

**RICHMOND REGION TOURISM  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS' MEETING MINUTES  
SEPTEMBER 21 2023  
PLANRVA  
424 HULL STREET ROAD  
NOON**

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

- A. Welcome: Chair Angela Kelly-Wiecek called the meeting to order at 12:10 p.m., established a quorum and led the pledge of allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. Chair Kelly-Wiecek welcomed the group and introduced new staff members Danielle Fitz-Hugh, Vice President of Community Relations and Grantland Steele, Administrative Coordinator. Chair Kelly-Wiecek also introduced Ms. Martha Shickle, Executive Director of PlanRVA, who welcomed the group to the facility. PlanRVA's location in the rapidly growing Manchester neighborhood is symbolic of effective urban land-use development.
- B. **MOTION Minutes**: The minutes from the July 13<sup>th</sup> meeting were reviewed. Mr. Jim Holland made a motion to accept the minutes which were seconded by Ms. Nancy Thomas. The vote passed.

**II. NEW BUSINESS:**

- A. Staff Recognition: Chair Kelly-Wiecek recognized Toni Bastian on her 20-year anniversary with Richmond Region Tourism. Ms. Bastian was presented with a plaque, and it was noted that she started her career with Richmond Region Tourism as an intern.
- B. President's Report: Mr. Jack Berry gave a personnel update that included announcing the new hires of Danielle Fitz-Hugh, Vice President of Community Relations and Grantland Steele, Administrative Coordinator. Liana Acevedo was promoted to Director of Destination Services, Morgan Stanley was promoted to Sports & Events Specialist, Ashleigh Wilson joined the team as a sports intern from VCU Center for Sport Leadership. Our Public Relations Manager, Katie Potter left on September 15<sup>th</sup> as she relocated to Maryland. Currently we have three openings for the positions of Tourism Insights Analyst, Sports Events Manager and Public Relations Manager.
- C. Financial Update: Director of Finance, Mike Kerr, presented a financial update. Actual and YTD earnings through June 2023 were presented and reviewed. RRT (Richmond Region Tourism) is partnering with a new auditor, Harris, Hardy & Johnstone P.C. The financials are unaudited and in draft form. The year ended with savings. Expenses were projected at \$8.15 million, with the board approving the use of \$2.85 million in reserves to offset expenses. Draft actuals including the unplanned ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) income and expenses, resulted in reserve savings over plan for the fiscal year of \$892,417.
- D. Market Trends: Mr. Berry presented the market trends through July noting a little softening for July 2023 compared to July 2022, but still extraordinarily strong for central Virginia overall. Board Member Mayush Mehta of JP Hospitality announced record growth in Q1 and Q2. He is hopeful that TID (Tourism Improvement District) initiatives will help hotels bounce back from a slight dip in revenue. Board Member Renee Haltom, of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, shared that the economy has been strong because of consumer demand for experiences post-covid. There is little price resistance to hotel rates, according to Mehta, reaffirming the strong economy.
- E. **MOTION Composition Chart**: Mr. Berry reported that now that the Bylaws and Articles have been amended to include the new TID Seat and a Hotel Seat, that the Board should officially appoint Mr. John Cario to the Hotel Seat which is appointed by the Board of Directors. Mr.

Cario will begin his three-year term, September 21, 2023. Ms. Nancy Thomas made a motion to the appointment, seconded by Mr. Jim Holland. The vote passed.

F. **MOTION Tourism Improvement District**: Mr. Mayush Mehta, Vice Chair of the TID Governance Committee expressed thanks to the leadership of RRT for assisting with the creation of the TID Workplan and Budget for FY24. The Governance Committee has met several times over the summer and has worked hard to create the plan for the year. The plan, which was presented to the hotels on September 13<sup>th</sup> was distributed to the Board. Mr. Tom Loftus, Vice President of Marketing reviewed the marketing objectives for the plan which included:

- Drive Hotel Occupancy and Revenue
- Target travel intenders 12 months a year
- Drive overall travel but with a concentration on mid-week or difficult months such as December
- Raise awareness for the entire region

Through partnerships with Sojern, Adara and TripAdvisor, ads will be served year-round. RRT ads will be “always on”, which was not possible prior to the TID. Approximately \$1.7 million in TID funds will be used compared to only \$600,000 in advertising currently (excluding the ARPA Inspiration Campaign). A combination of short and long-term campaigns will be utilized, including Drive December, I Heart Radio Campaign and others. RRT will target the Black Traveler market, a \$104 billion industry. Mr. Loftus thanked Troy Bell from RIC for the great relationship between RRT and the airport, as well as the new direct flights from Breeze and Spirit Airlines.

Marketing will run a jurisdiction campaign in April where all RRT jurisdictions will be highlighted individually with \$50,000 each in funding. For public relations, there will be additional in-market activities. A TV series segment will be created. TikTok influencers have successfully gained hundreds of thousands in ad exposure. RRT will market without the use of ad agencies, saving upwards of \$300,000 to be reinvested in campaigns. Mr. Jim Holland asked to see more metrics, and results to track the progress of marketing dollars. He asked for proof of ROI outside of RRT income, to be available monthly. Chair Kelly-Wiecek asked if the data shows a trend towards last-minute or weekend trips to the region. Mr. Loftus confirmed that numbers are indeed trending towards last-minute travel. Approximately 56% of travelers researching online do not know where they want to travel, creating an excellent opportunity to suggest RVA. Chair Kelly-Wiecek suggested a Rainy Day in Richmond campaign to highlight all the indoor activities available on severe weather days. Mr. Jim Holland asked that local restaurants/food to be spotlighted in marketing efforts. In response, Mr. Loftus teased a mimosa campaign, which would be the first of its kind according to his research.

Ms. Toni Bastian presented on Group Tours in the absence of Mr. Matt Robinette, VP of Visitor Experience. The group tour motorcoach industry has recovered well from the pandemic. TID funds will expand the department’s ability to attend tradeshow and earn new business for the hotels. Ms. Bastian announced that Collette Tours (notable for their association with Wheel of Fortune) will work with RRT on an upcoming heritage bus tour. Data/metrics will help RRT find tour opportunities in advance. Tradeshow participation will expand to include smaller more targeted shows. The story of Richmond will be reimaged to

show off the area's unique vibe and Ms. Bastian shared that in-person meetings with sales partners are what seals the deal to win bids for the group tour market.

Ms. Jerrine Lee, VP of Sales, presented the sales plan along with Lauran Peoples, Director Sales Marketing & Business Development, via their participation through Zoom Video Conference. Ms. Lee reviewed RRT's primary and secondary markets. TID funds will allow sales to attend new tradeshows, increase booth size, and make up to 80 appointments with meeting planners over a three-day event. Sales plan to double their footprint in the sports sector and expand their presence with faith meeting planners. Sales leaders will attend IMEX, an exclusive event in Las Vegas, for the first time. The larger budget will help expand partnerships and access new programs such as AMPs, CVENT, Conference Direct and Helms Briscoe.

Local initiatives such as RVA Champions and Meaningful Meetings will be re-energized. The Greater Richmond Partnership is targeting industry leaders to plan meetings in RVA and move their businesses to the area. Peoples shared that meeting planners are her primary target at tradeshows followed by influential leaders. The RVA sales pitch highlights the area's central location, top-notch convention center, powerful experiences, southern hospitality, and unique differentiators. HubSpot will help sales better engaged with new and existing clients, as well as profile meeting planners strategically. Digital Edge provides collaboration opportunities with other DMOs, target marketing, unique activations, and text-based campaigns (which has proven more successful than email). Sojern will be used for short-term awareness campaigns.

Mr. Jon Lugbill inquired about any promotional TID funding to help with existing events or re-occurring events such as the Striker's sporting events. Mr. Lugbill emphasized the importance of driving attendance to reoccurring "staple" events in the region and Ms. Lori Waran also echoed those sentiments. Ms. O'Donnell said this will be a topic for the TID Governance Committee to address and will be brought to their attention at their next monthly meeting. Chair Kelly-Wiecek stated that adding dollar figures to the Workplan and PowerPoint would add clarity regarding the projects. Mr. Jim Holland made a motion to accept the TID Budget and Workplan, seconded by Mr. Pat Collins. The vote passed.

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

- A. Inspiration Campaign: Mr. Tom Loftus updated the Board on the progress to date for the Inspiration Campaign and noted that both ad performance and social media performance are going extremely well. Fly market impressions are outperforming drive markets. The Beer Trail ad video was shown and well received by the Board.
- B. Other New Business: Katherine O'Donnell reminded the Board of the upcoming Board Retreat to be held November 16<sup>th</sup> at the new Henrico Sports & Events Center beginning at 11:00 a.m. Bill Geist with DMO Proz will lead the discussion. The Tourism Master Plan will be discussed, and the group will determine RRT's next main priorities. A survey will be sent out to the Board to generate ideas and feedback.
- C. Roundtable Announcements: The floor was open to roundtable announcements. Topics included:
  - RIC record month in August
  - Fall Line Trail
  - U.S (United States). 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in July 2026

- Chesterfield County to host Copa Talento July 2024, a large youth soccer event
- Henrico Sports & Events Center grand opening October 4<sup>th</sup>
- InUnison conducting state and local research to assess consumer confidence
- New hotel with JP Hospitality is underway in the Gaskins/Short Pump area
- Hanover Autumn Fest September 30<sup>th</sup> at Hanover Tavern
- Valor Awards December 5<sup>th</sup>
- NASCAR date changes coming

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 1:33 p.m.

Attendees:

Pat Collins, TowneBank  
 Renee Haltom, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond  
 Jim Holland, Chesterfield County  
 Angela Kelly-Wiecek, Hanover County  
 Jon Lugbill, Sports Backers  
 Mayush Mehta, JP Hospitality  
 Danielle Ripperton, Children's Museum of Richmond  
 Nancy Thomas, Retail Merchants Association  
 Lori Waran, Richmond Raceway

Guests Present

Martha Shickle, PlanRVA  
 Dawn Miller, Henrico County  
 Tara Worden, City of Richmond  
 J.C. Poma, Chesterfield County  
 Karen Epps, Colonial Heights  
 Troy Bell, Capital Region Airport Commission

Staff Present

Jack Berry  
 Michelle Lovatt via Zoom  
 Katherine O'Donnell  
 Jerrine Lee via Zoom  
 Toni Bastian  
 Tom Loftus  
 Mike Kerr  
 Grantland Steele  
 Danielle Fitz-Hugh  
 Lauran Peoples via Zoom

Absent:

Kathy Abbott, Town of Ashland  
 Neil Amin, Shamin Hotels  
 Brian Anderson, ChamberRVA  
 Bridgette Bywater, Kings Dominion  
 John Cario, Richmond Hilton Downtown  
 Paulin Cheatham, Dominion Energy  
 Greg Kochuba, Colonial Heights  
 Michael Lindsey, Lindsey Food Group  
 Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corp  
 Perry Miller, Capital Region Airport Commission  
 Patricia Paige, New Kent County  
 Todd "Parney" Parnell, Richmond Flying Squirrels  
 Ellen Robertson, City of Richmond  
 Dan Schmitt, Henrico County  
 Lisa Sims, Venture Richmond  
 Jennifer Wakefield, Greater Richmond Partnership