

WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
May 20, 2025
Meeting Minutes

The Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) meeting was convened at 1 p.m. on May 20, 2025. The meeting was held at the Williamsburg Winery, Williamsburg, where a quorum was present.

Tourism Council Members Present:

Ruth Larson, James City County Board of Supervisors, Chair
Mayor Doug Pons, Mayor, City of Williamsburg, Treasurer
Ron Kirkland, Williamsburg Hotel and Motel Association
Michael Claar, Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association
Christy Coleman, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation (JYF)
Denise Kellogg, Jamestown Rediscovery Historic Jamestowne
Kevin Lembke, Busch Gardens/Water Country USA
Sheila Noll, York County Board of Supervisors
Dr. Porter Brannon, Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce (GWCC), Ex Officio

Staff Members Present

Edward Harris, CEO
Brittany Alger, Senior Sales Manager
Josue Ayala, Community Relations and Logistics Specialist
Jennifer Case, Chief Marketing Officer
Morgan Cordle, Sports Sales Manager
Greg Kavanagh,
Jackie Lavan, Executive Assistant
Daniela Owen, Familiarization Tour Coordinator
David Turner, Finance Director
Sandra Vazquez, Talent and Culture Manager

Guests Present

Neal Alfano, Miles Partnership
Danelle Amos, Miles Partnership
Lauren Bourgoing, Miles Partnership
Angela Smith, Williamsburg Winery

I. Call to Order

Chair Ruth Larson called the meeting to order. Angela Smith, Williamsburg Winery, welcomed attendees and offered post-meeting tours.

II. Public Comment

- No public comment

III. Roundtable Discussion

Ms. Larson introduced the roundtable discussion.

- **Kevin Lembke:** Two new attractions and 50th anniversary celebrations underway.
- **Michael Claar:** April business improved; W&M event schedule changes affecting restaurant traffic patterns.
- **Christy Coleman:** Major fall events planned, including *Dragon Chinese Porcelain* exhibition with Historic Jamestowne and potential large-scale lantern attraction; Yorktown art exhibition opening.
- **Ruth Larson:** FY2026 budget passed with no tax increase; hosting Virginia Association of Counties spring board meeting.
- **Mayor Doug Pons:** FY2026 budget passed with targeted tax increases to sustain tourism funding (6.5% of budget).
- **Denise Kellogg:** April improvement but soft May; record \$1.6M in federal funding; possible grant loss; active 250th preparations.
- **Ron Kirkland:** Revenue up 3%; occupancy steady year-over-year.
- **Dr. Porter Brannon:** Announced leadership transition to Adria Vanhoozier as Ex-Officio Board Member.

IV. Minutes

Ms. Larson presented two items for the Board's consideration: approval of the amended November 19, 2024, minutes and approval of the March 18, 2025, minutes. The amendment to the November 19, 2024, minutes adds actions not previously recorded, including approval of a Bylaws change to extend officer term limits, election of officers for a third term, and adoption of an updated policy on electronic meeting participation.

Motion

Mayor Doug Pons made a motion to approve the amendment to the November 19, 2024 meeting minutes and to approve the meeting minutes from the March 18, 2025 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Kevin Lembke and was approved by the Board.

V. Chair Report

- Board Retreat: July 15, 2025 retreat/meeting to be rescheduled; Visit Williamsburg will poll members for a new date.
- Annual Meeting: Due to recurring scheduling conflicts, the Annual Meeting will shift to November; the Board may consider a Bylaws amendment to make this change permanent.

VI. Treasurer's Report

Financials

Mayor Doug Pons shared financial statements through March 2025

- Revenue: \$1.1M (under budget by \$12K)
- Sales tax: \$978K (on budget)
- Transient tax: \$102K (under budget by \$18K)
- Expenses: \$1.5M (under budget by \$95K)
- YTD sales: \$13.2M (over budget by \$61K)
- Cash on hand: \$8.5M for operations

2026 Budget Presentation

David Turner, Chief Financial Officer, presented the proposed 2026 budget.

- Total revenue budgeted at \$18.6 million (July 1, 2025–June 30, 2026), reflecting a 9% revenue increase and a 12.7% expense increase over FY2025
- Sales tax budgeted at \$15.6 million (2.8% increase over FY2025)
- Transient occupancy tax revenues budgeted at \$1.6 million
- Using \$150,000 from reserves for office renovations
- Additional \$1 million from reserves allocated for marketing the 250th commemoration
- Additional staffing to expand sales and marketing capabilities.
- Continued prudent reserve management, ending FY2026 with \$3.8M unrestricted and \$1.8M restricted cash balances
- There was also continued discussion about the sports complex marketing funding and coordination between Visit Williamsburg, Kemper Sports, and the Historic Triangle Regional Facilities Authority

Motion

Doug Pons made a motion to approve the 2026 budget as presented. The motion was seconded by Denise Kellogg and was approved by the Board.

VII. CEO report

President and CEO, Ed Harris provided the CEO report.

Staff Updates

- New staff introduced: Jackie Lavon (Executive Assistant) and Greg Kavanaugh (Vice President of Business Development)
- Upcoming hire: Elisa Campana (Destination Development Director)
- New intern program launching
- Discussion differentiating between Business Development (focused on sports center sales) and Destination Development (focused on events and non-sports activities)
- Spring break performance: 3.22% increase in demand compared to the previous year
 - April occupancy numbers showed growth despite national downward trends

Tourism Research & PR Updates

- National research shows travelers choosing more affordable destinations and using rewards programs
- Sales team attending key trade shows including African American Travel Conference, military reunion conferences, religious conferences
- Upcoming sports events expected to generate 7,000 room nights
- Visit Williamsburg is now using Destinations International Economic Impact Calculator to measure event value
- PR placements in publications like Conde Nast Traveler and Southern Living
- Samantha Brown filmed in the region for upcoming PBS episode
- Marketing team held 'Williamsburg meets Williamsburg' PR event in Brooklyn

Visitor Experience Enhancements

- Integration with Rype allows visitors to book hotel rooms directly from visitwilliamsburg.com
- Creating customized landing pages for events with integrated booking functionality
- Developing mobile passes for events like the Whiskey and Wine Festival
- Launching 'Cool Summer Savings Pass' for July-August with 20+ businesses offering discounts
- Visitors can earn branded items (Bogg Bags, sunglasses, hats) by visiting multiple participating businesses
- Partners include Busch Gardens, Baskin Robbins, Colonial Williamsburg, Yorktown Beach Hotel

VIII. Miles Partnership Presentation

Neal Alfano, Danelle Amos, and Lauren Bourgoing were introduced to present. Miles Partnership is a new advertising agency that Visit Williamsburg has been working with since the start of 2025.

Summary of Miles:

- Company overview: 375+ tourism marketing specialists, 8-year average client relationship
- Travel trends: Spontaneous staycations within 300 miles increasing
- 95% of travelers planning at least as much travel this summer as last
- Sporting events and concerts are top travel motivations
- International travel expected to lose \$12.5 billion in spending in 2025
 - 69% of travelers planning to travel domestically

Miles Media Strategy

- Bridge campaign (January-June 2025) generated 100+ million impressions, 290,000+ clicks
- 480,000+ conversions with average time on content exceeding 2 minutes
- 50% increase in Williamsburg's market share of hotel bookings year-over-year
- Tourism Economics tracking shows 14,000+ business visits from January-April
- Top performing markets: Baltimore, Charlotte, Greensboro, Greenville, Harrisburg

- Creative strategy leverages triangle motif from destination brand mark
 - Variety of media formats including rich media units, digital ads, print material

New Campaign and Preview and Closing

- New campaign theme: 'America's journey began right here'
- Updated visual approach with black and white photography for 'timeless America' feel
- Refined color palette and subtle logo updates for better legibility
- Using destination textures (brick, textiles, flags) to differentiate from other tourism marketing
- Digital campaign will be nimble enough to adjust if June numbers are disappointing
 - Special emphasis on Christmas marketing as a priority for attracting higher-spending visitors

IX. New Business

- None

X. Old Business

- None

XI. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:43 p.m.

The next meeting and Board retreat will be determined by polling Members of the Board.