

ATTACHMENT A
WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
September 19, 2023
Meeting Minutes

The Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) meeting was convened at 1 p.m. on September 19, 2023. The meeting was held at the Yorktown Freight Shed. A quorum was present.

Tourism Council Members Present:

CHAIR Ruth Larson, James City County Board of Supervisors
Vice Chair Cliff Fleet, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Neal Chalkley, Williamsburg Hotel and Motel Association
Michael Claar, Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association
Christy Coleman, Jamestown/Yorktown Foundation
Chad Green, York County Board of Supervisors
Kevin Lembke, Busch Gardens/Water Country USA
Denise Kellogg, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation

Ben Ellington, Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce, Ex Officio
Rita McClenny, Virginia Tourism Corporation, Ex Officio

Staff Members Present:

Victoria Cimino, CEO

Josue Ayala, Executive Assistant
Jennifer Case, Chief Marketing Officer
Jennifer McConnell, Sales and Service Coordinator
Lori Ottarson, Accountant
Daniela Owen, Familiarization Tour Coordinator
Julia Smyth-Young, Chief Sales Officer
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 comments were presented

III. Longwoods International Briefing – Amir Eylon

- Victoria Cimino introduced Amir Eylon, president of Longwoods International, a 33-year veteran of the travel and tourism industry, and a regular speaker on market research at tourism conferences and events nationwide
- Longwoods International
 - Established in 1978 and headquartered in Columbus, OH and Toronto, ON, working with more than 175 destinations and brands
- Key Learnings
 - Don't forget about COVID
 - One in four travel differently and with different expectations
 - Don't deep discount – show value
 - Demand remains strong but with a reallocation of spending to offset inflation
 - Heightened service expectations
 - Lean into technology and manage expectations
 - Don't fear artificial intelligence
 - Content creators' roles are more important than ever

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

- McClenny announced that VTC had entered a budget request of \$8.9M
 - The majority of funds are requested for marketing to replicate previous successes realized with ARPA funds
- Season 2 of "My Home, Virginia" was launched on YouTube
 - Made to connect economic development and talent retention, as well as to show the power of those who are from Virginia and their influence on the hospitality industry

V. Roundtable Discussion

- Larson introduced the roundtable discussion
 - Denise Kellogg shared that visitation has been better at Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation but not at 2019 levels; Kellogg also shared that the archaeology team recently discovered a well on the island
 - Chad Green spoke to Princess Cruise Line's future schedule, anchoring off of Yorktown's shoreline three times in 2024
 - Christy Coleman announced that attendance is trending above 2022
 - Student visitation numbers are expected to increase for the fall season
 - This spring, the *Susan Constant* will be rebuilt in Connecticut
 - Cliff Fleet reported that while year-to-date numbers are up over last year, August was soft [likely due to heat]; school group visitation has not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels
 - Larson stated that progress is being made with the sports complex

- Neal Chalkley shared that hotels are experiencing some softness, however, fourth-quarter pace has increased
- Ben Ellington announced the Chamber's second Speaker Series event
- Kevin Lembke announced that Howl-O-Scream will begin in September
 - August heat impacted attendance
 - Future demand looks strong
- Michael Claar announced the third annual boost program that encourages consumers to buy discounted gift cards and WARA gift certificates

VI. Minutes

- Larson requested a motion to approve the July 18, 2023 meeting minutes
- Fleet motioned
- Chalkley provided a second
- Minutes were unanimously approved

VII. Chair Report

- Larson announced that the next board meeting may need to be rescheduled as it falls on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving; offered to circle back following the meeting

VIII. Treasurer's Report

- David Turner shared financial statements through July 31, 2023
 - July 2023 Revenue was \$1.4M - over budget by \$16K
 - Sales tax receipts totaled \$1.2M, over budget by \$12K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$167K, under budget by \$9K
 - Maintenance of Effort receipts totaled \$39K, over budget by \$13K
 - Other revenue totaled \$4K, in line with budget
 - July 2023 Expenses, were \$1.5M - over budget by \$27K for July
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$1.3M, over budget by \$41K
 - Sales activities were \$53K, over budget by \$8K
 - Total Administrative expenses were \$140K, under budget by \$22K
 - Staffing costs were \$114K, under budget by \$19K
 - Other Administrative expenses were \$26K, under budget by \$3K due to lower costs on employee recruiting
- Cash on Hand
 - The Tourism Council has \$4.8M in the bank for operations, over budget by \$1.4M with accounts payable liabilities totaling \$437K leaving cash on hand at \$4.3M
- Sales Tax Revenue
 - June decreased \$13K or 1.1% year-over-year
 - \$1.24M in 2023 vs. \$1.25M in 2022
 - The 3-month moving average increased 1.1% vs. same period in 2022
 - YTD sales tax receipts increased 5.6% vs. same period 2022

- Transient Tax Revenue
 - June increased \$70K or 58.4% year-over-year,
 - \$188K in 2023 vs. \$119K in 2022
 - The 3-month moving average increased by 14.8% vs. the same period in 2022
 - Year-to-date tax receipts are up 11.3% versus the same period in 2022

IX. Executive Director and CEO report

- Key Performance Indicators
 - STR Report data
 - July 2023
 - Occupancy: 68%
 - Flat in comparison to July 2022
 - Average Daily Rate (ADR): \$159.65
 - Decreased compared to July 2022 (\$161.52)
 - RevPAR: \$109.81
 - Decreased when compared to July 2022 (\$109.81)
 - Revenue: \$22M
 - Decrease when compared to July 2022 (\$22.3M)
 - July 2023 YTD comparison to 2022
 - Occupancy increased by 6.3%
 - ADR was flat
 - Demand increased by 7%
 - RevPAR increased by 6%
 - July 2023 YTD comparison to 2019
 - Occupancy increased 3.3%
 - ADR increased by 16.2%
 - RevPAR increased by 24%
 - Top Origin Markets
 - Washington, D.C. remains number one
 - New York is now number two
 - Philadelphia is at number three
 - 77% of visitors are out of state
 - Average Visitor Daily Spend Per Month
 - August's average visitor spend totaled \$152
 - Visitor spending is influenced by seasonal lodging rates and length of stay
 - Visitors are spending the bulk of their dollars on food, lodging, retail, gas, and attractions
 - Visitor Spend by Age Group
 - 45 – 54 leads in spending, with 65+ following behind
 - Benchmark Comparison, Average Visitor Spend per Month
 - Visitor spend is calculated as total visitor credit card swipes and divided by visitor card holder count
 - Visit Williamsburg exceeds the benchmark every month of the year

- View-to-Visit Window
 - Summer and fall have the longest planning windows at 50 and 37 days, respectively
- Marketing
 - Media Strategy: 2023 optimization will provide greater emphasis on key KPI's of booking and site traffic
 - Market Evolution: Committed to greater visibility in broadcast, integrating digitally in a new test market (Atlanta)
 - Endemic Lean-In: Increasing lower-funnel booking support like TripAdvisor and Priceline
 - KPI Refinement: Directing more site traffic to visitwilliamsburg.com versus media partner sites
 - Cookieless Expansion: Working with digital partners (Adara and Sojern) to ensure continued personalization in targeted insights
 - Using new identifiers to include email and IP addresses or device IDs
 - Seasonal Visitation Trends
 - Trends are in line with media spend
 - Visit Williamsburg is optimistic about fall/winter growth, given the increased activities and events during those seasons
 - Flighting Strategy
 - Tactics continue to include:
 - TV
 - Connected TV
 - Streaming Audio
 - Blog support
 - Paid search and social
 - Consumer emails
 - For the first time, Visit Williamsburg utilized broadcast television in September to promote the fall/holidays
 - Market Strategy
 - Launched in 23 markets in January, new this year: Atlanta (digital only)
 - Audience
 - Millennial/Gen X families and couples, as well as active mature couples
 - YTD: Digital Advertising Performance
 - Has driven 114,000 hotel searches
 - Site sessions from paid digital channels have increased by 20% and the booking conversion rate has increased by 8% year-over-year
 - Spotlight: Atlanta
 - Since its launch in January, it has risen to the #3 market based on website page views with a 226% increase in site traffic and a 49% increase in organic site traffic
 - *The WilliamsBLOG*
 - Content creation continues to be a significant priority as *The WilliamsBLOG* is utilized to publish new and unique pieces
 - YTD, the blog has realized 457K site visits; 33% via online search

- YTD Website Performance
 - VW website continues to outperform pre-pandemic levels and 2022
 - Site sessions and users increased by 12%
- New and Improved: visitwilliamsburg.com
 - Will launch in November
 - There will be a new industry partner portal for business/event listing management
 - A series of industry training programs will be held in advance of the launch
- July/August: Familiarization Tours
 - The region played host to four journalists and three influencers
 - Influencers drove 1.2M impressions and 124K engagements
- July/August: Organic Social Performance
 - We've placed a strong emphasis on shooting new visual assets and producing new editorial content
 - Consumers are responding with a:
 - 20% growth in followers
 - 49% increase in engagements
 - 118% increase in video views
- Public Relations
 - July/August Earned Media
 - 54.1M Global impressions; 13 placements
 - HGTV
 - *Travel & Leisure*
 - *Where to Next* podcast
 - July/August: Awards and Accolades
 - Travel and Leisure's #11 out of 15 Best Cities in the U.S. survey
 - *Southern Living* names Williamsburg the #18 "Festive Small Town for a Charming Christmas Getaway"
- Sales July/August 2023 Performance
 - July/August: Shows and Events
 - Student and Youth Travel Association (SYTA) Socials ARTECHOUSE (July 20)
 - SYTA Annual Conference (August 18-22)
 - Visit Williamsburg conducted a Destination Spotlight during the conference
 - Connect Marketplace (August 22-24)
 - Virginia Motorcoach Association (VMA) (August 22-24)
 - In addition to the shows, we conducted four client visits
 - July/August/September: New Business Leads
 - Sales issued 20 leads representing 8,401 room nights
 - July/August: Definite Bookings
 - Throughout July and August, the sales team converted 16 pieces of business, totaling 1,109 room nights

- Upcoming tradeshow and events
 - Capitol Region USA (CRUSA) Global Tourism Exchange (September 18-20)
 - The region will play host to 14 international tour operators following the event
 - Virginia Society of Association Executives (VSAE) (October 4-5)
 - Power of Partnership Stewardship Summit (October 15-18)
 - National Tour Association (NTA) Travel Exchange (November 12-15)

X. **Old Business**

- None

XI. **New Business**

- None

XII. **Closed Session**

- Fleet motioned to enter into Closed Session
 - Pursuant to Va. Code Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) to discuss personnel matters
- All were in favor
- Fleet motioned to exit Closed Session
 - We hereby certify that to the best of our knowledge, (1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements under the Freedom of Information Act, and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion by which closed the meeting was convened, were heard, discussed, or considered by this body in the closed meeting just concluded
- All were in favor

XIII. **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned