

JANUARY 31, 2018

# RICHMOND REGION TOURISM

TOURISM  
MASTER PLAN

STAKEHOLDER  
ENGAGEMENT

SUMMARY ISSUES  
& OPPORTUNITIES



The following material is a summary of issues and opportunities identified in the Stakeholder Conversations conducted in the Richmond region by Resonance Consultancy during the week of January 14, 2019 and additional calls held the week of January 21st. Approximately 115 stakeholders participated in 50 sessions.

The issues and opportunities are listed in alphabetical order:

- ABC Laws, Rules and Regulation
- African American Market
- Agritourism
- Airlift Development
- Arts
- Authenticity
- Biking and Biking Trails
- Broad Street
- Casino Gaming
- Convention Center Headquarter Hotel(S)
- Destination Development
- Downtown Parking
- Downtown Richmond
- Events and Festivals
- Gathering Place
- History and Heritage
- James River
- Level Playing Field
- Live Music
- Main Street Station
- MICE Business and Economic Development
- Midweek Business
- Monuments
- Multicultural Assets
- Neighborhood Tourism
- New Kent County
- Planning
- Poverty, Education and Social Inequality
- Regional Connectivity
- Retail Strategy
- Resident Perception
- Richmond Coliseum (Navy Hill) Project
- Richmond Region Tourism Roles
- Richmond's Colleges and Universities
- Richmond's Maker Movement
- Safety and Security
- Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)
- Social Events Venues
- Sports Facilities and Other Group Venues
- Sports Tourism
- Outdoors Experiences
- Voluntourism
- Walkability



## ABC LAWS, RULES AND REGULATION

Stakeholders have reported the Commonwealth of Virginia's ABC laws, rules, permitting processes and regulations are outdated and prevent Richmond's entertainment and nightlife establishments (bars, clubs and music venues) from attracting residents and visitors, and from competing with other leading destinations such as Nashville, Memphis, Austin and Washington, D.C. RRT should join with organizations such as the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association and the Virginia's Craft Brewers Guild to support many of the changes necessary to level the playing field for the Richmond region.

## AFRICAN AMERICAN VISITOR MARKET

Stakeholders have reported the Richmond region doesn't do enough to promote and develop its African American cultural and historical assets, or provide programming and experiences for the African American visitor market. RRT has an opportunity to lead in the prioritization and development of an African American Tourism Strategy, following on the successes of the OutRVA initiative. In 2017, RRT brought together a collection of community members to help develop a unique way to attract more tourism that celebrates Richmond's Black history and culture. The organization recently released an RFP to bring the Black Experience Tourism Initiative to life and capitalize on this opportunity.

## AGRITOURISM

Stakeholders have suggested the Richmond region has an opportunity to development and promote more agritourism experiences within the region, particularly in the counties. The Hanover Tomato Festival is used as an example of a successful regional event, and stakeholders see opportunities to tie agricultural assets in the region to the growing culinary scene.

## AIRLIFT DEVELOPMENT

Although it is unlikely that Richmond could ever compete with Dulles, Reagan and BWI Airports—which serve as the nearest major aviation centers in the Mid-Atlantic region—Richmond should continue to cultivate and invest in additional non-stop, long-haul and specialty market airlift development that provides additional opportunities for growing aviation traffic and Richmond region tourism. Stakeholders reported that Richmond's lack of funding to support airlift development has left the region at a competitive disadvantage.

## ARTS

Stakeholders have suggested that Richmond's art scene, museums, galleries, institutions and events are excellent, but are in need of additional funding to deliver high quality experiences for visitors and enhance quality of life for residents.

## AUTHENTICITY

Richmond is in the throes of a destination identity transformation as the region attempts to move away from historical perceptions, in particular its notoriety as the capital of the Confederacy. At the same time, new developments and new residents are reinventing Richmond's vibe, a catalyst for an evolved sense of place. In the end, RRT is not the creator of authenticity, but is responsible for articulating its identity, so the challenge will be to continue monitoring the region's identity evolution and convey that through its marketing and promotion to local, domestic and international audiences.

