

**Washington Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, March 19th, 2025,
Washington Civic Center
*Minutes***

ATTENDEES

Abigail Cabrera

John Jesso

Andrew Kuhn

Linda Harrington*

Anthony Tyre* (City Council Liason)

Manfred Alligood* (Vice Chair)

Bobby Clark*

Paula Stephenson

Catherine Glover

Renee Moore*^

Charlotte Stubbs

Sarah Godley

Donald Sadler (Mayor)

Tammy Swindell

Fred O. Watkins III* (Chair)

Tom Richardson*^

Henry Capogna

* Board Members

*^Sign Interpreter

Absent: *Dee Patel & Wanda Geisen*

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. Manfred motioned to approve the February meeting minutes; Linda seconded, and the minutes were approved.

TOURISM PARTNER GUEST SPEAKER (JOHN JESSO):

John Jesso, the director of the Washington Harbor District Alliance (WHDA), was the guest speaker at the March meeting. He discussed the changes the WHDA is implementing in its branding and marketing efforts. The downtown organization aims to act as an economic developer for the area, focusing on business retention and recruitment. Jesso also emphasized the importance of collaborating more closely with other organizations downtown, such as the WTDA and the Chamber of Commerce. He provided updates on the Harbor District market, including news about new businesses, such as Val's Baked Goods, opening in the area.

Linda inquired about what we are doing regarding the vacant spots downtown and our plans to encourage investment in the area. Jesso mentioned the need to be more deliberate in recruiting and emphasized that Washington is open for business. However, the biggest challenge lies in the negotiations between business owners and landlords. Small businesses are eager to set up in Washington, but the challenge is making it affordable to remain downtown.

City Council Liaison Anthony Tyre inquired how the WTDA could support the WHDA. John Jesso responded by stating that for most tourism efforts, a vibrant downtown area serves as the primary draw for visitors, encouraging them to stay in local accommodations and dine at local restaurants. He noted that the WHDA and WTDA have improved their relationship and begun collaborating more effectively.

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION GRANT PRESENTATION:

Henry Capogna, from the Human Relations Council, presented the Juneteenth Celebration Grant application. This will be the 4th year of the celebration, and will happen on June 21st and 22nd. He noted that Eastern North Carolina has only eight Juneteenth celebrations, with Washington being the only city to host a two-day festival. This year's events will feature a parade starting at Stewart Parkway and returning to Beebe Park. The

celebrations will include contests for Little Miss and Mister Juneteenth and performances by gospel bands from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Florida. The event has attracted an increasingly diverse crowd as people come to Washington to learn about Black history. It is open to all community groups to join in learning, connecting, and enjoying fellowship throughout the weekend.

Mayor Donald Sadler mentioned a gospel band he met while in Myrtle Beach. He talked about one of the band members whose mother lives in Washington and expressed excitement about performing for their hometown.

Linda asked if any signs would highlight the historic Black-owned businesses along 2nd and 3rd Streets, which used to be a vibrant business district. Anthony responded that a trifold was created in the first year, highlighting the area's businesses and homes. He explained that each trifold tells its own story, showcasing the buildings' rich history.

(Vote on page 7)

42ND ANNUAL SUMMER FESTIVAL GRANT PRESENTATION:

Catherine Glover, the Executive Director of the Washington Beaufort County Chamber of Commerce (WBCC), presented the grant application for the 42nd Annual Summer Festival. She noted that the costs for TV and print advertisements have already been covered. The WBCC is requesting \$2,000 to help fund radio advertisements. Mae Rodgers will handle the binding and organize a gospel event on Friday night. The \$2,000 will help promote her event and reach a broader audience through the radio ads.

Catherine also mentioned that the festival would include a boat show, contests, live music on both nights, and carnival rides. She stated that they are seeking new ideas and potential changes to continue growing the event for the 42nd Annual Summer Festival.

