

**Washington Tourism Development Authority  
Board of Directors Meeting  
Wednesday, May 21st, 2025,  
Police Station Conference Room  
*Minutes***

**ATTENDEES**

|                                      |                                |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Adam Waters                          | Jonathan Russell               |
| Andrew Kuhn                          | Linda Harrington*              |
| Anthony Tyre* (City Council Liaison) | Manfred Alligood* (Vice Chair) |
| Billie Wilson                        | Paula Stephenson               |
| Bobby Clark*                         | Robin McKeithan                |
| Charlotte Stubbs                     | Renee Moore*^                  |
| Donald Sadler (Mayor)                | Tammy Swindell                 |
| Ellen Brabo                          | Tom Richardson*^               |
| Franz Holscher                       | Wanda Geisen* (Treasurer)      |
| Fred O. Watkins III* (Chair)         | Zach Settewongse               |
| John Butler                          |                                |

\* 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; Liaison Anthony Tyre seconded the motion, and the agenda was

adopted. Manfred motioned to approve the April meeting minutes; Wanda seconded, and the minutes were approved.

## **NEW YEAR'S EVE CRAB DROP GRANT PRESENTATION:**

Billie Wilson and Zach Settewongse, representatives of the Crab Drop Committee, presented their New Year's Eve Crab Drop Grant Application to the WTDA. Billie noted that there has been a lack of downtown events in Washington on New Year's Eve. A group on Facebook collaborated to discuss ideas for a potential crab drop in Washington. She mentioned that they presented the idea to the city council in January 2025, where it received positive feedback. Since then, a committee was formed to begin planning a New Year's Eve Crab Drop for Washington.

The event is designed to be family-friendly, with two crab drops scheduled throughout the day. The first drop will take place at 8 PM at Festival Park, making it suitable for families with younger children who may not be able to stay out late. The second drop will occur at midnight, marking the start of the New Year near the downtown businesses that serve alcohol.

The event will feature activities such as glow-in-the-dark mini golf, food trucks, and gospel singers performing early in the evening. Later in the night, a DJ will take over to keep the party going. A large crab, measuring 8 feet in diameter, is being constructed locally at no charge to the committee. This crab will be dropped from the top of a fire truck ladder. Zach mentioned that schools are planning to participate in the event by providing hot chocolate throughout the night.

Billie and Zach reviewed the requested funding amount and the budget for the Crab Drop event. They have applied for \$5,000 in grant funding from the WTDA, while the current budget stands at \$5,850. As a result, some cuts had to be made, including the laser light show, which had a high upfront cost. Billie stated that they plan to host the laser light

show next year and will use leftover sponsorship funds to cover the upfront costs then. They are also still seeking additional funding from downtown businesses.

Members of the WTDA Board and community members inquired about insurance and whether the group operates as a committee. Billie and Zach clarified that they are not a committee and do not currently have any insurance. It was strongly recommended that they register as an LLC to obtain insurance for the event.

(Discussion on page 7)

### **WTDA GUEST SPEAKER: ADAM WATERS (Tar Pamlico Trolley):**

Adam Waters, owner of the Tar Pamlico Trolley, presented to the board. He worked for 31 years with the City of Washington and retired three years ago. The idea for the Tar Pamlico Trolley originated when he and Jonathan were conducting a parking lot study with some graduate students. When Jonathan asked Adam what he planned to do after retirement, Adam jokingly replied, "Buy a golf cart and shuttle people around from parking lots to downtown."

Three years later, the Tar Pamlico Trolley, a golf cart shuttle that transports visitors from distant parking lots to their desired destinations, started. The trolley operates from Thursday to Saturday, with downtime typically occurring from January to March during the colder months. Adam mentioned that while they try to expand beyond downtown, most of the focus remains in the downtown area. Weddings and festivals are the busiest times for the trolley service. Visitors can call the trolley if they need to be picked up. Adam mentioned he would place signs at pickup locations so people can reach out if a pickup is required.

Adam stated that this is a money-making project. He pays the drivers \$10 per hour, and they keep half of the tips they receive. The other half of the tips contribute to covering the drivers' wages. Additionally, the advertisement above the trolley helps cover the cost of insurance.

Jonathan noted that it might be in the interest of the TDA to assist with sponsorships, as this project is neither a fully established business nor a free taxi service. He emphasized that the Tar Pamlico Trolley is a valuable resource, particularly in light of online complaints about a lack of parking. For individuals with mobility issues, the trolley can provide essential transportation to their desired destinations more easily.

## **VISITOR CENTER UPDATE:**

Catherine Glover could not attend the meeting. Robin McKeithan, the assistant director of the chamber, was in her place.

Robin mentioned that there were over 1,500 visitors in April. She also provided the board with some visitor information, including the countries from which visitors were coming and the reasons for their visits.

She went on to talk about the upcoming 42nd Annual Washington Summer Festival happening June 13th & June 14th.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS:**

### **Directors Report:**

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

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

**Treasurer's Report:**

Tammy Swindell, the Director of Administrative Services for the City of Washington, presented the March finance report to the board. She mentioned that the chamber contract may appear to have an overpayment, but since it is paid quarterly and in advance, the difference will even out next month. She also reported that the occupancy taxes collected over the past nine months have resulted in an increase of almost \$68,000 for the year. Tammy expressed confidence that the occupancy tax will continue to remain strong for the rest of the year.