## BIKING AND BIKING TRAILS

Richmond's biking trails, including the Virginia Capital Trail, have served to connect communities, provide alternative transportation options and create recreational opportunities in the Richmond region that are unique for the City/Counties and aspirational for many communities. Stakeholders have suggested that future development, enhancement and expansion should focus on building more and better bike lanes and pathway connections to downtown Richmond and important regional venues, attractions and places; creating pedestrian and cyclist amenities along the trails; and ensuring activation and programming that bring the infrastructure to life for residents and visitors alike. They have also recommended that the Biking Master Plan needs to be better coordinated and connected to overall regional transportation efforts and the visitor industry.

## BROAD STREET

Stakeholders have reported that the storefront vacancies, abandoned buildings and blight on Broad Street is having a disproportionate impact on resident and visitor perceptions of Downtown Richmond and is preventing tourism (leisure, business and meetings) from achieving its full potential.

## CASINO GAMING

A number of destinations (some adjacent) to the Richmond region are exploring, developing or providing local casino gaming attractions. The Richmond region should explore and decide if it wants to compete with these destinations and establish an attraction(s) of its own, or let these other destinations serve the gaming needs of Richmond residents and visitors.

## CONVENTION CENTER HEADQUARTER HOTEL(S)

Industry stakeholders and professional meeting planners have suggested that there is a real and urgent need for a headquarter hotel(s) (for the Richmond Convention Center) that will provide much-needed direct-access room inventory for business, group and MICE (Meetings, Incentive, Convention and Exhibition) visitors to Richmond.

## DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholders have suggested that the counties, communities and neighborhoods could benefit from destination development services organized and provided by RRT. The organization would act as a consultant, advisor, educator, facilitator, catalyst, funding source and general resource for helping regional destinations develop products, services, amenities, events, marketing, promotion, technology and social media for their local communities.

## DOWNTOWN PARKING

Stakeholders have reported that residents and visitors are not satisfied with downtown parking. This complaint usually stems from the limited availability of free parking, compared to suburban destinations, where parking is ample and usually free.

## DOWNTOWN RICHMOND

Downtown Richmond delivers an important culinary, retail, hospitality and entertainment experience that is unique to the Richmond region. Continued focus on and investment in tourism assets and quality of life experiences in Downtown Richmond, as well as increasing downtown density, will be a critical component of Richmond's overall success. Included in this focus are improved sidewalks, lighting, streetscaping, cleanliness, safety and security.

## EVENTS AND FESTIVALS

Stakeholders have reported that festivals and events have been successful in bringing together disparate communities within the region, and help promote the region's amenities and experiences to both residents and visitors. There may be a need for a comprehensive Events and Festivals Strategy, along with professional resources and a dedicated stakeholder committee (Regional Richmond Tourism, City, Counties and communities), that brings together public sector officials, industry stakeholders, venue owners / operators / organizers and event producers. Their purpose would be to agree on a destination-wide strategy, program, calendar, sponsorship, seasonality and operating plan to deliver the full potential of events and festivals to Richmond.

The City of Richmond and the county governments should provide resources that facilitate and encourage events and festivals and make it easier for organizers and venues to create, develop and grow this business.

Additionally, there are a number of existing events and festivals in Richmond that could serve as a Signature Event / Festival for the destination, but require additional development, marketing and promotion to achieve national or international Signature Event status.

## GATHERING PLACE

Stakeholders have reported that Richmond does not have a central outdoor gathering place that serves to anchor the community, and where locals and visitors can gather to celebrate major events and festivals. Richmond should examine if such a gathering place, with its purpose defined and location determined, would be a positive opportunity to enhance the quality of life for residents and increase the quality of experience for visitors.

## HISTORY AND HERITAGE

Stakeholders have suggested that the Richmond region has a unique story to celebrate that could connect visitors and residents to the history and heritage of the region, its people, culture and art. To date, the narrative and presentation of historical assets has been "old school and passive" instead of "high-tech and active." To achieve the fullest potential of these assets, the Richmond region should "push the envelope" and connect in authentic and engaging ways with its visitors and residents.

## JAMES RIVER

Stakeholders have suggested that additional planning, development, activation and access to the James River in Richmond could deliver significant resident and visitor activities, enhance quality of life and have an important economic impact. Stakeholders have suggested that the highest priority is the implementation of the Riverfront Plan.

## LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Stakeholders have reported that different rates of hotel and meal taxes between the City and counties in the Richmond regional area are creating different operating environments and business results even though these establishments are operating under one regional tourism geography / destination. Stakeholders have suggested that the Richmond regional tourism area should level the playing field.

