

**ATTACHMENT A**  
WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING  
Williamsburg, Virginia  
January 18, 2022  
Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) was convened at 1:00 p.m. on January 18, 2022. The meeting was held at Jamestown Settlement (Elmon and Pam Gray Presentation Hall). A quorum was present.

**Tourism Council Members Present:**

CHAIR Ruth Larson, James City County Board of Supervisors  
TREASURER Doug Pons, Mayor, City of Williamsburg

Neal Chalkley, Williamsburg Hotel & Motel Association (WHMA)  
Michael Claar, Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association (WARA)  
Christy Coleman, Executive Director, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation  
Chad Green, Chair, York County Board of Supervisors  
James Horn, President and Chief Officer, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation  
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  
Julie O'Neil, Marketing Director  
Tamara Paris, Partnerships & Content Director  
Jill Pongonis, FAM Tour Coordinator  
Julia Smyth-Young, Sales Director  
Deana Zaharopoulos, Sales & Services Coordinator

**I. Call to Order**

- Ruth Larson called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.
  - Noted that Cliff Fleet and Chris Smith were unable to attend
- Christy Coleman was introduced as the meeting's host and provided opening remarks
  - Coleman provided an overview of JYF's strategic planning process, which is focused on three key areas – personnel, communications, and programming
  - JYF has seen strong visitation, at times exceeding 2019 numbers
  - There are 25,000 students booked for March/April 2022

## II. Public Comment

- No public comments presented

## III. Student & Youth Travel Association (SYTA) Briefing – Carylann Assante, CEO

- Victoria Cimino introduced Carylann Assante
  - SYTA is the international association that promotes student and youth travel worldwide; Assante is a seasoned tourism and association executive with more than 30 years of industry experience
- Assante provided a student and youth travel market briefing
  - Student and youth market is 26% of global tourism, producing \$33B annually prior to the pandemic
  - Large market share, youth (under 18) travel makes up 12% of travelers
  - SYTA has seen students in third grade and beyond traveling globally; parents believe travel is a major factor for students' success in school and future careers
  - Studies have shown social impact of youth travel; traveling 20 miles to another city increases the student's potential from a learning perspective
  - The U.S. ranks within the top ten travel destinations, with primary competition being Canada, Great Britain, and Ireland
    - Top three destinations in the U.S. are New York City, Orlando, and Washington, D.C.
    - Southern destinations are starting to see growth, i.e. Nashville
  - Student and youth group market is primarily focused on travel for education, voluntourism, and performance tours
    - Travel is planned by teachers and educator groups
    - Assante stated that destinations should market directly to educators
  - Noted a SYTA workshop for the region's hospitality suppliers will take place immediately following the board meeting
  - Acknowledged the pandemic's impact on student travel
    - The U.S. has been the only country with traveling students, the current estimate is 60% versus pre-pandemic student travel
    - Factors such as vaccination requirements and mask mandates have shifted students' destinations and postponed travel to 2023
  - Noted that destinations close to Washington, D.C. are seeing growth; student groups are decreasing overnights in D.C.
  - SYTA study showed that a student who travels to New York City for three days spends \$1500 versus an adult spend of \$600, showing the positive economic impact of student and youth travel
    - Students visit attractions that business travelers do not
    - Emphasized the need to influence administrators to allow student travel
- Rita McClenny noted the Governor promotes the fact that Virginia is open for business, and Virginia Tourism Cooperation is emphasizing safety and educational opportunities in its messaging, i.e. Virginia is for Learners

- Chad Green inquired about groups that are decreasing travel time in D.C., and if they are leaving for budgetary reasons
  - Assante stated that it is based on closures, regulations, and strict requirements
  - Groups are choosing to visit alternative destinations
- Cimino stated that Visit Williamsburg will partner with SYTA on a tour operator familiarization tour (August 2022)
  - Coleman inquired about Visit Williamsburg's outreach to educators and administrator councils
    - Cimino stated that the destination marketing organization is not engaged in direct communication with educators at this time [outside of trade/association efforts]
  - Assante stated SYTA exhibits on behalf of the travel industry at educational travel shows

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

- Larson introduced McClenny
- McClenny provided a VTC briefing
  - Implementation of leisure, domestic, outdoor, and sports travel strategies to remain dynamic in 2022
  - Expecting domestic travel in 2023 to reach 2019 levels, international restricted due to uncertainty of pandemic
  - Continuing to work with Brand USA and United Airlines on a multi-million-dollar international inbound campaign
  - Significant investments made in industry-centric data solutions with SMARI, Adara, Near, Longwoods International, and Tourism Economics, for data, trends and origin market intel
    - Emphasized investment in personalization for future content

#### **V. Roundtable Discussion**

- Larson asked board members for updates
  - Kevin Lembke reported that Busch Gardens is entering its off-season, although it will now be open every weekend of the year
    - Grand opening of roller coaster attraction, Pantheon, will occur in March
    - Strong year-end; solid bookings for 2022
  - Neal Chalkley stated transient and sports group travel bookings are up, with education-based travel showing weaker performance
  - Jim Horn stated Historic Jamestowne has seen visitation returning to 2019 levels
    - Noted opportunities to increase partnerships, eco-tourism, etc.
  - Michael Claar noted that Restaurant Week will take place January 21 – 31, 2022
    - Restaurant industry continues to have staffing challenges; operational shifts include menu alterations, reduced/altered hours, and price increases

## VI. Minutes

- Larson requested a motion to approve the November 16, 2021 meeting minutes
- Pons motioned
- Chalkley provided a second
- Minutes were unanimously approved

## VII. Treasurer's Report

- Pons shared financial statements through November 30, 2021
- Total November 2021 revenues was \$1.7M
  - Over budget by \$220K
  - Sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$1.2M, over budget by \$214K
  - Transient tax receipts totaled \$92K, under budget by \$89K
    - Budgeted at 5% less than 2019 actuals
    - Monthly fluctuations are driven by timing and receipts collected
  - Maintenance of Effort (MOE) revenue totaled \$455K, over budget by \$95K due to the timing of payments
- November expenses were \$898K, under budget by \$349K
  - Destination Marketing expenses were \$762K, \$347K under budget for the month
  - Sales activities were \$9K, under budget by \$2K
  - Administrative costs were \$127K, in-line with budget
    - Staffing costs were \$99K, under budget by \$7K
    - Other administrative expenses were \$28K, over budget by \$7K
      - Due to recruiting and equipment/office supplies
- Fiscal Year to Date (FYTD) 2022 revenue was \$7.4M, over budget by \$1.2M
  - FYTD sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled 5.9M, over budget by \$1.2M
  - FYTD transient tax receipts totaled \$760K, over budget by \$17K
  - FYTD MOE revenues were \$788K, in-line with budget
- FYTD 2022 expenses were \$4.4M, under budget by \$2.1M
  - Destination Marketing expenses were \$3.8M, under budget by \$1.9M
  - Sales activities were \$67K, under budget by \$86K due to the timing of invoices and expenses
  - Total administrative expenses were \$550K, under budget by \$111K
    - Staff costs were \$435K, under budget by \$76K
    - Other administrative costs were \$114K, under budget by \$35K
- Cash on Hand
  - The Tourism Council has \$13.3M in the bank; \$8.7M for operations and \$4.5M reserved for product development
  - Cash on Hand for Operations is over budget by \$1.9M as of the month of November
    - Sales tax revenue is exceeding budget
    - Budget may be revised to augment advertising campaign

- Cash on Hand for Product Development is under budget by \$67K due to the timing of receiving payments
- Sales tax revenue
  - October increased \$303K or 36.3% year-over-year
    - \$1.1M in 2021 versus \$835K in 2020
  - The 3-month moving average increased 27.8% versus the same period in 2020
- Transient tax revenue
  - October increased \$92K or 124% year-over-year
    - \$166K in 2021 versus \$74K in 2020
  - The 3-month moving average increased 74% versus the same period in 2020
- Cimino noted the importance of the 3-month moving average in determining revenue and reiterated that all contractors are paid on a reimbursable basis

## VIII. CEO Report

- Provided an update on ARPA funding distribution
  - Applications were submitted by each municipality; the following amounts will be contributed to Visit Williamsburg's 2022 advertising campaign
  - City of Williamsburg = \$402K
  - James City County = \$295K
  - York County = \$240K
    - Total is \$937K, to be utilized to launch the Boston market
- Stated that Senator Norment introduced Senate Bill 438, which was assigned a bill number on Thursday, January 13, 2022
  - The Bill amends Va. Code Section 58.1-603.2
  - Senate Bill 438 addresses housekeeping items, clarifies and corrects items in current statute
- Cimino presented the Smith Travel Research (STR) report
  - November 2021
    - Occupancy was 43.4% versus 44.1% in 2019
    - Average Daily Rate (ADR) was \$136.87 versus \$120.75 in 2019
  - Year-to-Date
    - Occupancy was 45% in 2021 versus 51% in 2019, 6% down
      - Cimino noted the gap may decrease to less than 5% below 2019 once December's STR reports are received
      - December's weekly reports showed strong performance
    - \$137.91 ADR in 2021 versus \$124.56 in 2019
- Marketing and Communications
  - 2021 Campaign Performance
    - Digital Advertising Performance
      - 440M digital impressions, 13% increase over 2020
      - 9.6% paid click-through-rate (CTR) versus 2.4% industry benchmark, 28% increase year-over-year

- 10K bookings that are directly attributed to digital ads
  - Resulting in \$4M in revenue
  - 140% increase in bookings
- 2.8M site sessions, 70% increase year-over-year
  - 51.3% increase over 2019
- 2021 Web Performance
  - Site traffic is up nearly 70%
  - Slight dip in September and October
    - Cimino noted that less media ran in Fall 2021 compared to Fall 2020
      - Media was launched in February 2021 versus previous campaign launch timeframe of June 2020
- *The WilliamsBLOG*: 2021 vs. 2020 Performance
  - Sessions are up 453%
  - Number of users are up 194%
  - New user sessions are up 15%
  - Average time on page is up 9%
  - Top post continues to be "7 Essential Things to do on a First Time Visit to Williamsburg"
- Influencer Marketing Program Overview
  - 21 influencers hosted in 2021
  - More than 100 businesses throughout the region were featured
  - 47.3M impressions, 3M engagements garnered through social media influencer posts
  - 18.2K followers secured on Instagram since July 2020
  - 17.8K sessions on visitwilliamsburg.com driven by influencer posts
    - 89.7% are first-time visitors
- 2021 Social Media Audience Growth
  - Social audience increased to 114,695 in 2021
    - Up 317% from 2020's growth rate
  - Instagram is up 220%
  - Facebook is up 333%
- Welcome Email Performance (Consumer)
  - New consumer email launched in July 2021
  - More than 2,400 new subscribers since July
    - Open rate is up by 23.6%
    - Click rate is up by 40.3%
    - Avg. Session Duration on WTC site is 3:38
- Cimino shared awards won for "Life. At Your Pace." campaign
  - Noted Visit Williamsburg has won a total of seven awards in 2021
- Holiday [November-December] Campaign Performance
  - Cimino shared holiday creative
  - 74M impressions via digital ads
  - Click-through-rate (CTR) was up 60%, .16% versus .10% industry benchmark

- Booking conversions were up 4.6%, highest for the entire year
  - Revenue attributed to advertising was up \$271K, up 55% versus 2020
- Influencer Partnership Spotlight: Tori Roloff
  - Worked with Tori Roloff, co-star of TLC's *Little People, Big World*, 1.7M Instagram followers
    - Posts from her trip garnered 2.4 million impressions, 600 new social media followers during the familiarization tour
    - Roloffs' trip was picked up by multiple major national media outlets including *People*, *US Weekly*, *MSN*, *In Touch*, *The Sun*, and *Heavy*
- Social Media (November/December)
  - Top Facebook Posts
    - Cimino shared top performing posts, noting fall and Tori Roloff content
  - Top Instagram Posts
    - Cimino shared top performing posts, noting holiday and fireworks content
    - Scenic posts provide the most engagement and will be a focus of content going forward
- 2022 Campaign
  - Campaign will launch on February 1
  - Flight Strategy
    - 45% of the 2022 advertising budget will be utilized in the spring
    - Focused on linear and connected TV, travel endemics for digital display ads, streaming audio, email, search, social, and influencers
  - Geographic Targeting
    - Launching in 21 markets
      - Launching TV in New York, ran digital only in 2020 and 2021
      - Launching Boston; demographic is in-line with Visit Williamsburg's target demographic criteria, significant air lift, growth in organic interest, Uber Media data showed strong numbers, and cost-efficient
  - \$11.2M advertising campaign
    - \$2M increase over 2021
    - Allows for the same digital coverage while expanding the broadcast buy into key expansion markets
    - Linear TV in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, and Boston
    - Cable TV in remaining markets
    - Out-of-home (OOH) media in key expansion markets to align with linear TV
- Public Relations (November 1 – December 28)
  - 738.9M impressions with 19 placements
  - Key media placements included *Washingtonian*, *USA Today*, *Womans Day*, and *Midwestern Traveler*
- Sales (November/December)
  - Participated in 7 trade shows, events, and site visits, including:
    - National Tour Association
    - Connect DC (Medical and Association)

- Capital Region USA (CRUSA) – Global Marketing Forum
- American Bus Association (ABA) Marketplace
  - Partners participated in the Visit Williamsburg booth (complimentary participation provided on a first-come, first-served basis) – Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, and Great Wolf Lodge
- Visit Williamsburg posted 18 new business leads and 3 service leads
  - Represents 6,684 room nights
- Confirmed nine bookings in November/December
  - Represents 238 room nights
- Four upcoming trade shows and events
  - Religious Conference Management Association (RCMA) EMERGE
  - Southeastern Tourism Society (STS) Domestic Showcase
  - Pennsylvania Bus Association (PBA) Marketplace
  - African American Travel Conference
- 2022 Sales Plan
  - Cimino introduced Visit Williamsburg’s Sales Director, Julia Smyth-Young
  - Smyth-Young provided a brief overview of the 2022 sales action plan
  - Group travel segments are individualized and broken down to apply unique focus and sales activities:
    - Sports – client events, marketing programs, sponsorships, and key tradeshow
    - S.M.E.R.F. (Social, Military, Education, Religious, and Fraternal) – client events, fairshare/co-ops, sales calls, sponsorships, and key tradeshow
    - Group tour – networking events, client events, sales calls, fairshare/co-ops, sponsorships, key tradeshow, and educational seminars
    - International – key tradeshow
    - M.I.C.E. (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) - client events, sales calls, fairshare/co-ops, and key tradeshow
    - Diversity and Inclusivity – client FAMs and key tradeshow
    - Association – client events for regional association management firms, sales calls, fairshare/co-ops, and key tradeshow
    - Corporate – client events, sales calls, fairshare/co-ops, and key tradeshow
  - Ruth Larson inquired about the follow-up procedure that occurs following tradeshow/conference attendance
    - Smyth-Young stated follow-up is always complete within one week of the tradeshow/event; solicitation is continued with groups through email, lists are compiled and shared with partners
    - Cimino stated that within ten business days, a trip report is posted or sales leads are sent out via weekly industry emails



**IX. Old Business**

- No old business was presented

**X. New Business**

- No new business was presented

**XI. Closed Session**

- Larson requested motion to enter into Closed Session
  - Pursuant to Va. Code Section 2.2-3711(A)(1) to discuss personal matters
- Pons motioned
- All were in favor
  
- Pons 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
  
- Larson motioned for an approval of the amendment to Victoria Cimino's employment contract to (1) extend the term of the contract, (2) increase the base salary, and (3) establish new bonus provisions
- Coleman motioned
- Pons provided a second
- All were in favor

**XII. Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned
- The next meeting will take place in-person on March 15, 2022