

ATTACHMENT A
WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
March 18, 2025
Meeting Minutes

The Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) meeting was convened at 1 p.m. on March 21, 2025. The meeting was held at the American Revolutionary Museum, Yorktown, 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 (CW)
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)
Denise Kellogg, Jamestown Rediscovery Historic Jamestowne
Kevin Lembke, Busch Gardens/Water Country USA
Sheila Noll, York County Board of Supervisors
Rita McClenny, President and CEO of Virginia Tourism Corporation, Ex Officio
Dr. Porter Brannon, Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce (GWCC), Ex Officio

Staff Members Present

Edward Harris, CEO
Brittany Alger, Senior Sales Manager
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 introduced the roundtable discussion;
 - Sheila Noll shared that Yorktown's Market Days have been attracting a lot of attention

- York County welcomed the Norfolk Tide at Chilled Ponds in Yorktown
- York County's budget proposition will be presented later in the evening but the budget will be tight
- Dr. Porter Brannon thanked Ed Harris for presenting at GWCC's board meeting
 - Thanked Cliff Fleet for hosting Commonwealth Conversations and shared that tickets are still available for the upcoming Commonwealth Conversations with the guest speaker, Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger on Friday, March 21
- Ron Kirkland shared the upcoming Visitor Guide will be distributed in about two weeks
 - Will be the biggest issue they've had with about 100 pages
 - Thanked Edward Harris and the marketing team for the Ripe application added to the Visit Williamsburg website
- Kevin Lembke shared Busch Gardens' February numbers were not good with the weather
 - Hoping for good weather for Spring Break
 - Openings for both parks are still on schedule
- Larson announced James City County's budget is ongoing
 - Had meeting with school board and City of Williamsburg the previous Friday
 - The school board requested about \$13M in additional revenue to keep up with the state assessments
 - Harris spoke with the Board of Supervisors and shared the excitement for the Williamsburg 250th
- Doug Pons shared the City of Williamsburg is also going through budget season
 - The plans for the splash pad have been delayed
- Denise Kellogg stated Historic Jamestowne is continuing its "Save Jamestowne" campaign, raising close to \$9M
 - Concerned about federal funding shortfalls
- Cliff Fleet shared that Colonial Williamsburg started strongly but changed dramatically within that last month
 - Government bookings declined due to the current state government spending
 - February weather also was a big effect
- Christy Coleman shared that JYF was also affected with the weather events in the past month along with technical issues from Verizon that prevented ticket sales
 - Shared excitement for the next exhibition: Following the Dragon
- Michael Claar shared the Restaurant Association's decline based off of the weather events in February
 - Thanked Jennifer Case and Morgan Cordle for speaking at the annual meeting, building a lot of enthusiasm with the membership
 - Saw \$85K in gift ticket sales in 2024
- Rita McClenny shared that the luxury market is continuing strong in spending trends
 - 34 grants have been awarded for relation to Virginia 250
 - Canadian tourism had dropped by 12% YoY in February

IV. Minutes

- Larson requested a motion to approve the January 21, 2025 meeting minutes
- Kirkland motioned

- Fleet provided a second
- Minutes unanimously approved

V. **Chair Report**

- Larson shared excitement for Williamsburg 250
- Considering reaching out to the congressional delegation about concerns related to the 250th anniversary and potential cuts to the National Park Service

VI. **Audit Report**

- The audit report was presented with an unmodified clean opinion issued
 - No difficulties occurred during the audit, and no material misstatements were found
 - Management provided a representation letter confirming the accuracy of the information
 - Pons thanked Lori Ottarsen for her efforts to ensure a good audit report

VII. **Treasurer's Report**

- Pons shared financial statements through January 2025
 - January 2025 Revenue was \$1.5M, over budget by \$50K
 - Sales tax receipts totaled \$1.3M, over budget by \$31K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$131K, over budget by \$19K
 - Maintenance of Effort Funds was \$39K, in line with the budget
 - January 2025 expenses were \$740K under budget by \$722K
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$409K, under budget by \$596K
 - Sales and marketing activities were \$150K, under budget by \$81K
 - Total Administrative expenses were \$39K, over budget by \$5K
 - Fiscal Year 25 Revenue activity
 - Revenue was \$10.4M, under budget by \$18K
 - Sales tax receipts were \$9.1M, under budget by \$49K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$1M, over budget by \$10K
 - Maintenance of efforts was \$102K, in line with budget
 - Fiscal Year 25 expenses were \$7.2M, under budget by \$1M
 - Destination Marketing Expenses were \$5.1M, under budget by \$528K
 - Other sales and marketing activities were \$790K, under budget by \$222K
 - Total administrative expenses were \$195K, under budget by \$237K
- Cash on Hand
 - WTC has \$7.2M in the bank for operations
 - Cash on Hand for Operations as of January 2025 was over budget by \$606K, with accounts payable liabilities of \$828K, leaving free Cash on Hand for Operations at \$6.3M
- Sales Tax Revenue
 - December sales tax
 - Increased to \$75K or 5.1 % year over year
 - 3-month moving average increased \$211K or 5.4% vs same period in 2023
 - YTD sales tax receipts increased \$475K or 3.2% vs. same period in 2023
- Transient Tax Revenue
 - December Transient Tax was increased by \$3K or 2.5% YoY

- The 3-month moving average increased by \$31K or 8.2% vs the same period in 2023
- Year-to-date tax receipts increased \$35K versus the same period in 2023

VIII. CEO report

- **Performance – 12 month trend comparison**
 - There was 6.8% growth in terms of the transient tax.
 - There was a flat level for the star occupancy tax
 - Website traffic to visitwilliamsburg.com saw gains of north of 20% for the year
 - January saw occupancy up 2.8%.
 - February occupancy was down 9.3% due to weather events, cancellations, and government cut noise
- **Partner Insight**
 - Over 50% of the demographic coming to the area is the prime family age of 25 to 54
 - DC continues to be a key market
 - Raleigh Durham was the highest average business visitor spend market reported by Zartico
 - The 2024 media plan influenced over \$450 million in visitor spending, resulting in a \$44 ROI for each media dollar spent
 - Anticipation in terms of traffic spending will slow with potential economic and political uncertainty
 - Family and friends led the way in terms of influencing trips planned to the region, with social media also being a big influence
- **Travel trends and concerns**
 - 88% of American travelers have travel plans within the next six months, down from 93% a year ago
 - People are interested in historical sites and landmarks, as well as historical museums
 - People are seeking fun, rest, relaxation, new experiences, and spending time with friends and relatives
 - Concerns impacting travel decisions include personal finances, transportation costs, airfare prices, inflation, and gas prices
- **American Travel Sentiment Study by Longwood International**
 - A survey of 4,000 adults every month for several years indicates the highest percentage of people expect to take a leisure trip sometime later in 2025
 - Summer travelers will be looking to redeem rewards and find budget friendly hotels and destinations
 - There is a growing sense of caution with decreases in Americans feeling that right now is a good time to spend on travel
 - Families think that their budget should be a high priority when it comes to travel
 - The annual budget that families are looking at for this year's travel has dropped over 15%
 - Excitement for travel levels has fallen to a seven month low
- **Williamsburg 250 – Where America's journey begins**
 - Visit Williamsburg will focus on key events in 2026 in the historic Triangle
 - Expand Williamsburg Live to four nights of entertainment, moving it closer to the 4th of July

- Jamestown beach concert weekend in the works which includes reenactments, a drone light show, and a concert at night
 - Yorktown has SAIL250 coming to town next year
- A New York press event is coming up last week of April in the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York
 - Stories will include the quilt project, Wolf's Revenge at Busch Gardens, and other exciting things that are coming up
- A social media marketing campaign around the 250th has already launched
 - Each week a video highlights five or six things to do in the historic Triangle
- **Group business and Sports**
 - The sales team has been converting leads for 2025, securing room nights using budget allocation
 - Secured business extends to 2026, 2027, and 2028
 - Sports continues to build with a calendar of outdoor events in the Triangle
 - Secured room nights for sports alone are 50,000 plus.
 - Secured a three-year deal with Phenom Hoops for 4,900 room nights each year from December through July, 2027, 2028, and 2029
- **International and community outreach**
 - The UK and India are key feeder markets when it comes to international travel 2025 Vision
 - An India mission starts in the following week
 - The team continues to share updates at meetings throughout the Triangle, getting feedback from York County, James City County, and friends in Williamsburg
 - Harris gave a shout out and thanked Josue Ayala for his services as Executive Assistant; will be taking on a new role as Community relations/Logistics Specialist
- **Marketing & Communications presented by CMO, Jennifer Case**
 - Media objectives: awareness, consideration, and response with measurable results
 - Targeting: travel intenders, geographic targeting, and behavioral attributes
 - Geotargeting: similar to past years, but bringing it a little closer in
 - Media overview: display and native, TripAdvisor, digital out of home, Connected TV, pre-roll with online video
 - Content partnerships: Undertone, Kargo, VistaGraphics, Destination DC, Atlas Obscura, Nativo, Hulu, and Disney+
 - Social media: Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and TikTok
- **Creative launched in January**
 - Native ads on Facebook and Instagram
 - Print ads for meetings and events
- **Creative for February & March**
 - Content for February/March focusing on freedom
 - VistaGraphics: 16-page insert with the Hotel Motel Association
 - Kargo: An unit with spinning elements
- **Additional Creative/Marketing Updates**
 - Pancake Trail Pass
 - New logo with a "Pancake guy"
 - Event planned with all-you-can-eat pancakes and possibly an eating contest
 - Sports Williamsburg partnered with White 64 for a facilities guide and other sports-related initiatives
 - Samantha Brown's: Places to Love
 - 30-minute episode, filming in May and shown in 2026
 - Number 1 rated show on PBS

- Fox 5
 - Will be featured throughout the year
 - The last segment included Busch Gardens, Colonial Williamsburg and Yorktown
 - The next segment will be on Good Morning Washington
 - Coming soon to Raleigh and Roanoke
- Hoffman Media – Southern Lady and Victoria
 - Includes full-page ads, content partnership, email marketing, and social media
- Sales Collateral
 - Created in-house
- Hotel Images and Video
 - Creating images and video for hotels to use
- Direct Mail
 - Mini booklets and jumbo postcards
- Newsletters
 - VistaGraphics newsletters sent monthly
 - Sales and sports newsletters are coming up
- Passes
 - Creating the Cool Summer Savings pass to promote Williamsburg during the hot summer months
 - Pancake festival for September
 - Mocktail Trail with William and Mary students for Sober October
- **Public Relations Highlights**
 - Satellite media tour
 - Over 3 million impressions
 - Featured in Harrisburg, PA and Rochester
 - Had two syndicated shows Business First AM (114 markets) and The Jet Set (213 markets)
 - Media mentions included on Mommy Poppins and Michelangelo
- **Discussions and Future plans**
 - New Agencies
 - Progress is being made with the new agencies and things are starting to click
 - Agency presentations
 - When the new brand and campaign is presented the agencies will be involved

IX. **New Business**

- None

X. **Old Business**

- None

XI. **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned
- Next Meeting on May 20, 2025