel performance is still positive, with April 2026 showing continued gains in occupancy, average daily rate, demand, and revenue across the region.

• Short-term rentals continue to contribute to the visitor economy, particularly for family and sports-related travel, with rate and revenue performance staying strong.

In closing, the presentation emphasized that the Richmond Region's proximity to major population centers, competitive pricing, strong visitor assets, TID investment, marketing, sports tourism, and group sales efforts are supporting elevated tourism demand.

During discussion, Board members asked about destination performance trends, sports tourism, and market-specific messaging. The discussion noted that sports tourism is still highly competitive, destinations with strong existing infrastructure are better positioned, and RRT continues to adjust messaging based on market conditions and audience segments.

III. ANY OTHER BUSINESS & ADJOURNMENT:

A. Adjournment: With no further business to discuss, Chair Sims adjourned the meeting at 1:35 PM.

Attendees:
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA
Brian Bald, Capital One
Rick Butts, Omni Richmond Hotel
Will Dixon, Sports Backers
Perry Miller, Richmond International Airport
Drew Molloy, Town of Ashland
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels
Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond
Jennifer Schofield, Kings Dominion
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond
Jordan Stewart, New Kent County

Guests Present:
Joe Casey, Chesterfield County
Steve Halasz, Blue Room Research
J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County
Angela Oakes, Greater Richmond Partnership
Rachel Smith, Hanover County
Kim Taylor, Hidden Wit Brewing Company
Amber Wallace, City of Colonial Heights

Staff Present:
Katherine O'Donnell
Danielle Fitz-Hugh
Mike Kerr
Jerrine Lee
Aubrey Lipscomb
Mike Kerr
Matt Robinette
Grantland Steele

Absent:
Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels
Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy
Susan Dibble, Hanover County
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights
Kimberly Love-Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group
Mark Miller, Chesterfield County
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond
Nancy Thomas, InUnison
Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership