

ATTACHMENT A
WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
November 19, 2024
Meeting Minutes

The Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) meeting was convened at 1 p.m. on November 19, 2024. The meeting was held at the Stryker Center, where 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

Ron Kirkland, Williamsburg Hotel and Motel Association

Michael Claar, Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association

Christy Coleman, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation (JYF) (Via Zoom)

Denise Kellogg, Jamestown Rediscovery Historic Jamestowne

Kevin Lembke, Busch Gardens/Water Country USA

Sheila Noll, York County Board of Supervisors

Adria Vanhoozier, Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce, Ex Officio

Staff Members Present

Edward Harris, CEO

Josue Ayala, Executive Assistant

Jennifer Case, Chief Marketing Officer

Selena Coles, Public Relations Specialist

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 1 p.m.

II. **Public Comment**

- No public comment

III. **Roundtable Discussion**

- Larson welcomed Michael Claar to the board since Mickey Chohany retired
- Larson asked for a motion to allow Christy Coleman to participate remotely
 - Doug Pons motion
 - Cliff Fleet second the motion
 - Vote unanimously approved

- Larson introduced the roundtable discussion;
 - Denise Kellogg shared that visitation has been declining since March
 - Kevin Lembke shared that Christmastown opened the previous weekend and anticipates numbers to climb after the shift from successful Howl-O-Scream
 - Ron Kirkland shared October occupancy up compared to 2023 but revenue is down by 1% YoY
 - The Hotel Association is having its annual meeting on December 18
 - Sheila Noll shared that the Virginia Beer Company is expanding to new locations in York County
 - Chilled Ponds opened with a new restaurant and brewery
 - Larson shared that the celebration of business event is on November 20
 - Announced that Oceans and Ale are moving locations
 - Doug Pons shared of ongoing projects and that the State of the City report will be releasing on December 12th
 - Cliff Fleet shared of Colonial Williamsburg is celebrating the 200th anniversary of Lafayette's return
 - Holiday season is starting strong and looking forward to a stronger finish.
 - Michael Claar shared the Buck Stay Here Program is starting again with they increased the amount of gift certificates this year
 - Restaurant week is January 12 – 19 2025
 - Denise Kellogg shared that visitation has gotten better but still is low year over year
 - The Save Jamestown campaign has started with 5 million in donations, so far
 - Christy Coleman shared that the Jamestown Yorktown Foundation and Jamestown Rediscovery are collaborating on an exhibition called Following the Dragon, opening Fall 2025
 - The Give Me Liberty exhibition will open in March
 - Adria Vanhoozier announced the Jingle Fest at Busch Garden on Thursday, November 21
 - Shared that the Washington Commanders band will be leading the Christmas parade

IV. **Minutes**

- Larson requested a motion to approve the September 17, 2024 meeting minutes
- Pons motioned
- Kirkland provided a second
- Minutes unanimously approved

V. **Chair Report**

- Larson shared the election of officers will be taking place
 - Shared that voting for virtual meeting policy will take place
 - Policy will be adopted annually

VI. **Treasurer's Report**

- Pons shared financial statements through September 2024
 - September 2024 Revenue was \$1.6M, over budget by \$21K
 - Sales tax receipts totaled \$1.4M, under budget by \$41K

- Transient tax receipts totaled \$209K, over budget by \$38K
 - Maintenance of Effort Funds was \$0, in line with budget
 - Other revenue totaled \$36K, over budget by \$24K
 - September 2024 expenses were \$997K under budget by \$24K
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$768K, over budget by \$72K
 - Sales and marketing activities were \$77K, under budget by \$20K
 - Total Administrative expenses were \$151K, under budget by \$29K
 - Fiscal Year 25 activity
 - Revenue was \$ 4.6M, over budget by \$70K
 - Sales tax receipts were \$4.1M, over budget by \$106K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$466K, under budget by \$68K
 - Maintenance of efforts was \$39K, in line with budget
 - Fiscal Year 25 expenses were \$3.1M, under budget by \$228K
 - Destination Marketing Expenses were \$2.4M, under budget by \$116K
 - Marketing spend totaled \$116K, under budget by \$88
 - Offset by digital advertising
 - Sales activities were \$187K, under budget by \$34K
 - Total administrative expenses were \$496K, under budget by \$70K
- Cash on Hand
 - WTC has \$5.9M in the bank for operations
 - Cash on Hand for Operations as of September 30 was under budget by \$282K, with accounts payable liabilities of \$1.7M, leaving free Cash on Hand for Operations at \$4.2M
- Sales Tax Revenue
 - August sales tax
 - The 3-month moving average increased by \$15K or .4 % year over year
 - YTD sales tax receipts increased \$265K or 2.8% vs. the same period in 2023
- Transient Tax Revenue
 - August Transient Tax was increased by \$24K or 20.8% YoY
 - The 3-month moving average increased by \$4K or .7% vs the same period in 2023
 - Year-to-date tax receipts increased \$38K versus the same period in 2023

