

**ATTACHMENT A**  
**WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING**  
Williamsburg, Virginia  
November 20, 2023  
Meeting Minutes

The Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) meeting was convened at 1 p.m. on November 20, 2023. The meeting was held at Williamsburg Lodge, Tidewater Room. A quorum was present.

**Tourism Council Members Present:**

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

Neal Chalkley, Williamsburg Hotel and Motel Association  
Mickey Chohany, Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association  
Christy Coleman, Jamestown/Yorktown Foundation  
Chad Green, York County Board of Supervisors  
Jim Horn, Jamestown Rediscovery  
Kevin Lembke, President, Busch Gardens/Water Country USA

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

- LOVE sign unveiled in New Town (James City County)
- Returned from Governor’s VA 1 Tourism Summit
  - The Governor spoke about sports tourism, among other topics
  - Summit topics included information on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the hospitality industry’s seven pillars
  - McClenny introduced guest speaker, Dan Roberts, Vice President of Research and Strategy

### IV. VTC Research Briefing – Dan Roberts, Vice President of Research and Strategy

- Dan Roberts serves on the VTC executive team, driving external and internal research and analysis
- 2022 Economic Impact Results in Virginia
  - Virginia has crossed \$30 billion in visitor spending for the first time
  - Visitor spending in the Historic Triangle has grown beyond 2019 levels by 4%
  - Virginia is still recovering in overall total visitation, as well as the labor market
    - Discussion ensued re: labor; expenses have increased while the number of employees has decreased
  - Lodging, food and beverage, and recreation are the largest contributors to visitor spending in the region
- Data Collection
  - Tax data is collected by the University of Virginia’s Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service
  - Longwoods International collects traveler survey data
  - Jobs and wage data is collected from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, United States Census Bureau, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Economic Census

### V. Roundtable Discussion

- Larson introduced the roundtable discussion
  - Chad Green had no comment
  - Christy Coleman had no comment
  - Jim Horn stated he was grateful that the government did not shut down
  - Cliff Fleet shared that Colonial Williamsburg had its best October ever
  - Larson shared that James City County has a new LOVE sign at Freedom Park
    - Will be in Freedom Park for six months, but hope to move throughout the County
    - James City County will have a new Supervisor in January, Barbara Null, taking Supervisor Sue Sadler’s seat
  - Doug Pons shared the city council approved the recommendation from the tourism grant review committee, which includes the African American Heritage Trail
    - The Christmas Parade is on December 3

- Kevin Lembke shared that Busch Gardens' October was strong and forecasting good demand for December
- Neal Chalkley stated October was strong for the Williamsburg Hotel Motel Association; he was optimistic about the end of the year
- Mickey Chohany stated October was good for Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association (WARA) members and forecasted a strong November and December
  - WARA will continue its gift certificate program
  - WARA is updating its website
- Ben Ellington reiterated that the Christmas Parade will be on December 3 and is expecting 2022's attendance to beat its record of 18,000
  - The speaker series will continue on January 10 with B.K. Fulton

#### VI. **Minutes**

- Larson requested a motion to approve the September 19, 2023 meeting minutes
- Fleet motioned
- Coleman provided a second
- Minutes were unanimously approved

#### VII. **Chair Report**

- Larson attended the Virginia Association of Counties Annual Conference; tourism and film were prevalent topics throughout the conference
  - James City County participated in a breakout session, re: recreational tourism
- Larson thanked Chad Green for serving on the Williamsburg Tourism Council board of directors

#### VIII. **Treasurer's Report**

- Mayor Pons shared financial statements through September 30, 2023
  - September 2023 revenues were \$1.6M, over budget by \$68K
    - Sales tax receipts totaled \$1.4M, over budget by \$18K
    - Transient tax receipts were \$168k, over budget \$49K
    - Maintenance of Effort funds totaled \$0K, in line with budget
    - Other receipts totaled \$4K over budget by \$1K
  - September 2023 Expenses were \$1.4M, over budget by \$85K
    - Destinations Marketing expense was \$1.2M, over budget by \$106
    - Other sales and marketing expenses were \$33K, under budget by \$11K
    - Labor and benefits were \$109K, under budget by \$24K
    - Total administrative expenses were \$43K, over budget by \$14K
  - 2023 Fiscal YTD revenues were \$4.4M, over budget by \$158K
    - YTD sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$3.8M, over budget by \$20K
    - YTD transient tax receipts totaled \$524K, over budget by \$109K
    - YTD Maintenance of Effort funds was \$39K, over budget by \$13K
    - Other revenue was \$26K, over budget by \$16K

