

ATTACHMENT A
WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
March 12, 2024
Meeting Minutes

The Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) meeting was convened at 12 p.m. on March 12, 2024. The meeting was held at the Goodwin Building—a quorum was present.

Tourism Council Members Present:

CHAIR Ruth Larson, James City County Board of Supervisors
VICE CHAIR Cliff Fleet III, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
TREASURER Doug Pons, Mayor, City of Williamsburg

Mickey Chohany, Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association
Christy Coleman, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation (JYF)
James Horne, Jamestown Rediscovery Historic Jamestowne
Ron Kirkland, Williamsburg Hotel and Motel Association
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corporation, Ex Officio
Sheila Noll, York County Board of Supervisors

Staff Members Present:

Julia Smyth-Young, Interim CEO
Josue Ayala, Executive Assistant
Jennifer Case, Chief Marketing Officer
Lori Ottarson, Accountant
Daniela Owen, Familiarization Tour Coordinator
Ally Ramello, Group Sales Manager
David Turner, Finance Director
Sandra Vazquez, Talent and Culture Manager

I. **Call to Order**

- Ruth Larson called the meeting to order at 12 p.m.

II. **Public Comment**

- No public comments presented

III. **Certified Tourism Ambassador (CTA) Program Briefing – Mickey Schaefer**

- Larson introduced Mickey Schaefer, founder of the Certified Ambassador Program.
- Using CTA to achieve strategic objectives
 - Internationally recognized certification
 - Strengthened brand awareness
 - Community Engagement
 - Workforce development
 - Enhancing the visitor experience

- There are four modules in the curriculum
 - Module 1 – Power of travel and tourism
 - Module 2 – Discovering the region
 - Module 3 – Knowing, finding, and using resources
 - Module 4 – Exceeding customer expectations

IV. **Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC) Briefing – Rita McClenny, President and CEO**

- McClenny announced that VTC started a new campaign, Vacation Begins in Virginia, with their agency, Sway, focusing on itinerary-based trip inspiration
 - Campaign will be 100% digital
 - Governor’s Conference will be held at the Omni Homestead on November 15, 2024

V. **Roundtable Discussion**

- Larson introduced Sheila Noll, Vice Chairman of the York County Board of Supervisors
 - Kevin Lembke announced Busch Gardens spring schedule beginning in March
 - Mardi Gras event went well for Busch Gardens
 - Mickey Chohany shared that the Restaurant Association had its annual board meeting with over 100 members and celebrated 25 years in existence
 - Restaurant week was successful with over 20 restaurants participating
 - The gift certificate program was also very successful, selling over \$100K in gift certificates
 - Christy Coleman shared update on Military through the Ages event March 16 – 17, 2024
 - Ruth E. Carter exhibit opens on May 11, 2024
 - James Horne stated that Jamestown Rediscovery is working on 250th anniversary at Historic Jamestowne
 - Doug Pons shared the city is in the middle of working budget season, noting increases on assessments for maintenance
 - The comedy festival was widely popular and well-attended
 - Larson stated James City County assessments have increased 20%
 - Cliff Fleet shared that Colonial Williamsburg introduced a new brand campaign,
 - Colonial Williamsburg group segment pacing well
 - 450 people attending the second national planning meeting for 2026, “*A Common Cause to All*”
 - Sheila Noll stated that York County lost its ability to partner with Princess Cruises
 - The Farmer’s Market opened March 16, 2024
 - Ron Kirkland shared the new issue of Williamsburg Magazine with a feature about the sports complex

VI. **Minutes**

- Larson requested a motion to approve the January 16, 2024 meeting minutes
- Kirkland motioned
- Coleman provided a second
- Minutes unanimously approved

VII. **Chair Report**

- Larson shared to the board that the Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce and Visit Williamsburg were working cohesively and commended Terry Banez and Smyth-Young
- Larson also shared Cynthia Hudson stepped down from her role as legal counsel. A representative from Sands-Anderson will assume Hudson's position

VIII. **Treasurer's Report**

- Pons shared financial statements through January 2024
 - January 2023 Revenue was \$1.4M - over budget by \$48
 - Sales tax receipts totaled \$1.2M, over budget by \$63K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$110K, under budget by \$22K
 - Other revenue totaled \$10K, over budget by \$7K
 - January 2023 expenses were \$1.3M- under budget by \$308K
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$1.1M, under budget by \$262K
 - Sales and marketing activities were \$34K, under budget by \$42K
 - Total Administrative expenses were \$176K, under budget by \$4K
 - Staffing costs were \$111K, under budget by \$36K
 - Other Administrative expenses were \$65K, over budget by \$31K, attributed to the CEO search
- FYTD Revenue and Expenses
 - FY 2024 revenue was \$10.1M, over budget by \$365K
 - Sales tax was \$8.9M, over budget by \$328K
 - Transient Tax was \$1M, under budget by \$13K
 - Other revenue was \$73K, over budget by \$50K
 - FY 2024 expenses were \$8.2M, under budget by \$1.1M
 - Destination marketing was \$6.8M, under budget by \$840K
 - Other Sales and Marketing was \$292K, under budget by \$127K
 - Labor and benefits was \$84K, under budget by \$120K
 - Admin was \$225K, over budget by \$17K, due to CEO search
- Cash on Hand
 - WTC has \$7M in the bank for operations
 - Cash on Hand for Operations as of January 31 was over budget by \$3.1M, with accounts payable liabilities of \$1.7M, leaving free Cash on Hand for Operations at \$5.4M
- Sales Tax Revenue
 - December sales tax was \$1.46M
 - The 3-month moving average decreased by 64K or negative 4.2% year over year
 - YTD sales tax receipts increased \$656K or 4.6% vs. the same period in 2022
- Transient Tax Revenue
 - December transient tax was \$111K
 - The 3-month moving average decreased by \$19K or negative 5% vs the same period in 2022
 - Year-to-date tax receipts increased \$23K or 1.5% versus the same period in 2022
 - Pons updated the board that the cash reserve transfer to a short-term CD was in process