VII. CEO report

- **Industry Insights**
 - **Future Partners** - *The State of the American Traveler* study is a monthly tracking survey that captures the sentiments of a representative sample of adult American travelers across the country. With over 4,000 fully completed surveys collected each wave, the data provides a robust understanding of domestic travel trends.
- **International Insights**
 - BrandUSA shared that inbound travel from Europe will continue to increase
 - Top activities include, Historical attractions and shopping
- **Recent performances**
 - October YTD Occupancy
 - Over 8K more rooms sold over the past 10 weeks vs same period Last Year (LY)
 - Occupancy increased vs last year's in 8 out of the previous ten weeks
- **Sales**
 - Congratulated the Sales team in efforts

- Ensured the team were at key conferences and events
- **Sports**
 - Julia and Morgan have been actively promoting the sports facility in multiple conference with letters of intent being signed for future tournaments
 - Still booking outdoor tournaments throughout the Historic Triangle
 - Working with White 64 agency to help promote sports marketing
 - Actively collaborating with KemperSports
 - Announced the first Sports Advisory Committee was held and will be meeting quarterly
- **Marketing**
 - **VisitWilliamsburg.com**
 - Site traffic increased 18% YoY
 - Engagement increased 5% YoY
 - Visitor Guide requests increased 13% YoY
 - E-newsletter sign-ups increased 199% YoY
 - **Key Markets**
 - Washington, D.C. is first, followed by Richmond, Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News, Raleigh-Durham, Roanoke, Lynchburg
 - **Social Media Insights**
 - 65% of travelers who use social media for planning make a purchase or visitation decision based on content they encounter
 - **Social Media: September – October Performance**
 - New Followers – 2,647
 - Impressions – 502,208
 - Engagements – 27,781
 - Engagement Rate – 5.5%
 - Instagram: Fall, Halloween and Holiday-themed posts performed extremely well, leading to a super strong average engagement rate of 8.3%
 - Facebook: History-themed content led the way once again, and the high performance was highlighted by an archaeology post that generated over 3K organic clicks
 - YouTube: Higher view counts are happening more often.
 - **Social Media: Recent Events**
 - Ruth E. Carter Exhibit
 - Howl-O-Scream
 - Burg Quest
 - Yorktown Folk Festival
 - Yorktoberfest
 - Let Freedom Ring Gala
 - Virginia Cat Festival
 - Veteran’s Day Commemoration at American Revolution Museum
 - **Social Media: Upcoming Events**
 - Busch Gardens Christmas Town
 - Foods & Feasts of Colonial Virginia (Yorktown)
 - Friendsgiving at Alewerks
 - Grand Illumination Weekends
 - Great Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce Christmas Parade
 - Yorktown Christmas Tree Lighting
 - A Candlelight Christmas
 - **Media Highlights**
 - Holiday Value messaging is live across all channels:

- Trip Advisor, Sojern, Booking.com, Youtube, Paid Social Advertising
- **Influencer Marketing: September – October Performance**
 - 11 Influencers
 - 45K+ Engagements
 - 495K+ Impressions
 - 100+ Social posts
- **Marketing Partnerships with FOX 5**
 - Had 5 on-site segments in the Historic Triangle aired on FOX 5 Local TV news
 - Segments are included on the FOX local app
 - Had 2 in-studio interview with Visit Williamsburg
- **Marketing Partnerships with the Washington Commanders**
 - Given opportunities to provide stadium signage
 - Gameday LIVE Programming on YouTube
 - Banner advertising
 - Email inclusion
- **Marketing Partnerships with Kingdom Magazine**
 - **Print: 2 x Full-page advertisements in next 2 editions of Kingdom Winter 24/25 & Spring 2025**
 - **Guaranteed editorial coverage in Spring 2025 at editor's discretion**
 - **Digital**
 - Dedicated Newsletter – Q1 2025
 - Sponsored Newsletter – Q4 2025 – Banners
 - Sponsored Newsletter – Q4 2024 – Native feature
 - Sweepstakes – 1 month campaign, 5000 emails minimum
- **Marketing Partnerships with Bandwango**
 - Working to create the Williamsburg Historic Holiday Pass
 - The Historic Holiday Pass highlights the following:
 - Historic museums in the Historic Triangle
 - Iconic holiday events like the Grand Illumination, Holiday Markets and Tree-lighting ceremonies
 - Pass is valid November 29, 2024 – January 2, 2025
- **2025 Partners**
 - Miles Partnership
 - MMGY Global
 - Brand Federation
 - White 64
- **Public Relations**
 - September 1 – October 31, 2024
 - 1.7 Billion Global Impressions
 - 29 Placements
 - **New PR Partner Immersion with MMGY Global**
 - Week of 12/16
 - **Recognition**
 - Visit Williamsburg was announced as a winner of the 2024 Magellan Awards by Travel Weekly
 - Visit Williamsburg won Gold this year for its entries:
 - Destination Marketing-Live events for destinations (Revolutionary Ideas Media Event, Washington, D.C.)
 - Destination Marketing-Website for Destinations(Discover Visit Williamsburg's New Digital Gateway)

- **Events**
 - The team has gone to multiple groups, meeting events and volunteer events
- **On the Horizon**
 - Big Bad Wolf opening in 2025
 - Working with Bandwango with potential Mocktails and Pancake Tours
 - Strategizing with Brand Federation for VA 250 and Sail 250

VIII. **Old Business**

- None

IX. **New Business**

- None

X. **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned
- Next Meeting on January 21, 2025