

**Washington Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
Wednesday, July 16th, 2025,
Washington Civic Center Conference Room
*Minutes***

ATTENDEES

Andrew Kuhn	Fred Watkins
Anthony Tyre* (City Council Liaison)	Glen Geisen
Antwan Horton (City Council)	Jonathan Russell
Blache Gibbs Tillis*	Paula Stephenson
Bobby Clark*	Paula McCullough*
Catherine Glover	Shante Masson*
Charlotte Stubbs	Stacy Jesso* (Chair)
Donald Sadler (Mayor)	Tammy Swindell
Ellen Brabo	Wanda Geisen* (Vice Chair/Treasurer)
Franz Holscher	

* WTDA Board Members

Absent: NONE

CALL TO ORDER:

WTDA Director Paula Stephenson called the meeting to order at 12:01 pm.

WELCOME NEW BOARD MEMBERS:

Oath of Office:

The WTDA had four board members whose terms expired. These members were:

- Dee Patel

- Fred Watkins
- Linda Harrington
- Manfred Alligood

The City of Washington City Council appointed four new board members on July 14, 2025. The selected new members were:

- Blache Gibbs Tillis
- Paula McCullough
- Shante Masson
- Stacy Jesso

WTDA Director Paula Stepheson welcomed all board members. Cynthia Bennet, the city clerk for the City of Washington, led the oath of office for the new board members. She then read the oath of office for the four new members. All of them agreed and signed the oath of office.

Appointment of Chair:

WTDA Director Paula Stephenson made a motion for nominations for the open position of WTDA chair. There were only two nominations:

- Bobby Clark nominated **Wanda Geisen**
- City Liaison Anthony Tyre nominated **Stacy Jesso**

Paula Stephenson then closed the floor for nominations and called for a vote.

Anthony Tyre then suggested that the board conduct their votes in a ballot format. Each board member would write down their chosen candidate and sign their name at the bottom.

New board member Blanche Gibbs Tillis asked if the nominees could provide their backgrounds, as most of the board members were unfamiliar with the current candidates.

After the nominees discussed their backgrounds and explained how they believe they will contribute to the WTDA, Paula Stephenson collected the votes and announced the results. The voting results were as follows:

- **Stacy Jesso:** 6 votes (*Anthony Tyre, Balance Tillis, Paula McCullough, Shante Mason, Stacy Jesso, Wanda Geisen*)
- **Wanda Geisen:** 1 vote (*Bobby Clark*)

Stacy Jesso was elected as the new Chair of the WTDA.

Appointment of Other Officers:

Newly elected WTDA Chair Stacy Jesso made a motion for nominations for the open position of WTDA Vice Chair. Bobby Clark made the only nomination for Vice Chair to Wanda Geisen. Clark stated that having someone who's had experience on the board would be beneficial for the WTDA. Stacy Jesso then closed the floor nomination.

Wanda asked if her role as Treasurer was still appropriate, given that she was the current Treasurer with the former board. City Attorney Franz Holscher explained that since this was the "Organizational Meeting," all positions for the WTDA would be open for a vote. Wanda mentioned that the bylaws state the Board Chair serves a one-year term, while the other positions, such as Vice Chair and Treasurer, serve two-year terms. Stacy then asked Wanda if she would prefer to continue as Treasurer or take on the role of Vice Chair, emphasizing that the board wanted her to be in a position where she could be most effective. Wanda accepted the position of Vice Chair.

Stacy then called for a vote on Wanda's nomination for the role of vice chair. The voting results were as follows:

In favor: 6 (*Balance Tillis, Bobby Clark, Paula McCullough, Shante Mason, Stacy Jesso, Wanda Geisen*)

Opposed: 1 (*Anthony Tyre*)

With Wanda Geisen being voted in as the WTDA Vice Chair, the position of Treasurer was left vacant. Stacy Jesso mentioned that since the Treasurer position had just opened and the board was not expecting a vote, she requested that they postpone filling the Treasurer role until the next meeting. This would allow other board members time to learn about the responsibilities associated with the position, and Wanda could discuss those responsibilities in more detail.