IX. **Executive Director and Interim CEO report**

- Larson wanted to take a moment to thank the staff for stepping up during the transition period
- **Key Performance Indicators**
 - STR Report data
 - January 2024 occupancy 28.3% vs January 2023 occupancy 29.3%
 - Year to Date
 - Average Daily Rate (ADR): \$111.29 vs \$120 in 2023
 - RevPAR: \$31.44 vs \$35 in 2023
 - Demand: 1.14M rooms sold
- **Top Origin Markets (First Quarter)**
 - Washington, D.C. remains number one
 - Increased digital marketing in Roanoke and Raleigh
- Visitor Reach vs. Advertising Spend
 - Engaged in marketing penetration, resident sentiment, and brand health studies
- **Visit Williamsburg Strategic Plan 2024-2026**
 - Occupancy goal of 53.5%; and 1.8M visitors in 2024
 - The strategic plan is a roadmap to achieve goals
 - Broken down by growing visitor economy, expanding the brand, and ensuring operational excellence
 - Kirkland commended Visit Williamsburg for establishing goals
- **Action Steps**
 - Strategic plan
 - Request for Proposal (RFP)
 - Advertising Agency
 - Sports/Events Agency
 - Public Relations Agency
 - Brand Health, Market Penetration Studies, and Resident Sentiment
 - Quarterly Sales Director Meetings
 - Tourism Forum in 2024
- Smyth-Young introduced Ally Ramello, new Group Sales Manager
 - PR Specialist (Open)
 - Sports Sales Manager (Open)
- **Marketing**
 - Market/PR Action Steps
 - Social Media 3-4 times a week posting to create relevance
 - Increase real-time posts
 - More niche influencers – less mega
 - Markets
 - Hyper focus on drive markets
 - Increase exposure in performing markets like Roanoke and Raleigh-Durham
 - Pulled Ohio broadcast (April-June) for additional digital marketing opportunities
 - Out of Home
 - Revised Atlanta locations to focus on high-traffic highways and areas
 - Digital Advertising
 - Add timely promotions to create short-term travel
 - Monthly newsletters

- Public Relations
 - Washington, D.C. event – June 18, 2024
 - Increase PR coverage
 - Media drop-offs in New York City
- **E-Newsletter**
 - Launched two E-Newsletters with VistaGraphics with an audience of 400K
- **Black History Content Partnership and PR Strategy**
 - Visit Williamsburg is working with Fluent 360 to coordinate organic PR
 - Content partnership launches in June across websites and social media
 - Creating familiarization (FAM) tours with national journalists
- **Influencer Program Highlights**
 - January/February: Travis Levis came to Williamsburg and provided 15.3K+ impressions and 1.3K+ engagements
 - Nine influencers with strong audiences in target markets will be coming to Williamsburg to cover a variety of key topics, including history, family, outdoor activities, golf, adventures, etc...
- **Organic Social Channels**
 - Top five posts focused on history
 - Launched TikTok channel; now fourth-largest site traffic driver compared to Google and Meta
- **Key Media Placements (January 1 – February 29, 2024)**
 - Garnered 162.2M Impressions with 17 Placements
- **Sales**
 - Leads (January 13 – March 1, 2024)
 - Visit Williamsburg converted nearly 3,000 definite room nights
 - Just signed a deal with Collette Tours for 2024/2025 seasons
 - Shows/Events
 - SYTA Summit: February 2-5, 2024
 - HSMAI: February 13-14, 2024
 - Client Events and Site Visits
 - Virginia Motorcoach Association (VMA): December 13 – 15, 2023
 - North Carolina Motorcoach Association: December 28 – 30, 2023
 - November/December: New Business Leads
 - Sales issued 16 leads representing 4,268 potential room nights
 - Sales closed on ten pieces of business, totaling 1,690 room nights
 - Upcoming tradeshow and events
 - Student & Youth Travel Association (SYTA) Summit: February 2 – 5, 2024
 - African-American FAM and Travel Conference: April 14 – 17, 2024

X. **Old Business**

- None

XI. **New Business**

- None

XII. **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned