

**Washington Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, January 15th, 2024,
Washington Civic Center
*Minutes***

ATTENDEES

Andrew Kuhn

Mayor Donald Sadler

Bobby Clark*

Paula Stephenson

Charlotte Stubbs

Renee Moore*^

Fred O. Watkins III* (Chair)

Stacy Jesso

Jayne Meisell

Tammy Swindell

John Jesso

Tom Richardson*^

Linda Harrington*

Wanda Geisen* (Treasurer)

Manfred Alligood* (Vice Chair)

* Board Members

*^Sign Interpreter

Absent: *Anthony Tyre & Dee Patel*

CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Fred Watkins III called the meeting to order at 12:01 pm. Wanda motioned to adopt the agenda; Bobby seconded the motion, and the agenda was adopted. Manfred motioned to approve the December meeting minutes; Linda seconded, and the minutes were approved.

TOURISM PARTNER GUEST SPEAKER

Jayne Meisell and Stacy Jesso from the Beaufort County Arts Council (BCAC) introduced themselves to the WTDA board at the Historic Turnage Theatre. Stacy expressed that the Arts Council has begun to stray from its mission of serving the arts community. She emphasized that the Council aims to focus more on community events and less on large acts or performances that require significant funding. She also mentioned that to be successful as an arts council, they cannot afford to keep the Turnage Theatre open. Some options include shutting it down, selling it, or establishing a partnership for the Theatre. They presented to the WTDA board three proposals, which included:

- gifting the Theatre to the City
- gifting the Theatre to the City, BCAC manages the Theatre
- BCAC retains ownership of the Theatre after significant financial investment from the City

Fred asked about the theatre's structural soundness following the roof repairs made years ago. Stacy responded that while the building is stabilized, more repairs are still needed.

Charlotte asked Jayne and Stacy about the ideal scenario for the BCAC. They mentioned that they would like the city to manage the building and take care of daily operations, such as cleaning and maintenance, while allowing the BCAC to conduct community events inside.

Linda inquired whether the BCAC has attempted to collaborate with ECU. Jayne and Stacy mentioned that they are currently working with ECU on several projects, including the upcoming performance of the Green BLook play by the ECU School of Dance and Theatre. They also expressed a desire for the BCAC to concentrate more on forming partnerships with other communities and leaders.

Stacy and Jayne thanked the WTDA board for approving their grant application of \$5,000 for the Green Book Project. (More details in “Old Business.”)

VISITOR CENTER UPDATE:

Catherine could not attend the meeting but updated the TDA Director, Paula Stephenson, on the latest happenings at the Visitor Center. The update mentioned that the visitors center experienced attendance numbers similar to previous years despite the three-month relocation to the Daily News during renovations.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Treasurer’s Report:

Tammy Swindell, the Director of Administrative Services for the City of Washington, presented the December finance report. Year-to-date expenses are slightly under budget. Although revenue appears to lag, this is primarily due to occupancy taxes, which often run behind schedule. While occupancy taxes are beginning to trend downward, this is typical for the winter season; however, they still exceed the budgeted amount.

Manfred motioned to accept the Treasurer’s report; Linda seconded, and the report was approved.

Civic Center Report:

Charlotte Stubbs, the Venue and Event Manager, reviewed the report. 2026 is quickly becoming booked, with 33 wedding packages and nonprofit events booked. The remaining dates for 2026 have been shared through social channels. Charlotte also discussed year-end numbers, including bookings, social events, and other data related to the civic center. Charlotte updated the board on a few suite updates to make it more welcoming for bridal parties.

Bobby motioned to accept the Civic Center report; Linda seconded, and the report was approved.

Directors Report:

The Tourism Development Director, Paula Stephenson, presented the director's report. During her presentation, she highlighted her previous blogs published on our website and WRAL's "Hometown Carolina." Paula then reviewed metrics from social media, newsletters, and our website. She also showcased a few community mentions from other digital creators. She mentioned the WTDA is in a 250th America Celebration committee and has started the grant writing process for the 2025/2026 heritage days.

Wanda motioned to accept the Director's report; Linda seconded, and the report was approved.

ONGOING BUSINESS

Next Tourism Partner Guest

John Jesso, the director of the Washington Harbor District Alliance, is scheduled for February.

Setting Objectives from Strategic Plan

The board wanted to table the Strategic Plan objectives until Placer A.I. is in place.

OLD BUSINESS

Resource Grant Request (Vote)

The board decided to table the vote for the next meeting.

Reserve Fund

As requested during last December's meeting, Tammy provided the WTDA board with an overview of their reserve fund balance. She averaged the data in the previous four years

due to the new Tyler system, which only records information back to 2020. Tammy highlighted that a healthy reserve fund balance should be around 45%, as this would ensure sufficient funds are available for emergencies, such as pandemics or natural disasters, to cover essential expenses if the WTDA and Civic Center need to suspend operations. Currently, the WTDA's reserve fund stands at 100%.

Wanda asked about the exact amount needed for emergencies. Tammy explained that these figures can change over time and are not fixed. Based on the current fiscal year's data, a reasonable estimate for emergency funds would be \$250,000; however, this amount may vary by the start of the new year. We must review our current expenditures, as they may increase or decrease. This estimate is based on actual spending, which won't be fully known until the year ends. Tammy highly recommends tracking expenditures monthly rather than relying on a set figure.

The Board decided to table a vote on the amount of months for the next meeting in February.

Washington History Museum

There are no current updates besides the WTDA and HPOW working together to start a move on swapping locations.

NEW BUSINESS

The Green Book Project (Grant)

During the week of January 6th, Paula emailed the WTDA board to vote on a grant application submitted by the BCAC for their upcoming Green Book Project on February 7th- 9th. The application was approved, with five members voting in favor: Bobby, Fred, Linda, Manfred, and Wanda.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION AND PUBLIC COMMENT

N/A

ADJOURN

Manfred motioned to adjourn the meeting; Wanda seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.

The next board meeting is scheduled for noon on February 19th, 2025, at the Washington Civic Center Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Kuhn

Marketing & Outreach Coordinator

Washington Tourism Development Authority