(Vote on page 7)

VISITOR CENTER UPDATE:

Catherine Glover noted that the visitor center is becoming busier with the arrival of spring. Visitor numbers are up compared to last year, but this increase is somewhat misleading as they were housed in the daily news last year. Additionally, they have been collecting visitors' email addresses and other information for marketing purposes. Some visitors express hesitation in sharing their information.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS:

Treasurer's Report:

Tammy Swindell, the Director of Administrative Services for the City of Washington, presented the January finance report to the board. Year-to-date expenses are slightly under budget. Occupancy taxes are above the budgeted amount and the previous year's figures. So far, occupancy taxes have reached 70% of the budgeted \$420,000, even though we are only 59% through the year.

Bobby 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, 42 events have been booked, which include 8 weddings, 34 other events (Non profit fundraisers, high school reunions, proms, corporate meetings, etc.) She went over available Fridays and Saturdays for people to book in 2026. Charlotte then discussed year-end numbers related to bookings, social events, and other civic center data.

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

Directors Report:

Paula Stephenson, the Tourism Development Director, presented the director's report. In her presentation, she highlighted her previous blog posts published on our website and WRAL's "Hometown Carolina." Paula reviewed metrics from our social media platforms, newsletters, and website. She also discussed the community meetings she has attended, including the Committee of 100, Juneteenth, and the Crab Drop event.

Catherine Glover from the Washington Chamber of Commerce noted that at least 25 businesses want crab sculptures similar to those in downtown areas. A local company, which began with the Committee of 100, has scanned the existing crab sculptures and can produce replicas in any size. Additionally, they have designed bear sculptures in New Bern and several other nearby areas. Catherine mentioned everything is early in the process.

Bobby inquired about some audience locations for the WTDA newsletter, including California. Andrew explained that the newsletter attracts audiences through our website and collaborative marketing efforts, such as an email push with Our State Magazine in 2021.

Manfred motioned to accept the Director's report; Bobby seconded, and the report was approved.

ONGOING BUSINESS**April Tourism Partner Guest:**

April's guest speaker will be Debra Torrence, Director of the Beaufort County Arts Council.

Emergency Reserve (Vote):

Tabled for next meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

Resource Grant Request (Vote)

After a group discussion, the board decided to stick with the current Grant Application. Manfred motioned to deny the new Resource Grant Request document, and Manfred seconded. The Resource Grant Request was denied.

NEW BUSINESS

Crabs: An Arts Council Cooperative Project:

Linda proposed creating more photo opportunities for visitors to enhance their experience. One idea is to place crab cutouts around the waterfront, allowing families to stick their faces through the cutouts for fun pictures. She suggested that the WTDA use a grant to provide the materials needed for painting and crafting the crabs. Additionally, there could be a contest for the best designs, culminating in selecting a local artist to create a painting.

The board mentioned possibly having a larger cutout that families could sign on the back. However, concerns were raised about some individuals potentially being too "creative" and including profanity on the back.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION AND PUBLIC COMMENT

While reviewing the grant applications submitted, the board reviewed changes to the current grant document. The board recommended the following changes:

- The current year added to the title of the document.
- In Application Specifications & Guidelines, the following was crossed out:
 - 1. *"from areas more than 100 miles distant... and during times other than peak tourism season."*
 - 2. *"Projects performed under this program must be totally and completely for travel promotions and may not contain or include any material or information not strictly related to destination marketing"*

The revised document will be reviewed and voted on at the next meeting.

GRANT APPLICATIONS (Vote):

City Council Liaison Anthony Tyre asked if the applicants could leave the room so that the board members wouldn't feel uneasy about their votes in front of them.

Juneteenth Celebration:

City Council Liaison Anthony Tyre recused his vote due to a conflict of interest.

Manfred motioned to approve the \$5,000 amount requested, Bobby seconded. All in favor, the Juneteenth Celebration grant application was approved.

42nd Annual Summer Festival:

Linda motioned to approve the \$2,000 amount requested, and Manfred seconded. All in favor, the 42nd Annual Summer Festival grant application was approved.

ADJOURN

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

The next board meeting is scheduled for noon on April 16th, 2025, at the Washington Civic Center Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Kuhn

Marketing & Outreach Coordinator

Washington Tourism Development Authority

CLOSED SESSION:

WTDA Director's Board Evaluation. City Council Liason Anthony Tyre recused his input due to a conflict of interest since Paula Stephenson is a city employee.