

WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
August 19, 2025
Meeting Minutes

The Williamsburg Tourism Council (“WTC”) meeting was convened at 1 p.m. on August 19, 2025, at the Williamsburg Lodge in Colonial Williamsburg, where a quorum was present.

Tourism Council Members Present:

Ruth Larson, James City County Board of Supervisors, Chair
Cliff Fleet, Colonial Williamsburg, Vice Chair
Mayor Doug Pons, City of Williamsburg, Treasurer
Ron Kirkland, Williamsburg Hotel and Motel 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
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corporation, Ex Officio

Staff Members Present

Edward Harris, CEO
Brittany Alger, Senior Sales Manager
Josue Ayala, Community Relations and Logistics Specialist
Elisa Hernandez Campana, Destination Development Director
Morgan Cordle, Sports Sales Manager
Greg Kavanagh, Vice President, Business Development
Jackie Lavan, Executive Assistant
David Turner, Finance Director
Sandra Vazquez, Talent and Culture Manager

I. Call to Order

Chair Ruth Larson called the meeting to order.

II. Public Comment

- No public comment

III. Roundtable Discussion

Ms. Larson introduced the roundtable discussion.

- **Sheila Noll:**
 - Reported strong summer season with high attendance at Fourth of July celebrations and Sounds of Music concert series
 - Announced *Ken Burns American Revolution* screening (Sept. 20) with Park Service events beginning 3:00 PM
 - Shared plans for *Sail Yorktown 2026* (June 12–14, 2026), featuring Class A tall ship *Debark Castle* with free tours
 - Event is part of official *Sail America 26* affiliate harbor program (60+ ships from 20 countries coming to Hampton Roads)

- **Rita McClenny:**
 - \$10M state funding request resubmitted for competitive sports event incentive fund (previously rejected)
 - Legislative framework in place; Delegate Rodney Willett (Henrico) and Senator Head (Roanoke) leading efforts
- **Cliff Fleet:**
 - *Bray School* and new golf course opened earlier this year
 - Palace gardens restoration underway, beginning with tree removal to restore colonial-era design
 - Juneteenth coverage brought the highest national media attention of any site in the country
- **Kevin Lembke:**
 - Summer performance in line with regional trends
 - *Howl-O-Scream* launching in under three weeks with new content
 - *Christmas Town* preparations underway — now the only Christmas theme park event in Virginia (Kings Dominion discontinued *Winterfest*)
- **Christy Coleman:**
 - Reported slight decline in visitation in first fiscal month despite multiple capital projects
 - *Susan Constant* ship repairs on track at Mystic Seaport; return to Jamestown set for June 2026
 - New exhibitions: *Pasco de Mayo's Fresh Views of the American Revolution* (Oct.) and *Chinese Porcelain and Urban Jamestown* (Nov.)
 - Chinese lantern display planned in conjunction with November exhibition
- **Ruth Larson:**
 - Government center public meetings continuing; Berkeley District town hall scheduled Sept. 4
 - Legislative request process underway; seeking Tourism Board input
 - Announced new Wawa opening in James City County (Aug. 28, 8:00 AM), expected to boost sales tax revenue
- **Mayor Doug Pons:**
 - New police station scheduled to open Dec. 14
 - Regional Sports Center construction is progressing (and is visibly impressive)
 - Downtown library under discussion (new build vs. renovation)
 - \$3M awarded for fire trucks (four-year delivery timeline)
 - FY25 budget on track to close successfully
- **Denise Kellogg:**
 - Slight dip in visitation compared to prior year; new marketing strategies underway
 - 250th anniversary programs in development for 2025 and 2026

- Secured grant funding for special events and gatherings
- Infrastructure upgrades: raised pathways and lighting systems to address flooding
- *Save Jamestown* campaign continuing with resiliency projects (hydrology/topography studies)
- *Archaeology Day* scheduled for Oct. 4
- **Ron Kirkland:**
 - July occupancy: 65% (vs. 62% prior year) despite 3.3% fewer available rooms
 - Room sales up 1% year-over-year; revenue also up 1% with flat rates
 - Total room inventory: 6,001 (down from 10,200 rooms 35 years ago; 9,500 rooms 20 years ago)

IV. Minutes

Ms. Larson opened the floor for discussion of the May 20, 2025, meeting minutes, which were included in the meeting packet. With no comments offered, she called for a motion to approve the minutes.

Motion

Mr. Kirkland moved to approve the minutes of the May 20, 2025, meeting. Mr. Lembke seconded the motion, which was unanimously approved by the Board.

V. Chair Report

The next meeting was previously scheduled for September 16, 2025. The date may need to be adjusted, and Visit Williamsburg will follow up to confirm or distribute a Doodle poll for availability.

VI. Treasurer's Report **Financials**

- June revenues: **\$1.5 million** (\$37,000 over budget)
- Transit tax receipts: **\$146,000** (\$26,000 over budget)
- June expenses: **\$2.8 million** (\$400,000 under budget)
- Year-to-date revenues: **\$17.1 million** (under budget by \$13,000)
- Cash on hand: **\$8.5 million**, with \$5.4 million available for operations
- Sales tax increased **3.9%** year-over-year in June
- Transient tax up **6.5%** in June, but down **8.1%** year-to-date

VII. CEO report

President and CEO, Ed Harris provided the CEO report.

Tourism Industry Analysis

- National tourism trends showing declines; major chains (e.g., Marriott) reforecasting travel demand

- Luxury market remains strong, while other segments face reductions
- Virginia destinations outperforming U.S. averages in occupancy levels
- Williamsburg: strong weekend occupancy but notable weekday declines (20-point gap)
- RevPAR around \$180, competitive with Virginia peers except Virginia Beach

Sales & Sports Success

- Successful business signings at multiple trade shows, including African American Travel Conference and Virginia Society of Association Executives
- Secured *Historic Hotels of America* annual convention for next year (500 room nights)
- New sports website launched with updated photography and creative content
- 85,000 room nights under agreement for sports groups over next three years (~\$9 per room investment)
- Sports center opening confirmed for next year

Marketing Performance & Initiatives

- New agency partnerships driving higher website traffic and social media engagement
- *Summer Savings Pass* promotion generated 133,000 website visitors and offered \$600+ in deals
- Top-performing deals: Colonial Williamsburg, Busch Gardens, Bubba's Ice Cream Shack, ghost tours, Jamestown Settlement, Water Country USA
- "America's Journey Begins" campaign continuing as national brand positioning
- New video and photography completed across the Historic Triangle

Upcoming Events & New Initiatives

- *Pancake Trail* launching Sept. 1 with app and point-earning system
- *Pancake Festival* planned to position Williamsburg as "Pancake Capital of the World"
- *Virginia Black Film Festival* scheduled for Feb. 5–8 (dates may shift one week)
- *Paranormal Cirque* considering Halloween weekend stop in Williamsburg
- *International Fireworks Championship* targeting Yorktown for 2026 Yorktown Day
- *250th Quilt Project* collecting 12x12 squares nationwide for 250-foot quilt display

Major Media Opportunities Discussion

- *Today Show* option
- *Good Morning America* option: 2.6M audience reach

- Syndicated options (*Kelly & Mark*, *Kelly Clarkson Show*) targeting female decision-makers with integrated campaigns
- Board discussion favored syndicated shows for broader targeting and multiple touchpoints throughout the year
- Decision expected in the coming weeks for 250th anniversary marketing

VIII. New Business

- None

IX. Old Business

- None

X. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:05 p.m.