Stacy made a motion for Wanda to continue as Treasurer and to table the appointment of the position until the next meeting. All voted in favor.

Resolution of Legal Representation Issue:

City Council Liaison Anthony Tyre was made aware that someone is representing the WTDA as their legal counsel. He expressed that he has not seen any official vote taken to hire an attorney as a full-time representative of the WTDA, even though he has requested this information.

City Manager, Jonathan Russell, mentioned that the WTDA has not produced any formal minutes indicating that a vote took place. He stated that during each WTDA board meeting, the minutes are voted on and approved, thus becoming the official record for the organization. These minutes are then used during the annual audit to review contracts. According to invoices, the attorney began work in October 2024 at an hourly rate of \$475, which Johnathan suggested is excessive for the region. He also stated that the selection of the attorney seems somewhat arbitrary, as there was no procurement process and no solicitation of local or regional attorneys.

There was some discussion on whether or not the vote was left off the minutes. However, City Council Liaison Anthony Tyre pointed out that Andrew Kuhn, who takes the minutes, records the meetings and reflects the recordings in the minutes.

WTDA Chair Stacy Jesso and other WTDA board members discussed the possibility of appointing a secretary to take meeting minutes, which would help protect WTDA staff. WTDA Vice Chair Wanda Geisen discussed that the WTDA operates differently from the City. She mentioned the board doesn't review expenditures that come from the WTDA Director, Paula Stephenson. The WTDA board doesn't micromanage her or vote on individual contracts. Once the fiscal year budget is approved, Paula follows that budget line. If she were to go over the budget, Paula would then bring it to the WTDA board's attention, explain the reasoning, and the WTDA Board would then vote on a budget transfer.

Wanda went on to say that Article XVIII Section 2-483 (Powers & Duties) of the Code for the City of Washington states, "*The authority may contract with any person, firm or agency to assist in carrying out the purposes for which the tax proceeds levied by the act referred to in [section 2-481](#) may be expended.*" Wanda added that the WTDA was not out of compliance with the By-Laws or state statutes.

WTDA Board members Shante Masson and Paula McCullough asked about the previous WTDA board's decision to hire an attorney outside the City. Wanda mentioned that the City & WTDA are two separate legal entities. They wanted to review the grant application/process to ensure compliance with By-Laws and state statutes regarding their spending.

They went on to ask about the meetings with a few board members and the Director outside of the regular WTDA meetings held once a month. These meetings were brought to light due to invoices from the hired attorney detailing who was present at the outside meetings.

Former WTDA Board Chair Fred Watkins attended the meeting and was asked to discuss the WTDA's attorney contract spending. Fred noted that the previous grant application lacked a clear explanation of how the grant funding was intended to be used. The previous

WTDA board had questions regarding grant applications for events that would not result in bringing guests to hotels or Airbnbs. They aimed to clean the grant application form and sought the assistance of an attorney for this purpose. He mentioned a case with Currituck County TDA, where they spent money on non-tourism-related activities and ended up in a lawsuit. The previous WTDA board wanted to prevent similar mistakes with the restructuring of their grant application.

City Attorney Franz Holscher noted that the state statute does not require you to spend your money exclusively on something that you know will bring someone to stay in a hotel or Airbnb. He explained that the WTDA can decide to spend its money in that way. But they have the opportunity to spend money on other related ways, like capital-related expenditures.

Orientation:

Due to the meeting lasting longer than anticipated, the board wanted to hold off on orientation and reconvene at the next meeting. The UNC School of Government, which focuses on tourism, will come in to train the board at a later time.

ADJOURN

Stacy motioned to adjourn the meeting; Tyre seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.

The next board meeting is scheduled for noon on September 17th, 2025, at the Washington Civic Center Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrew Kuhn

Marketing & Outreach Coordinator

Washington Tourism Development Authority