

ATTACHMENT A
WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
March 15, 2022
Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) was convened at 1:00 p.m. on March 15, 2022. The meeting was held at The Maine of Williamsburg. A quorum was present.

Tourism Council Members Present:

CHAIR Ruth Larson, James City County Board of Supervisors
VICE CHAIR Cliff Fleet, President and CEO, Colonial Williamsburg
TREASURER Doug Pons, Mayor, City of Williamsburg

Christy Coleman, Executive Director, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
Chad Green, Chair, York County Board of Supervisors
James Horn, President and Chief Officer, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation
Ron Kirkland, Williamsburg Hotel & Motel Association (WHMA)
Kevin Lembke, President, Busch Gardens/Water Country USA
Rita McClenny, President and CEO, Virginia Tourism Corporation

Staff Members Present:

Victoria Cimino, CEO
Glen Butler, Executive Assistant
Melissa Hall, Accountant
Miranda Jarrell, Communications Director
Julie O'Neil, Marketing Director
Tamara Paris, Partnerships & Content Director
Jill Pongonis, FAM Tour Coordinator
Julia Smyth-Young, Sales Director
David Turner, Finance Director

I. Call to Order

- Ruth Larson called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.
- Larson requested a motion to approve Cliff Fleet attending virtually due to personal reasons
- Doug Pons motioned
- Chad Green provided a second
- All were in favor

- Tracy Hannigan, Chief Operating Officer, The Maine of Williamsburg, was introduced as the host and provided opening remarks
 - Hannigan discussed the venue’s early success and enhancing opportunities for industry partners

II. Public Comment

- No public comments were presented

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

- Larson introduced Rita McClenny
- McClenny provided a briefing
 - Governor Glenn Youngkin is focused on Virginia tourism and travel, creating 400,000 jobs, 10,000 small businesses, and has declared himself as the Chief Marketing Officer of the Commonwealth of Virginia
 - Virginia Tourism Corporation is working with the First Lady of Virginia, Suzanne Youngkin, on tourism initiatives
 - McClenny stated that the 2022 media campaign will launch on all platforms in April and continue through November

IV. Roundtable Discussion

- Larson asked board members for updates
 - Kevin Lembke stated that Busch Gardens is entering its spring break season, and will be open daily for the first three weeks of April
 - Noted staffing is increasing, aided by the J-1 visa program
 - Grand opening of Pantheon, a new roller coaster, is March 25
 - Water Country USA’s season begins in May, with a new attraction to open
 - Demand is strong for spring break
 - Cliff Fleet stated demand has been strong; the attraction and hotels are seeing increased reservations and visitation beginning in March
 - Christy Coleman reported business is ticking up, not yet at 2019 levels
 - Noted that retail operations have exceeded 2017
 - Ron Kirkland discussed the STR report for January and noted hotel/motel demand was up, February numbers are expected to be strong
 - Reiterated the opportunity for Visit Williamsburg to consider financial incentives to attract new group travel business, and suggested several Williamsburg Tourism Council bylaws that would allow for such activities
 - Jim Horn discussed Historic Jamestowne’s seawall construction project, noted that discussion on a regional plan and investment to mitigate the future impacts of climate change may be necessary

- Larson stated that Scott Stevens, county administrator, James City County, was in attendance; Larson noted that Lembke and Cimino have volunteered to assist the Sports Authority as it continues to evolve

V. Minutes

- Larson requested a motion to approve the January 18, 2022 meeting minutes
- Coleman motioned
- Pons provided a second
- Minutes were unanimously approved

VI. Treasurer's Report

- FY21 Audit Report
 - Pons stated that Visit Williamsburg went out to bid for professional audit services in July 2021
 - Five proposals were received and evaluated by a procurement team comprised of staff and board members
 - CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA) was awarded the contract and began work with Visit Williamsburg last fall
 - Pons introduced Aires Coleman, director, CLA
 - Coleman provided an overview of the audit report
 - For FY21, the Williamsburg Tourism Council is reporting separate financial statements rather than combined statements with the Williamsburg Area Chamber of Commerce
 - The Tourism Council's financial statements are prepared in accordance with General Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) promulgated by the Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB)
 - Net position was \$9.4M as of June 30, 2021, a decrease of \$2.2M from the prior year
 - Destination marketing expenses were \$14.2M, 90% of total 2021 expenses and a 118% increase year-over-year
 - Administrative expenses were \$1.2M, 8% of total 2021 expenses and an 11% decrease year-over-year
 - Coleman reviewed the audit process, discussing the risk based approach
 - The Tourism Council's procedures were understood, and internal controls were tested
 - Interviews were conducted with management and the Treasurer
 - Audit Results
 - The auditor's opinion on financial statements is an unmodified "clean" opinion
 - CLA identified no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies over financial reporting