John Butler, the owner of the Elmwood, shared his thoughts on occupancy taxes for bed and breakfasts and similar businesses. He noted that, while he cannot speak for his colleagues, many have observed a decrease in reservations. He mentioned they had two open rooms for Memorial Day weekend, a time that is typically fully booked, and raised concerns that occupancy numbers may decline throughout the busy season.

Manfred motioned to accept the Treasure's report; Bobby 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, 62 events have been booked, including 13 weddings and 49 other events (Nonprofit fundraisers, high school reunions, proms, corporate meetings, etc.). She went over available Fridays and Saturdays for people to book in 2026.

Linda asked if Charlotte could provide a comparison of rentals for this year versus last year.

Charlotte then reviewed the updates for the facility. The first improvement addressed was the flooring, which involved filling in holes, sanding, and staining all the wood surfaces in

the ballroom, stage, and backstage areas. Additionally, the concrete deck outside was undergoing restoration, which included removing chipped paint and sealing the concrete.

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

## **INFORMAL DISCUSSION AND PUBLIC COMMENT:**

The HPOW grant application was withdrawn because the building owner wanted a different mural for their property. However, HPOW has expressed continued interest in placing a mural on another downtown building.

Ellen Brabo and John Butler, owners of a bed and breakfast, raised concerns regarding zoning codes that affect bed and breakfasts in the town. After discussing their problems, Mayor Donald Sadler stated that the matter should be brought to the City Council if there are issues related to zoning and codes.

Franz Holscher, the City Attorney, presented the proposed lease contract between the Civic Center and the City of Washington to the WTDA board. The current lease is set to expire on June 30, 2025. Franz explained that the new lease is similar to the previous one, but it has changed from a three-year lease to a one-year lease. The reason for this change is that a three-year lease would require a publication, which incurs costs. Additionally, the statute mandates that this publication must occur within 30 days before the next city council meeting. He noted that the WTDA board could opt for a three-year lease next year, but a one-year lease will help avoid the publication notice and associated expenses.

The WTDA board decided to take a recess to discuss and review the WTDA budget for the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the civic center contract as well as the New Year's Eve Crab Drop grant application. Liaison Anthony Tyre made a motion to recess the meeting, and Linda seconded. The meeting will reconvene **on June 4th** at the Washington Civic Center Conference Room at noon.

## **MEETING RECESSED:**

Chairman Fred Watkins III called the meeting to order at 12:01 pm.

## **WTDA PROPOSED BUDGET 2025-2026 FY (Vote):**

The WTDA board reviewed the proposed WTDA budget for the 2025 - 2026 fiscal year. Linda asked if, in the future, a year-over-year comparison could be provided to compare the proposed budget with the current fiscal year's budget, allowing for an assessment of the changes. She also requested that the budget be presented to the WTDA board more formally. The WTDA Director, Paula Stephenson, mentioned that the proposed format is structured according to the requirements of the City's Finance Office for inputting budgets. Paula further stated that she could reach out to the Finance department to obtain a year-over-year comparison for the board.

Linda motioned to accept the WTDA Proposed Budget; Bobby seconded, and the budget was approved.

## **Civic Center/City of Washington Lease (Vote):**

The WTDA board discussed the proposed civic center lease presented by the city on May 21st. They reviewed some of the changes, including the lease term. The board had no objections to the lease/changes.

Manfred motioned to accept the WTDA Proposed Budget; Linda seconded, and the budget was approved.

## **GRANT APPLICATIONS (Vote):**

### **New Year's Eve Crab Drop Grant Application (vote)**

Due to Liaison Anthony Tyre being on the Crab Drop Committee he recused himself from voting on the New Year's Eve Crab Drop grant application.

The WTDA board reviewed the New Year's Eve Crab Drop Grant Application presented on May 21, 2025. Fred expressed his belief that the event has potential and would be great for Washington. However, he questioned how many people would attend Washington's New Year's Eve event compared to others, such as Greenville or New Bern.

Wanda noted that the grant funding is intended as a reimbursement grant and should be used for advertising and marketing purposes related to the event. She acknowledged that the grant is designed to help establish events, but she expressed her doubts about whether people would want to go out at midnight and be outside in the cold. Wanda then asked if Placer.AI could provide information comparing New Year's Eve to other events, such as the Fourth of July or Light Up the City (Christmas).

Bobby mentioned that the event needs more activities for people to come out and enjoy themselves. And seek more sponsorship for the event.

Linda responded that people have more to do now compared to previous years, with more restaurants, shops, and bars opened up downtown. And the committee is starting small to try to grow.

The group inquired about whether hotel owners notice an increase in guests during Christmas and New Year's. Fred and Manfred responded that they typically do not see large crowds during that time of year. They added that guests who stay out late and choose to return to the hotel often engage in destructive behavior due to drinking, which can lead to damage to the property.

The board decided to hold off on the grant vote until they received more information about the event and analytics about visitor stays on New Year's Eve.

## **ADJOURN**

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

The next board meeting is scheduled for noon on June 18th, 2025, at the Washington Civic Center Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Kuhn

**Marketing & Outreach Coordinator**

Washington Tourism Development Authority