- 2023 Fiscal YTD expenses were \$3.8M, under budget by \$308K
  - Destination Marketing expenses were \$3.3M, under budget by \$217K
  - Other sales and marketing expenses totaled \$112K, under budget by \$15K
  - Labor and benefits costs were \$360K, under budget by \$50K
  - Total administrative expenses \$423K, under budget by \$77K
- Cash on Hand
  - The Tourism Council has \$5.7M for operations, over budget by \$2M with an accounts payable liability of \$1.6M
    - Chohany asked who the Tourism Council banks with
      - David Turner responded Chesapeake Bank and BBT (now Truist); Chohany suggested that funds might earn a higher interest rate
- Sales Tax Revenue
  - August increased \$180K or 14.5% year-over-year
    - The 3-month moving average increased 4.7% vs. 2022
- Transient Tax Revenue
  - August decreased \$50K or 29.7% year-over-year,
    - The 3-month moving average decreased by 1% versus the same period in 2022
    - Year-to-date tax receipts are up 0.6% versus the same period in 2022

## IX. Executive Director and CEO report

- Key Performance Indicators
  - STR Report data
    - Occupancy
      - September totaled 47.7% versus 49% in 2022
      - October totaled 53.7% versus 52.2% in 2022, a 2.8% increase
    - Average Daily Rate (ADR) 2023
      - September totaled \$132.61 versus \$136.33 in 2022
      - October totaled \$145.01 versus \$141.94 in 2022, a 2.2% increase
        - Coleman asked about trends in visitation, noting a lag in ticket sales (Fleet concurred)
    - RevPAR 2023
      - September totaled \$63.23 versus \$66.84 in 2022
      - October totaled \$77.87 versus \$74.11 in 2022, a 5.1% increase
    - Revenue
      - September totaled \$12.4M versus \$13.1M in 2022
      - October totaled \$15.8M versus \$15M in 2022, a 5% increase
  - YTD Comparison to 2022
    - October occupancy increased 3.2%
    - Total revenue through October was \$153.2M
  - YTD Comparison to 2019
    - Occupancy has increased 1.8%
    - This may be the last we compare against 2019, as 2023 will be a record-breaking year and the best year on record since 2007

- Top Origin Markets
  - Washington, D.C. remains number one
  - New York is now number eight but still very strong, considering the market was launched two years ago
- Average Visitor Spend by Category
  - On-site credit card swipes illustrate that visitors spend more money on food than any other category
- Visitor Spend by Age Group
  - Year to Date, Active Mature (65+) travelers spend \$206 per day and make up the strongest age group with the percentage of total spending
- Benchmark Comparison, Average Visitor Spend per Month
  - When comparing visitor spending in Williamsburg to Zartico's 200+ clients, our region outperforms every month of the year
- Marketing
  - Media Strategy: 2023 strategy included:
    - Increased broadcast television
    - Stronger emphasis on lower-funnel booking support
    - Use of partners that drive traffic to visitwilliamsburg.com rather than their sites
    - Utilize platforms that don't rely on cookies
  - Flighting Strategy
    - 25% of Visit Williamsburg's media buy took place from August through the end of the year
    - Visit Williamsburg ran a fall/holiday TV spot in September for the first time
  - Market Strategy
    - Visit Williamsburg continues to nurture new markets this year, including Atlanta, which launched with a digital-only program
  - Audience
    - Maintained a focus on the core audience
      - Millennials/Generation X, families and couples, and active mature couples
  - Quarter 4 Media Investments and Optimizations
    - Shifts were made this fall to address occupancy softening
      - Coordinated a Travelzoo destination spotlight featuring an overview and hotel offers at no cost to participants
    - Executed a strong presence on local news sites in key drive markets
      - NY Post, Washington Times, Baltimore Sun, and more
    - Increased Meta investment to saturate drive markets featuring golf, fall, and holiday content
    - Shifted dollars from Priceline to booking.com
    - Increased consumer email audience size and deployment
  - YTD: Digital Advertising Performance
    - Has driven 100,000 hotel searches and 64,000 flight searches
    - Sessions and traffic have shown gains year-over-year

- YTD Website Performance
  - Website performance continues to outpace prior years, with an increase in both sessions and users
- Top Pages/Blog Posts
  - Top pages on the site include attractions, events, shopping, and restaurants
    - “Fall happenings” was the top blog posts
- YTD Social Media Performance
  - Strong YoY growth across Instagram and Facebook
- September/October: Influencer Program
  - The program featured content creators Ernest Crim (Black history), Cynthia Andrew (family travel), Jennifer Allan (accessible travel), Annie Jiang (scenery), Christine Tran Ferguson (multi-gen travel), and Shay Spence (food and drink)
  - Visit Williamsburg also hosted the Hamilton’s, a celebrity couple from the hit TV show *Love is Blind*
  - The region will continue to host influencers through the end of the year
- September/October: Organic Social Performance
  - Organic social outperformed July/August
  - One of the most successful posts to date featured the Crim Dell Bridge with 134,000 impressions
- 2024 Media Strategy
  - As we approach 2024, Visit Williamsburg will:
    - Continue to evolve emerging markets, including launching broadcast television and Out of Home (OOH) in our newest market, Atlanta
    - We will continue to focus on lower-funnel booking sites
    - Increase the use of high-impact video and audio
    - Continue to test platforms that do not rely on cookies to illustrate attribution
- 2024 Evolution
  - Tactics
    - Broadcast television – Continue with 15-second spots in mature markets and 30-second spots in new markets
    - OOH – Short and loud 4-week campaign to launch in spring
    - Travel endemics – Lean on 2023’s top-performing units and tactics
    - Audio – Continue the use of top-performing podcasts
    - Non-endemic digital – Advertising with a focus on driving site traffic
    - Paid search
    - Maintain influencer program – Creating an ambassador program for repeated exposure in priority markets
    - Organic/paid social
- Flighting Strategy: 2024
  - Will mirror 2023’s launch and seasonal allocation
- Cimino presented a behind-the-scenes video from Visit Williamsburg’s recent photo shoot

- Visitwilliamsburg.com
  - A new and improved website launched on November 1 that features a sophisticated aesthetic and improved functionality
  - Cimino encouraged the industry to take advantage of free business and event listings via the partner portal, noting future training sessions
- Public Relations
  - September/October 2023 Performance
    - 43.8M impressions; 13 placements
      - Travel+Leisure, AAA, Travel Pulse, and more
  - September/October Awards and Accolades
    - Visit Williamsburg achieved eight awards – Magellan (3), HSMAI (3), Smart Meetings Platinum Choice, Convention South Readers’ Choice
- Sales September/October 2023 Performance
  - Shows and Events
    - Capital Region USA Global Tourism Exchange (September 18-20)
    - Virginia Society of Association Executives (VSAE) (October 4-5)
    - Stewardship Summit (October 15-18)
    - National Tour Association (NTA) (November 12-15)
  - New Business Leads
    - Throughout September and October, the DMO issued 16 new business leads, representing a potential 3,071 room nights
  - September/October: Definite Bookings
    - Visit Williamsburg converted 16 definite bookings, totaling 1,359 room nights
  - Upcoming tradeshow and events
    - Connect Corporate (November 27-29)
    - Travel South International Showcase (December 3-7)
    - Emerge 2024 (January 9-11)
    - American Bus Association (ABA) (January 13-16)
- 2024 Sales Plans
  - Cimino introduced Julia Smyth-Young to present the 2024 sales plan
    - Sports
    - SMERF (social, military, education, religious)
    - Group Tour
    - International
    - MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions)
    - Diversity and Inclusivity
    - Association
    - Corporate

- Vision, Mission, and Values
  - The Visit Williamsburg team engaged with Coraggio Group to lead a staff retreat and develop vision, mission, and values
  - Vision: Drive economic development by inspiring future visitors.
  - Mission: We drive overnight visitation and economic impact through innovative sales and marketing efforts that honor the region’s heritage, experiences, and natural beauty.
  - Values
    - Innovation – Visit Williamsburg fosters an environment that encourages creativity, experimentation, and the development of groundbreaking solutions.
    - Integrity – We lead by example while holding ourselves accountable.
    - Inclusion – We value the perspectives and experiences of our team and partners while providing a culture of respect and understanding.
    - Authenticity – We approach our work in a genuine and trustworthy manner. We strive to collaborate effectively with the region’s hospitality industry.
    - Purpose – Visit Williamsburg’s strategy, tactics, and efforts are intentional and deliberate in executing against business goals.
  - This year, a Talent and Culture Manager was created to formalize the organization's human resources function, implement a culture management plan, coordinate training sessions/continuing education, and more

X. **Old Business**

- None

XI. **New Business**

- None

XII. **Closed Session**

- Green motioned to enter into Closed Session
  - Pursuant to Va. Code Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) to discuss personnel matters
- Coleman provided a second
- All were in favor
- Green 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
- Coleman provided a second
- All were in favor



- Larson stated, “At this time I will entertain a motion, consistent with our closed session discussion, to task the Executive Committee with contracting for organizational succession planning services as the Tourism Council’s needs arise.”
- Fleet motioned
- Green provided a second
- All were in favor

XIII. **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned
- The next meeting will take place on January 16, 2024