## LIVE MUSIC

In order to attract and engage a younger audience of millennials, professionals and creatives, Richmond should continue to cultivate and expand its live music entertainment, activities, attractions, events and venues as an opportunity to enhance quality of life for residents as well as attract visitors from the region and afar. Richmond should continue to encourage and present music styles, genres and artists that are unique to the region, and which differentiate Richmond's music scene from that of other destinations.

## MAIN STREET STATION

Stakeholders have suggested that Richmond's Main Street Station should be repurposed from an event venue to full-time arts venue, amenity, attraction or retail space. Stakeholders have suggested that the space could be used as a indoor market space like West Side Market in Cleveland or Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia, and could serve as a major visitor attraction and supplier for Richmond's culinary community.

## MICE BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholders have suggested that greater efforts should be made to connect the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Expositions) business with economic development efforts. County, City and regional development agencies, organizations and officials can take advantage of professional and association groups meeting in the Richmond region to engage in a strategic and concerted effort to recruit talent, tourism and investment. As well, the Mayor or other top government officials should make a special effort during large MICE events to welcome and engage with visitors, and promote the Richmond region as a destination to live, work and invest.

## MIDWEEK BUSINESS

Stakeholders have reported that weekend leisure visitation is strong in Downtown Richmond and the surrounding counties, but midweek business travel, business meetings, and convention business is not filling their rooms, restaurants and shops. They suggest that a larger and more robust business sector downtown and a convention center headquarters hotel would definitely enhance the business travel and MICE segments.

## MONUMENTS

Stakeholders have indicated that some visitors and residents are uncomfortable with some of the monuments in the Richmond region and may be deciding not to visit as a result. Richmond Region Tourism should be involved in the discussion of Richmond's monuments and help leaders / decision makers understand the impact of Richmond's monuments on the tourism industry.

## MULTICULTURAL ASSETS

Richmond is home to a broad range of cultural assets and communities—including African American and Latino / Hispanic—and hosts events / festivals that collectively deliver a rich and diverse experience that is difficult to duplicate by competing destinations. These multicultural assets (food, music, history, heritage, art, culture, and events) should be celebrated and supported.

## NEIGHBORHOOD TOURISM

Stakeholders have reported that neighborhoods are a critical component of the tourism experience in the Richmond region and should be an important focus for the Tourism Master Plan. RRT should work with local officials and community leaders to help develop, market and promote the unique sense of place and character that Richmond's neighborhoods offer to residents and visitors.

## NEW KENT COUNTY

The reopening of Colonial Downs with video slot machines is likely to have a major impact on tourism-related business in the area. Richmond Region Tourism should take a closer look at the impact that Colonial Downs may have, and work with New Kent County to properly prepare for and capitalize on the changes. Similar planning for a second video slots location in Midlothian should be conducted.



## PLANNING

Stakeholders have suggested that the Tourism Master Plan should feed into and become part of the updated Comprehensive Plan, and be integrated with other strategies and plans for the City and counties.

## POVERTY, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Stakeholders have reported that there are significant socioeconomic issues associated with poverty, education and social inequality in Richmond that are top of agenda for the City, and which should be factored into any economic development effort, including the Richmond Region Tourism Master Plan. They have also suggested that tourism can and should play a major role in “giving back,” addressing poverty, education and social inequality in the Richmond region.

## REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Stakeholders have reported that the array of experiences in the region is dispersed and disconnected, making it difficult for residents and visitors to easily move about the region. Stakeholders have indicated that Pulse has been an improvement in meeting downtown transportation needs for residents, but should be enhanced to better serve visitors’ needs and increase public transportation services between hotels, restaurants, shopping, entertainment and other visitor activities. Some stakeholders wondered if a dedicated Pulse or private sector hop on / hop off service for visitor places and attractions might be a possible solution. It was also suggested that additional BRT trunk lines between communities could also have a significant impact on regional public transportation options and operations.

## RETAIL STRATEGY

Stakeholders have suggested that the City of Richmond should create a retail strategy for downtown that sets forth plans and activities to improve and enhance unique and creative shopping experiences downtown.

## RESIDENT PERCEPTION

Stakeholders have suggested residents have an outdated perception of the region, and because of those viewpoints and lack of knowledge of local experiences, they do not make effective tourism ambassadors. RRT should invest more in the “I Am Tourism” ambassador program and other efforts to build community pride and create local ambassadors.

## **RICHMOND COLISEUM (NAVY HILL) PROJECT**

Stakeholders have reported that the redevelopment of the Richmond Coliseum will be a “gamechanger” for Richmond regional tourism. They are supportive of the conceptual plan and see the opportunity for the Coliseum (Navy Hill Project) to deliver spinoff and spillover activities (residents and visitors) to Downtown Richmond, its neighborhoods and businesses.

## **RICHMOND REGION TOURISM ROLES**

Stakeholders have suggested that Richmond Region Tourism is underfunded because of the current funding structure and therefore the region is unable to compete with destinations on a national and international level. Stakeholders have also suggested that RRT needs to increase its visibility and advocacy efforts within the Richmond region and take on a broader and deeper leadership role in City, county and community affairs, bringing together these government offices to work in concert on travel and tourism-related issues and opportunities.

## **RICHMOND’S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

Richmond’s colleges and universities are arguably the intellectual centers of Richmond, and have an opportunity to serve a broader role, facilitating intellectual engagement, activities and entertainment for residents and visitors who are looking for personal and intellectual stimulation. Richmond Region Tourism and tourism stakeholders should engage with the Colleges and Universities to create a visitor “Learning Strategy” to capitalize on this opportunity.

## **RICHMOND’S MAKER MOVEMENT**

Richmond’s Maker Movement is an important element of economic development and can contribute to creating a robust urban manufacturing economy. The Maker Movement includes legions of artisans, craftspeople, entrepreneurs and doers who are reinventing and reshaping artisanal manufacturing one handmade product at a time. As the Maker Movement gains momentum across the globe, everyone is looking to uncover the who, what, why and how of this critical resurgence of artisanal manufacturing. As such, there may be an opportunity to showcase Richmond’s Maker Movement to visitors and other non-Richmond makers around the world.

## **SAFETY AND SECURITY**

Stakeholders have reported that safety and security in Downtown Richmond and other communities has significantly improved in recent years, but some visitors and residents still have concerns about their safety and security in certain places at certain times.

## SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMEs)

Stakeholders have reported that SMEs in Richmond are facing major hurdles and obstacles (timing, cost and effort) in getting business licenses and permits from Richmond City agencies. These hurdles and obstacles are causing some SMEs and entrepreneurs to locate their business in outlying counties instead of in the City of Richmond, even though their preference is to do business in the City.

## SOCIAL EVENTS VENUES

There is a need in the Richmond region to identify, create and / or deliver large event spaces required by MICE groups to host their social events (cocktails, meals/dinners, performances and entertainment).

## SPORTS FACILITIES AND OTHER GROUP VENUES

Individual counties and communities have plans to build sports facilities and other group venues to improve resident quality of life and attract sports tourism business. Some of these facilities may be competing with and cannibalizing existing facilities and venues in the region. The City of Richmond and counties should be working in concert to make sure that supply and demand are in balance.

## SPORTS TOURISM

The City of Richmond and surrounding counties have identified Sports Tourism as an important component of their leisure tourism business, with a need to build new infrastructure and facilities to serve this important market. Although there are positive developments in this direction, there does not appear to be a comprehensive Sports Tourism Strategy in place to properly and fully develop this market. Stakeholders have also suggested that the scale and depth of Sports Tourism could be better leveraged for overall economic development efforts by using sports venues to feature Richmond's regional message and to connect with and potentially attract business owners and decision makers (parents) while they are in town.

## URBAN ADVENTURE

Stakeholders have suggested that the outdoors and nature-based experiences in the Richmond region could help shape the future identity of the destination, and could increase awareness of the recognition of being named Outside Magazine's Best River Town in 2012. However, stakeholders reported that outdoors and nature-based experiences continue to be underfunded and have not been made a priority by leaders in the community.

## VOLUNTOURISM

Stakeholders have suggested that there is an opportunity to develop Voluntourism activities and programs to engage visitors in a positive visitor-to-resident experience(s) that would be fulfilling for visitors and help residents improve their quality of life in Richmond. Programs or community missions like neighborhood cleanup or sports clinics could be used to create a bridge between visitors and residents.

## WALKABILITY

Stakeholders have suggested the city of Richmond and surrounding counties are not walkable, an attribute that is increasingly desirable to both residents and visitors. Development initiatives should be implemented to increase the walkability of the city, such as broadening sidewalks, increasing and improving lighting, and developing walking thoroughfares in the downtown corridor.





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