

**Washington Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, February 26th, 2025,
Washington Civic Center
*Minutes***

ATTENDEES

Andrew Kuhn

Linda Harrington*

Anthony Tyre* (City Council Liason)

Manfred Alligood* (Vice Chair)

Bobby Clark*

Paula Stephenson

Charlotte Stubbs

Renee Moore*^

Fred O. Watkins III* (Chair)

Tom Richardson*^

Wanda Geisen* (Treasurer)

* Board Members

*^Sign Interpreter

Absent: *Dee Patel*

CALL TO ORDER:

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

VISITOR CENTER UPDATE:

Catherine could not attend the meeting but updated the TDA Director, Paula Stephenson, on the latest happenings at the Visitor Center. January was a down month, but that is

typical for this time of year. However, the Visitor Center did see an increase in visits compared to 2024.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Treasurer's Report:

Tammy Swindell, the Director of Administrative Services for the City of Washington, could not attend the meeting. Paula and Charlotte went over the January finance report for the board. Year-to-date expenses are slightly under budget. Occupancy Taxes are still above the budget amount and the previous year.

Fred expressed how the financial report can confuse some who may not know basic accounting or income/expense reports.

Wanda 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 and discussed the outlook for 2026. So far, 40 events have been booked, which include 5 weddings, 18 meetings, and 17 nonprofit events. The civic center is also undergoing several facility updates, including new lighting in the rooms and bathroom partitions. Charlotte's office will have updated photos for clients to showcase the venue's potential. Additionally, Charlotte discussed year-end numbers related to bookings, social events, and other civic center data.

Bobby Clark asked whether Charlotte personally accompanies clients during walkthroughs at the Civic Center and if she collects their contact information during these visits.

Charlotte confirmed that she does walk with clients and collects their contact information when they first reach out. She then sends a pricing guide for the space they are interested in touring. During the walkthrough, she addresses how their event or wedding might fit within the civic center. She highlights pictures to demonstrate the venue's full potential if they show interest. After the walkthrough, Charlotte informs potential clients that they can fill out the contract online if they are interested. She follows up with them a few days later, giving them time to discuss their options with friends and family.

Linda motioned to accept the Civic Center report; Manfred 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.

Paula informed the board that she attended a Juneteenth meeting earlier this month and was asked to discuss a potential sponsorship for the event. She noted that while the WTDA may not typically sponsor community events, there is a human interest aspect to consider. Visitors appreciate knowing that the town supports its local businesses and community. It's important to look at because it adds a lot about the community's personality. Anthony Tyre and Paula discussed what the event will have in 2026 with the board.

Wanda then asked if members of the Juneteenth organizing committee could present their application to the board in order to comply with WTDA funding protocols.

Anthony Tyre asked about targeting locations with Facebook ads, specifically mentioning he was in New Bern and discussing Washington, NC. A few people were unfamiliar with Washington.

Andrew pointed out that they typically focus on a radius that covers multiple cities. The most targeted areas include Richmond, VA; Suffolk, VA; the Triangle region in NC; Greenville, NC; and Charlotte, NC. When targeting those areas, they use a 30-mile radius to cover most of the region. Depending on the ad, they may switch to other cities and towns to target a different demographic.

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

ONGOING BUSINESS

HR Evaluation Staus/Timeline

Puala's anniversary date with the WTDA board is March 27, 2025. The board discussed the process for evaluating her performance and who would be responsible for it. Paula mentioned that she sent a packet to the board three weeks ago. They requested that Paula reach out to HR to determine the deadline for her evaluation review.

Arts Council Summary/Discussion

The WTDA board wanted Paula to provide an update on her recent discussion with the Arts Council. Paula mentioned that she spoke with Deborah Torrance from the Turnage Theater about upcoming events the Arts Council may have and possible funding opportunities for the WTDA Board.

Some potential "Heads in Beds" events include the Doctors Band in the spring, Music in the Park during spring and summer, bringing back the Wildlife Arts Festival in the fall, and hosting the NC Symphony Orchestra in Washington in the spring of 2026. The total cost for these events is estimated to be around \$80,000.

Paula indicated that the Arts Council plans to approach the WTDA Board and is working on grant applications. Torrence would prefer to present to the board in April.

Next Tourism Partner Guest

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

OLD BUSINESS

Resource Grant Request (Vote)

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

Reserve Fund (Vote)

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

Washington History Museum

Paula and Andrew mentioned they have started to make their move to the Peterson Building (Senior Center). They'll soon go through the in-between storage area to finish the move.

NEW BUSINESS

Audit Contract (Vote)

Wanda motioned to approve the audit contract with Martin Starnes & Associates; Manfred seconded the motion. The contract was signed by the WTDA Chairperson, Fred Watkins.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION AND PUBLIC COMMENT

N/A

ADJOURN

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Kuhn

Marketing & Outreach Coordinator

Washington Tourism Development Authority