- Required Communications
 - Financial statement disclosures: early implementation of GASB 87, Leases, and change in financial reporting entity, GASB 14, Financial Reporting Entity
 - Coleman stated there were no difficulties encountered during the audit, no material corrected misstatements, no uncorrected misstatements, no disagreements with management, and management provided representation for the financial statements
 - Management did not consult with other independent accountants
 - No significant issues were discussed with management prior to engagement
 - No other audit findings or issues
 - Coleman referred to the Management Discussion and Analysis for a high level summary of financial statements and activity, as well as the Budget to Actual Schedule
 - Green inquired about whether management not consulting with independent accountants is a positive aspect of the audit
 - Coleman acknowledged that is the correct practice
 - Kirkland thanked the Visit Williamsburg staff and Coleman for presenting the clear and concise findings
 - Pons emphasized the importance of a clean audit, and thanked staff
- Pons shared financial statements through January 31, 2022
 - Total January 2022 revenues was \$1.3M
 - Over budget by \$131K
 - Sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$1.2M, over budget by \$144K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$104K, under budget by \$12K
 - Maintenance of Effort (MOE) revenue was \$0, in line with budget
 - January expenses were \$1.3M, under budget by \$44K
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$1.1M, \$53K under budget for the month
 - Sales activities were \$58K, over budget by \$11K
 - Administrative costs were \$129K, under budget by \$2K
 - Staffing costs were \$97K, under budget by \$11K
 - Other administrative expenses were \$32K, over budget by \$9K
 - Fiscal Year to Date (FYTD) 2022 revenue was \$10M, over budget by \$948K
 - FYTD sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$8.2M, over budget by \$902K
 - FYTD transient tax receipts totaled \$1M, over budget by \$58K
 - FYTD MOE revenues were \$788K, in-line with budget
 - FYTD 2022 expenses were \$6.4M, under budget by \$2.6M
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$5.5M, under budget by \$2.4M
 - Sales activities were \$152K, under budget by \$89K due to the timing of invoices and expenses
 - Total administrative expenses were \$821K, under budget by \$102K

- Staff costs were \$650K, under budget by \$79K due to the timing of hiring
 - Cimino noted that three additional staff members are planned to be hired by the end of the fiscal year
 - Other administrative costs were \$170K, under budget by \$23K
 - Cash on Hand
 - The Tourism Council has \$14.2M in the bank; \$9.7M for operations and \$4.5M for product development
 - Cash on Hand for operations is over budget by \$2.4M as of the month of January
 - Cash on Hand for product development is over budget by \$6K due to the timing of receiving payments
 - Sales tax revenue
 - December increased \$316K or 27.8% year-over-year
 - \$1.5M in 2021 versus \$1.1M in 2020
 - The 3-month moving average increased 28.5% versus the same period in 2020
 - Transient tax revenue
 - December increased \$52K or 83.1% year-over-year
 - \$115K in 2021 versus \$63K in 2020
 - The 3-month moving average increased 90.5% versus the same period in 2020

VII. CEO Report

- Cimino provided an update on miscellaneous administrative items
 - Stated that Senator Norment introduced Senate Bill 438
 - The legislation amends Va. Code Section 58.1-603.2
 - Provides clarifications/corrections, further articulates distribution of Maintenance of Effort funds
 - Establishes the Williamsburg Tourism Council as an advisory board to the legislative branch of state government
 - Passed the Senate and the House
 - ARPA funds to be utilized to open the Boston designated market area
 - Visit Williamsburg has requested gasoline packages and promotions from suppliers
 - Signed on to a U.S. Travel Association letter that addresses H-2B/J1 Visas, asking Congress to increase the cap of the allowable visas
- Presented the Smith Travel Research report
 - January 2022
 - Occupancy was 23.3% versus 25.5% in January 2020, 2% down
 - Average Daily Rate (ADR) was \$114.54 versus \$109.74 in 2020
 - 5% increase over 2020
 - 13% increase over 2021

- In-State vs. Out-of-State Visitation
 - Cimino shared a comparison of pre-pandemic, pandemic, and recovery era visitation
 - Out-of-state visitor share remains consistent in February, inching closer to a 50/50 split
 - Cimino noted the positive trend, the further visitors travel, the longer they stay, and the more they spend
- February 2022 Top Origin Markets
 - Top markets remain steady
 - Report is based on mobile phone geolocation data collected by Near
 - Top four markets are: Washington, D.C., Norfolk, Richmond, and New York
 - New York continues to see gains in share
 - Noted that New York's digital campaign was launched last year, TV advertising began this year along with out-of-home executions
- Visitor Spend by Market
 - Top spending markets align with top origin markets
 - Boston, which was launched February 1, is seen in the top 10 for the first time
 - Noted the strong potential of the Boston market
- Marketing and Communications
 - 2022 Campaign Overview
 - Campaign launched on February 1, in 21 markets
 - Target audience
 - GenX and Millennial families
 - Active Mature, GenX, and Millennial couples
 - Noted a focus on travel shoppers
 - January/February Advertising
 - Cimino shared sample web and digital creative for "Life. At Your Pace."
 - Out-of-home was launched at the beginning of March and will run through the spring
 - Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and Cleveland
 - Train and subway stations, digital liveboards, wallscapes, kiosks, and more
 - January/February Digital Advertising Performance
 - Flight/hotel searches are up 262%
 - Hotel bookings are up 123%
 - Hotel booking conversion rates are up 3%
 - Flight booking conversion rates are up 7%
 - Paid search volume is up 218%
 - Organic Search spiked in February, aligning with campaign launch
 - 9% above February 2020 search volume

- January/February Web Performance
 - Cimino shared charts demonstrating the spike in traffic beginning on February 1
 - Site sessions are up 12% when compared to February 2021
- *The WilliamsBLOG*: January/February Performance
 - Performance continues to improve
 - Pages per session are up 6.1%
 - Average time on page is up 17.8%
 - New site sessions are up 1.5%
 - Average session duration is up 58%
 - Top posts include "7 Reasons Why Williamsburg is Good for Families", "Williamsburg's Current Excavations and Recent Findings," "Get Into the Swing of Golf in Williamsburg," "7 Things to do for First-Time Visitors," "A Romantic Weekend Getaway in Williamsburg," "Most Instagrammable Places in Williamsburg," and "How to Eat and Drink Your Way Through Williamsburg"
- Influencer Program: Recent Trips
 - The region played host to a number of influencers January through March:
 - Frederick Murphy (*History Before Us*)
 - Justin Chapple (culinary director, *Food & Wine*)
 - TikTok creators, @staysandgetaways and @dmvfoodie
 - Visit Williamsburg is an early adopter of working with TikTok creators
- January/February: Organic Social Media Performance
 - Engagement rates across social channels was a strong 4.7%
 - 34% increase year-over-year
 - 3 times higher than industry benchmark
- Content Partnerships: Bon Appétit and Golf.com
 - Bon Appétit content partnership launched in March
 - Included an article, video, and social amplification across *Conde Nast's* channels
 - Featured eight local food and beverage scenes
 - Pons and Kirkland commented on the quality of the content
 - Chad Green highlighted the opportunity it provided to businesses across all three municipalities
 - Cimino stated that as a reminder, partnerships opportunities are listed in the weekly industry email
 - Golf.com partnership relaunched in February
 - Included on-site advertising, two videos, three articles, and social posts
 - Early metrics of both partnerships show strong performance

- Awards and Accolades
 - 2021 HSMAI Adrian Award – Television Advertising
 - Silver – “Life. At Your Pace.”
 - Noted Visit Williamsburg won a total of eight awards in 2021 for the “Life. At your Pace.” campaign
 - Ruth Larson reported that Cimino was nominated and selected by HSMAI as one of “Top 25 Most Extraordinary Minds in Hospitality Sales, Marketing, and Revenue Optimization”
 - Public Relations (January 1 – February 28)
 - 95.2M impressions with 9 placements
 - Key media placements included *RIC Today*, *Destinations*, *Authority Magazine*
 - Sales (November/December)
 - Participated in 6 trade shows, events, and site visits, including:
 - American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace
 - Religious Conference Management Association (RCMA)
 - Southeast Tourism Society (STS) pre-FAM and Conference
 - FAM included visits to Colonial Williamsburg and Jamestown Settlement
 - Society of Government Meeting Professionals (SGMP)
 - Visit Williamsburg issued 17 new business leads and 5 service leads
 - Represents 5,816 room nights
 - Confirmed eight bookings from January-March
 - Equates to 1,160 definite room nights
 - Four upcoming trade shows and events
 - Pennsylvania Bus Association (PBA) Marketplace
 - African American Travel Conference
 - VSAE Annual Conference
 - Connect Marketplace
 - Cimino noted three sales positions have been posted
- Fall/Winter Ad Effectiveness
 - Visit Williamsburg’s third party research partner is Strategic Marketing and Research Insights, otherwise known as SMARI
 - SMARI is based in Indianapolis, the full service research firm is a destination marketing specialist with more than 35 years of experience
 - 20 state tourism organizations, 38 convention and visitors bureaus, and 20 attractions
 - Cimino introduced David Seiferth, President, SMARInsights
 - David Seiferth provided a brief overview of SMARI’s research
 - Research Objectives
 - Track COVID-19 impact on consumer perceptions and travel behaviors
 - Gauge advertising awareness
 - Calculate return on investment (ROI)
 - Review competitive environment

- Provide Boston baseline
- Methodology
 - Data was collected via 2,005 online surveys
 - Those surveyed take at least one trip a year that involves an overnight stay or is at least 50 miles from home
 - Research was conducted in proven as well as expansion markets
 - Boston excluded from ad analysis
- COVID-19 Impact on Perception
 - Seiferth shared bar graph charts that indicated a significant decrease in concern over COVID-19 from July 2020 to January 2022
 - 56% agreed that “the thought of traveling scares me right now” in late July/early August 2020 vs. 29% in late January 2022
 - 55% agreed that “it is irresponsible to travel right now” in late July/early August 2020 vs. 24% in late January 2022
 - Seiferth noted the impact of the January 2022 Omicron variant surge on results
- Leisure Travel Planning
 - Despite the Omicron variant, the percentage of consumers ready to plan leisure travel has grown since September/October 2021
 - Partially driven by the seasonality of spring break travel planning
 - Seiferth noted that increased recovery is expected
- Fall/Holiday Ad Awareness
 - Fall/Holiday advertising reached approximately a third of target households
 - Combined, 45% of target households recall seeing the advertising
- Ad Awareness by Market Group
 - Seiferth noted the very strong performance in expansion markets
 - Ad awareness is trending higher in proven markets than in expansion markets
- Ad Awareness by Demographic
 - Awareness is highest among GenX and Millennial families with children
 - Awareness is lowest among Active Mature couples
 - Seiferth noted the industry is finding it difficult to reach older consumers
- Familiarity and Overall Rating
 - Those aware of advertising are more likely to be “very familiar” and are more likely to rate the destination an “excellent” place to visit
 - Advertising is educating consumers and building more positive perceptions
- Ad Impact on Image
 - Seiferth shared a chart that indicated Unaware vs. Ad-Aware respondent’s ratings for perceptions of the destination
 - Top categories for the destination were “family friendly,” “a safe place to visit,” and “historic sites and landmarks”

- Fall/Holiday advertising has boosted specific perceptions
 - Ad Impact on Visit
 - Fall/Holiday advertising influenced length of stay, number of activities, spending, and trip satisfaction
 - Results suggest the advertising is effectively showcasing travel product and inspiring longer, more active trips
 - Economic Impact and ROI
 - Fall/Holiday advertising influenced:
 - Nearly 45,000 trips
 - \$62.4M in spending
 - A return of \$45 in visitor spending for each \$1 invested in media
 - 2021 advertising influenced:
 - Nearly 356,000 trips
 - \$469M in spending
 - A return of \$66 in visitor spending for each \$1 invested in media
 - Ron Kirkland asked if data exists to identify consumer's political leanings and how that may impact their COVID-19 perceptions and travel planning
 - Seiferth stated that research found anecdotal evidence, and there was a correlation between people's attitudes towards vaccines and whether or not they had a hesitancy to travel

VIII. Old Business

- No old business was presented

IX. New Business

- Ruth Larson stated that notes were taken during the roundtable discussion and follow-up is forthcoming
- Ron Kirkland noted The Maine of Williamsburg does not include directions on its website

X. Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned
- The next meeting will take place in-person on May 17, 2022