

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 16, 2023
HENRICO SPORTS AND EVENTS CENTER
11:00 AM**

I. CALL TO ORDER:

- A. Chair-Elect Lisa Sims called the meeting to order at 11:10 a.m., established a quorum and led the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

II. WELCOME:

- A. Welcome Remarks: Chair-Elect Sims welcomed Henrico County Manager, John Vithoulkas. Mr. Vithoulkas thanked the board members and guests for their attendance, as well as the Executive Director of Henrico Sports and Entertainment Authority, Dennis Bickmeier, for the hard work that brought the new Henrico Sports and Events Center to fruition. Mr. Bickmeier thanked board members and elected officials for their collaborative efforts and shared his excitement for further growth and development in Henrico County. The facility was not built to be an auditorium, but a multi-purpose events center, intentionally designed with flexibility in mind. Chair-Elect Sims welcomed speaker Mr. Bill Geist and Ms. Terri White of Zeitgeist Consulting's DMO Proz to the meeting. Chair-Elect Sims welcomed Ms. Susan Dibble with Hanover County to the board, who is replacing Angela Kelley-Wiecek representing Hanover County.
- B. New Staff Members: RRT welcomed Ms. Sarah Beth Couvillion, Public Relations Manager, and the new Sports Events Manager, Ms. Brittany Loving. Ms. Couvillion is originally from the Mississippi Gulf Coast and is an alumna of The University of Southern Mississippi. Ms. Loving is from Stafford, Virginia and is a graduate of James Madison University. Brittany brings valuable experience from her previous role as Tourism Marketing Specialist at Stafford County Government.

MOTION Minutes: The minutes from the September 21st meeting minutes were reviewed. Mr. Todd Parnell motioned to accept the minutes which were seconded by Ms. Bridgette Bywater. The vote passed.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. Staff Recognition: Chair Sims recognized Visitor Experience Coordinator, Ms. Shelly Jiggetts, for 10 years of service to RRT. Chair Sims recognized Jack Berry, President & CEO and Michelle Lovatt, Vice President of Administration, each for 35 years of service, to a standing ovation from board members.
- B. President's Report: Mr. Berry welcomed the Director of Finance, Mr. Michael Kerr, to deliver the financial update. Mr. Kerr reported that the June 30, 2023 audit is in process and that all pre-sitework audit documents have been uploaded to the Harris Hardy and Johnstone (HHJ) web portal. The on-site work will be conducted November 14-15. The audit will be presented in a comparative format as opposed to a single year. The audited financial statements should be in draft form by mid-December and HHJ will present the audit and management letters at the January meeting.

Mr. Kerr presented the summary of RRT's Financial Position as of August 31, 2023. The broad planned expense categories are shown on the left side of the first slide. The actual-to-budget for the categories is shown to the right. The dark blue bar being the actual and light blue bar being the budgeted amounts. Community Relations is lagging year-to-date as of 8/31 greatly due to the new Vice President of Community Relations, Ms. Danielle Fitz-Hugh, not joining the staff until late August. For Marketing, Mr. Kerr reported slower numbers out of the gate against budget, but it is now 93% of YTD as opposed to the 74% shown as of 8/31. For Sports, RRT had several summer projects putting 8/31 ahead of target, but that class is now tracking at 91% of plan. There was no budget for ARPA, and the actual is being reimbursed by the jurisdictions as we go. At the end of the year, this should be a wash.

MOTION FY25 Budget: Mr. Kerr presented the FY25 budget which represents \$8,900,241 in jurisdictional income which is a 16% increase. Total income and expenses are \$10,382,015. Interest income is projected to increase overall and in Administration, \$125,000 has been budgeted for the reserve fund. Ms. Bywater made a motion to adopt the budget which will be presented to the jurisdictions. The motion was seconded by Mr. Parnell. The vote passed.

Market Trends: Mr. Berry shared the Smith Travel Research reports and noted that we are at record levels for REVPAR in September. Hotel occupancies are softening but overall hotel taxes are at a record pace.

- C. **MOTION Slate of Officers Election:** Chair-Elect Sims proposed the FY24/25 Slate of Officers for consideration as recommended by Ms. Bridgette Bywater, Chair of the Governance Committee:

Proposed Slate of Officers for FY24/FY25:

Chair – Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond
Chair-Elect – Bridgette Bywater, Kings Dominion
1st Vice Chair – Jim Holland, Chesterfield County
2nd Vice Chair – Ellen Robertson, Richmond
Secretary – Neil Amin – Shamin Hotels
Treasurer – Susan Dibble, Hanover County
Immediate Past Chair – Dan Schmitt, Henrico County

Mr. Daniel Schmitt motioned to approve the slate of officers, which was seconded by Mr. Jim Holland. The vote passed.

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

- A. Tourism Improvement District Update: Mr. Mayush Mehta gave an update on the Tourism Improvement District, and how each RRT department is using the funds:

Marketing

- The Sojern mid-week and all-travel digital marketing campaign launched on October 12.
- Sojern's Drive December campaign launched on November 1.
- The Adara mid-week and all-travel digital marketing campaign will launch on December 1.
- Trip Advisor campaign will launch on January 1.

- Sojern and Adara are digital marketing platforms that use AI and machine learning to both identify qualified travel intenders and to serve up our ads to them.
- Our leisure marketing goal is TO BE ALWAYS ON, meaning that every day of the year, we will be serving up ads.

