

**Washington Tourism Development Authority
Board of Directors Meeting
Thursday, August 20th, 2026
Washington-Warren Airport
Minutes**

ATTENDEES

Abby Cabrera	Max Perrault (City Council Member)
Andrew Kuhn	Pam Anderson
Betsy Hester*	Paula McCullough*
Blanche Gibbs Tillis* (Secretary)	Sarah Godley
Erin Ruyle	Shont'e Mason* (Vice Chair)
Fred Watkins III	Stacy Jesso* (Chair)
Jeanne Harris (City' Ex-officio)	Susan Strickland* (Treasuer)
Jeffrey Beerer	

* WTDA Board Members

Absent: *City Council Liaison Joe Davis*

CALL TO ORDER:

WTDA Chair Stacy Jesso called the meeting to order. Stacy then proposed amending the agenda to add three items:

- Erin's Departure & Andrew
- Strategic Planning with James Attmo
- Tourism Ambassador Program

Betsy motioned to approve the amended agenda, and Paula seconded the motion. The amended agenda was adopted.

MINUTES APPROVAL:

Blanche motioned to approve the August 2026 meeting minutes. Betsy seconded, and the minutes were approved.

SPECIAL EVENTS GRANT PRESENTATION:

Hispanic Heritage: Color of our Culture:

Sarah Godley and Abby Cabrera with the City of Washington's Community Outreach Department presented their "Hispanic Heritage: Color of Our Culture" event to the board. Taking place on September 15, the family friendly Hispanic Heritage event is hosted by the City of Washington and celebrates the rich cultural traditions of the Latino community.

City Council Member Max Perrault asked whether the event would compete with the City's Hispanic Heritage: Colors of Our Culture event scheduled for October 3 and whether the City would provide funding for both events.

Sarah Godley and Abby Cabrera clarified that the City is solely organizing the "Hispanic Heritage: Colors of Our Culture" event, which has a different date, time, and location from the other event. The other event is being organized independently by private citizen Oscar Rodriguez and is separate from the City. They further explained that if the City were to consider providing funding or support for the event, the organizers would need to contact the appropriate City departments to discuss available resources and assistance.

The applicants requested \$1,000 to cover promotional materials, flyers, and digital advertising on Facebook.

Paula motioned to approve the grant application and increase the awarded amount to \$1,500. Shont'e seconded the motion. The grant application was approved, with an award of \$1,500.

NYE Crab Drop:

Jeffrey Beerer with the New Year's Eve Crab Drop Committee presented the event to the board. Taking place on December 30 in downtown Washington at Festival Park, the event provides families with an opportunity to celebrate and welcome the new year together.

The applicant requested \$2,500 to cover promotional materials, flyers, and digital advertising through social media.

Susan motioned to deny the grant application. Shont'e seconded the motion. The grant application was denied.

Smoke on the Water:

Pam Anderson with the Noon Rotary presented the "Smoke on the Water" grant application to the board. Taking place October 16 and 17, the event features a BBQ cooking competition, car show, and music festival, while also serving as a fundraiser for local nonprofit agencies.

The applicant requested \$2,500 to cover promotional materials, flyers, and digital advertising through social media.

Susan motioned to approve the grant application. Shont'e seconded the motion. The grant application was approved for \$2,500.

Washington on tap Brewfest:

Robin McKethan & Merlyin Crisp with the Washington-Beaufort Chamber of Commerce presented the "Washington on tap Brewfest" grant application to the board. Taking place September 25th, the event features local brews, live music and addition of arts & crafts vendors.

The applicant requested \$500 to cover promotional materials, flyers, and digital advertising through social media.

Susan motioned to approve the grant application. Shont'e seconded the motion. The grant application was approved for \$500

REPORTS:

Financial Report:

Tammy Swindell, the City of Washington's Ex-Officio Finance Officer, was unable to attend the meeting. Jeanne Harris presented the financial report on her behalf. She reviewed occupancy tax performance and the current budget overview for the WTDA.

Occupancy tax revenue for the 2025–2026 fiscal year was budgeted at \$485,000. Actual revenue totaled \$521,127, resulting in a positive year-end variance of \$36,127.

Shont'e motioned to approve the financial report. Susan seconded the motion. The financial report was approved.

Director's Report:

Erin Ruyle, the WTDA Executive Director, presented the WTDA Director's Report. She reviewed the organization's social media metrics and provided an update on the video shoot that took place on August 18 and 19. She also discussed upcoming influencer visits with NC Tripping, Bless Your Hearty Appetite, and Stays & Getaways.

Erin then announced to the board that she would be resigning from her position as WTDA Executive Director to pursue a new professional opportunity.

Shont'e motioned to approve the Director's Report. Susan seconded the motion. The Director's Report was approved.

OLD BUSINESS:

Staff Office Space

WTDA staff will relocate to the new office space at Havens Wharf, located at 409 W. Main Street, Suite 100, during the last week of August. The next board meeting will also be held at the new office location.

NEW BUSINESS:

First Bank Authorization

With Erin Ruyle's departure from the WTDA, the board discussed removing Erin Ruyle from the WTDA checking account and credit card and adding Andrew Kuhn as an

authorized user. The board also discussed authorizing Susan to serve as a second signatory for checks and invoices.

Betsy motioned to approve the authorizations. Shont'e seconded the motion. The authorizations were approved.

Erin's Departure & Andrew

The WTDA Board discussed having Andrew Kuhn serve as Interim Director until the Director position is filled.

Strategic Planning with James Amato

Stacy mentioned that she had discussions with James Amato of Catalyst Consultants about holding a strategic planning session for the WTDA Board in the future.

Tourism Ambassador Program

Stacy discussed the idea of developing a Tourism Ambassador Program for community residents, business owners, and community members. The program would help create a network of local ambassadors who could serve as voices and representatives for the WTDA within the community and assist visitors in experiencing Washington.

INFORMAL DISCUSSION & PUBLIC COMMENT

City Council Member Max Perrault provided an update on the future of the WTDA, including the latest information regarding legislation introduced by Senator Brinson.

Max stated that the City Council was not fully aware of the separation between the City and the WTDA until everything that happened with the former City Manager John Rorie, who pursued the separation independently.

Max further shared that Senator Brinson received a request regarding changes to the occupancy tax. According to Max, the request did not originate from the City Council, and Senator Brinson indicated that the request had been rejected.

ADJOURN

Shont'e motioned to adjourn the meeting; Susan seconded, and the meeting was adjourned.

The next board meeting is scheduled for 12:00 pm on September 17th, 2026, at the Haven's Wharf Conference Room.

Submitted by,

Andrew Kuhn

Marketing & Outreach Coordinator

Washington Tourism Development Authority