

**Washington Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, December 18th, 2024,
Washington Civic Center
*Minutes***

ATTENDEES

Andrew Kuhn	Donald Sadler (Mayor)
Anthony Tyre* (City Council Liaison)	Paula Stephenson
Bobby Clark*	Renee Moore*^
Charlotte Stubbs	Susan Squire
Fred O. Watkins III* (Chair)	Tammy Swindell
Jonathan Russel	Tom Richardson*^
Linda Harrington*	Wanda Geisen* (Treasurer)
Manfred Alligood* (Vice Chair)	

* Board Members

*^Sign Interpreter

CALL TO ORDER:

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

TOURISM PARTNER GUEST SPEAKER

Susan Squires from Economic Development addressed the WTDA board, explaining the concept of economic development, its significance, and how it functions. She discussed key partners involved, including the Committee of 100. Susan outlined the process of attracting new businesses and retaining existing ones. Additionally, she provided information on building reuse and the Rural Health Grant.

VISITOR CENTER UPDATE:

Catherine could not attend the meeting but updated the TDA Director, Paula Stephenson on the latest happening for 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 finance report for November. She noted that both accounts for revenue and expenses are trending positively, showing an improvement of \$99,000. Although occupancy taxes are beginning to trend downward, this is typical during winter. However, they still exceed the budgeted amount.

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

Civic Center Report:

Charlotte Stubbs, the Venue and Event Manager, reviewed the report. The year 2026 is quickly becoming booked with wedding packages and nonprofit events. A couple from Virginia has filled the available date in December 2025, which is expected to increase

occupancy taxes due to the wedding party and guests. Charlotte also discussed year-end numbers, including bookings, social events, and other data related to the civic center.

Wanda 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 mentioned she attended a North Carolina Travel Industry Association for a tourism leadership conference earlier in the month.

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

ONGOING BUSINESS

Next Tourism Partner Guest

Kelly with the Turnage Theatre is scheduled for January. John Jesso with the Washington Harbor District Alliance is scheduled for February.

WTDA Calendar updates

Paula mentioned that the Strategic Planning recap is ready and asked when the board could meet. The Board agreed to schedule it for January 6th, 2025, at 10:00 AM in the Civic Center Conference Room.

OLD BUSINESS

Vote on Budget Ordinance

Paula requested for a approval of the budget ordinance that was presented in detail last month. The request was to transfer funding from the fund balance to the appropriated accounts, which have experienced an increase in expenses.

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

Placer AI Update

Paula and Andrew presented an update on Placer AI to the board, outlining its features and how it will be utilized. This tool is particularly beneficial for the WTDA, as it provides insight into where visitors are coming from and where they are going. The data generated by the software will enable the WTDA staff to create more targeted digital advertisements, focusing on areas showing higher interest in Washington.

The contract is for one year for \$20,000 and will be covered under the WTDA's marketing and advertising budget. The City Council Liason, Anthony Tyre, expressed concerns about the amount, questioning whether the board should have a say since it is a significant sum. The board clarified that because the budget has already been approved, the Director and staff will utilize their expertise to allocate expenses according to their needs.

Reserve Fund

Wanda requested that at least six months' worth of funds be reserved in case of a pandemic, natural catastrophe, or similar emergencies to cover essential expenses if the WTDA had to suspend operations. She asked if Tammy could provide a figure based on the operating expenses from the last five years, which would come from the investments and be allocated to this emergency fund.

Tammy clarified that the Civic Center would be included in the fund since the WTDA manages the Civic Center. She stated that she would look into averaging the expenses over six months to determine the amount needed for the emergency fund.

New Resource Request

Wanda presented a new resource request form to the board for review and a vote. Fred suggested that the board should table their vote until the next meeting to allow more time for review since the document was first presented during the current meeting.

Washington History Museum

Jonathan Russel, the City Manager for the City of Washington, met with several Historic Port of Washington Project members to discuss the project's details. They are currently identifying what updates (flooring, painting, etc.) are needed in the WTDA offices to facilitate the move.

NEW BUSINESS

Amendment to By-Laws

Wanda presented documents and made a motion to the board to amend a section of the by-laws stating that the WTDA should only report quarterly on financial and year-end information. She proposed amending the reporting by-law to specify that any report submitted to the City Council or any other organization should be handled by the city's designated finance officer, Tammy Swindell, who is the authority's financial officer. Wanda expressed that she believes no one on the WTDA board could inform them as effectively as Tammy could.

Jonathan Russell pointed out to the board that, in all 12 city departments, the directors are expected to have a sufficient level of financial understanding to provide any necessary financial report.

After reviewing the documents, one email from Tyre to Paula was brought up, outlining potential questions he might ask during the December City Council meeting. He inquired if there were any concerns regarding what he had requested from Paula during the meeting and whether it required her to engage in a different level of accounting. He reiterated from his email that the same financial report provided by Tammy, which is presented to the WTDA board, is all Paula needs to present to the Council.

Wanda and Fred raised additional concerns about the unexpected questions posed to the Director during City Council meetings, which she felt unprepared for.

Anthony mentioned that the City Council would ask any director additional questions to ensure that all departments, including the WTDA, can be as transparent as possible. This is to provide informative details to the public about what is happening within the board and department. Although WTDA board meetings are public, City meetings have public attendance and are streamed live, allowing for greater visibility.

Linda emphasized that having Paula attend City Council meetings helps give the WTDA a visible presence in the community and provides an opportunity for her to inform the public about ongoing developments.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION AND PUBLIC COMMENT

N/A

ADJOURN

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

The next board meeting is scheduled for noon on January 15th, 2025, at the Washington Civic Center Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Kuhn

Marketing & Outreach Coordinator

Washington Tourism Development Authority