Sales & Sports

- We have upgraded Threshold360 to have enough spots for each hotel in the TID. An email will be going out this week to partners to let them know this is a complimentary benefit and next steps to get them setup.
- The sales team have attended (3) new tradeshow with (1) more at the end of the month. We were also able to double our booth size and appointments at TEAMS Conference and Expo
 - (New) - Northstar Destination East – we had 18 appointments, 16 with meeting planners/organization that were not in our CRM
 - (New) IMEX – we had a 10x10 booth and sponsored a section of the hosted buyer lounge that gave us amazing visibility at the largest industry tradeshow. We had 180+ scans/conversations with prospective clients over the three-days.
 - TEAMS Conf. and Expo – we doubled our booth size to a 10 x 20 and increased our appointments from 30 to 75
 - (New) Northstar Small & Boutique Meetings – (happening this week)
 - (New) Holiday Showcase in Chicago – happening at the end of the month
- Onboarding is just about complete for HubSpot which is a digital marketing platform that will allow us to be more sophisticated in our communication and marketing to meeting planners and sports tourism organizers.

Group Tour

Cory Lee

- Cory Lee is a travel writer and blogger who “shares the world from a wheelchair user’s perspective.”
- Mr. Lee presented how destinations throughout the Commonwealth can and should attract and host people with disabilities at the VA1 Governor’s Tourism Summit.
- Richmond Region Tourism invited Mr. Lee to spend a couple of additional days in our destination touring the sites and participating in some experiences. Mr. Lee will write and share about his experience in Richmond with his 100,000+ engaged and supportive followers.

Australian Familiarization Tour

- Virginia Tourism Corporation feels Australia will become a major market for Virginia, as we offer much of what Australians are interested in when they visit the U.S.
- Australians typically stay in the U.S. for several weeks at a time and research tells us they are not afraid to travel well outside the major gateway cities.
- Our Australian guests will experience a City of Richmond tour, Food and Craft Beer experience, and a culinary dining experience in their short time in the destination.
- We only had these people in Richmond for one day which provided the opportunity to highlight the City of Richmond.

Colonial Heights TID

- Petition drive complete
- Public hearing process begins in December
- TID targeted to begin collection April 1

B. Other New Business: Chair Sims opened the floor to board members and guests to make any announcements. Updates included:

- Beulah Neighborhood Park: Mr. J.C. Poma announced that the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Beulah Neighborhood Park, to include a cricket field and walking path, will be held on December 11th.
- Airport reported the best ever October statistics.
- Richmond Raceway Rebrand: Ms. Lori Waran announced Richmond Raceway's newly unveiled rebranding that reflects the River City's astral aspirations. The new look includes key visual cues that harken to elements of familiar Commonwealth imagery.
- Ashland Tree Lighting: Ms. Martha Miller welcomed attendees to the Ashland Christmas Parade, Tree Lighting, and Fireworks Celebration on December 2nd, starting at 6 PM. This year's theme is "Christmas through the Eyes of a Child".
- Secretariat Statue: Ms. Miller also announced, "Secretariat Racing into History", 21 feet long, 11.5 feet tall and 3,800-pound statue and the largest monument of the great Virginia-born Thoroughbred, will be unveiled at the Ashland Olde Time Holiday Parade on November 19th. Created by acclaimed sculptor Jocelyn Russell, it is the first and only statue of Secretariat in Virginia. The monument will be permanently placed on the campus of Randolph-Macon College. Plans are underway for a dedication ceremony in March of 2024.
- Flying Squirrels Charity: Mr. Todd Parnell (Parney) welcomed guests to attend the annual Flying Squirrels Hot Stove Banquet on November 16th (the night of the board meeting). The event will consist of VIP areas, a ballroom area with music, drinks, hors d'oeuvres, an autograph session and more.

Meeting dates for 2024 were noted at the back of the packet. There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 11:40 a.m. Attendees participated in a tour of the new Henrico Sports and Events Center, had lunch and participated in a Board Retreat Workshop.

Attendees:

Bridgette Bywater, King's Dominion
Pat Collins, TowneBank
Susan Dibble, Hanover County
Jim Holland, Chesterfield County
Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights
Jon Lugbill, Sports Backers
Mayush Mehta, JP Hospitality
Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels
Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond
Dan Schmitt, Henrico County
Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond
Nancy Thomas, Retail Merchants Association
Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership
Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway

Guests Present:

Bill Geist, Zeitgeist Consulting's DMO Proz
Terri White, Zeitgeist Consulting's DMO Proz
J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County

Troy Bell, Capital Region Airport Commission
Martha Miller, Town of Ashland
Dennis Bickmeier, Henrico Sports & Events Center
John Vithoukias, County of Henrico

Staff Present:

Jack Berry
Michelle Lovatt
Katherine O'Donnell
Jerrine Lee
Matt Robinette
Shelly Jiggetts
Tom Loftus
Mike Kerr
Grantland Steele
Danielle Fitz-Hugh
Brittany Loving
Sarah Beth Couvillion

Absent:

Kathy Abbott, Town of Ashland
Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels
Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA
John Cario, Richmond Hilton Downtown
Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy
Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond
Michael Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp
Perry Miller, Capital Region Airport Commission
Patricia Paige, New Kent County
Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond