

ATTACHMENT A
WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
July 18, 2023
Meeting Minutes

The Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) meeting was convened at 1 p.m. on July 18, 2023. The meeting was held at Jamestown Settlement, Presentation Hall. 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
Mickey Chohany, Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association
Chad Green, York County Board of Supervisors
Kevin Lembke, President, Busch Gardens/Water Country USA
Ben Ellington, Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce, Ex Officio

Staff Members Present:

Victoria Cimino, CEO
Josue Ayala, Executive Assistant
Jennifer Case, Chief Marketing Officer
Rob Larson, Sports/Group Sales Manager
Jennifer McConnell, Sales and Service Coordinator
Lori Ottarson, Accountant
Daniela Owen, Familiarization Tour Coordinator
Julia Smyth-Young, Sales Director
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. Group Collect Briefing – Bud Geissler, Jr.

- Victoria Cimino introduced Bud Geissler, president of Group Collect, a tool that allows streamlined access to passenger information, waivers, the ability to make payments, and more
 - Geissler worked as a student travel tour operator for more than 25 years; as former president of the Student Youth Travel Association (SYTA), he conveyed that “educational travel connects curriculum to reality, practice to performance, and classrooms to careers”
- Group travel trends
 - Growing solo traveler group market
 - Revenge travel
 - Numbers are beginning to approach 2019 numbers
 - Cashless
 - Technology
 - Connecting people to new group opportunities
 - Connecting travel planners with destinations
 - Connecting travelers with options upon arrival
 - Travel trade shows providing education tracks for tech
- Growth areas
 - More travelers per group, maximizing capacity
 - Growing desire for immersive, experiential travel
 - Concern: New staff across multiple industries
 - High interest in sustainable and cultural travel

IV. Roundtable Discussion

- Larson initiated the discussion, introducing Ben Ellington, chair of the Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce
- Kevin Lembke shared that Water Country and Busch Gardens are having a good summer, focused on staffing for the post-Labor Day season
- Chad Green stated that Yorktown is enjoying a good season
 - Kristi Olsen, director of Yorktown Economic and Tourism Development, provided information on Princess Cruises’ upcoming information session
 - Neal Chalkley shared that hotels are performing well, regardless of the staffing shortage
 - Cliff Fleet stated that Colonial Williamsburg sold 25,000 tickets over July 4th holiday weekend; with the addition of Princess Cruises’ on-shore excursions, Colonial Williamsburg is working to address shortage of bus parking
 - Mickey Chohany stated that the Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association has just completed its dining guide
 - Ben Ellington stated the Greater Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce will soon host a Speaker Series featuring Fleet as the first speaker

V. Minutes

- Larson requested a motion to approve the May 16, 2023 meeting minutes
 - Fleet motioned
 - Chalkley provided a second
 - Minutes were unanimously approved
- Larson requested a motion to approve the June 26, 2023 meeting minutes
 - Chohany motioned
 - Fleet provided a second
 - Minutes were unanimously approved

VI. Chair Report

- Larson met with the National Park Service superintendent regarding Colonial Parkway fees
 - Fees provide funding for maintenance
 - Parkway will undergo a significant construction project starting in Colonial Williamsburg

VII. Treasurer's Report

- David Turner shared financial statements through May 31, 2023

May Activity – Original Budget

- May 2023 revenues were \$1.3M – over budget by \$355K
 - Sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$1.2M, over budget by \$307K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$96K, over budget by \$35K
 - Other revenue was \$15K, over budget by \$13K
- May 2023 expenses were \$2.0M – over budget by \$361K
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$1.7M, over budget by \$350K
 - The destination marketing expenses reflect higher expenses incurred for the Spring 2023 marketing campaign
 - Sales activities were \$99K, over budget by \$60K
 - Media and Trade show expenses in May were over budget by \$69K, partially offset by savings in travel and client events
 - Total administrative expenses were \$156K, under budget by \$49K
 - Staffing costs were \$113K, \$64K under budget due to the timing of hiring and other staff-related savings
 - Other administrative expenses were \$43K, \$15K over budget due to an increase in interest expense for the implementation of GASB 96 (capitalization of subscription-based information technology)

May Activity – Amended Budget

- May 2023 revenues were \$1.3M – under budget by \$310K
 - Sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$1.2M, under budget by \$247K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$96K, under budget by \$15K
 - Other revenue was \$15K, under budget by \$48K
- May 2023 expenses were \$2.0M – under budget by \$958K
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$1.7M, under budget by \$1.4M
 - The destination marketing budget was increased to reflect higher expenses incurred for the Spring 2023 marketing campaign
 - Sales activities were \$99K, over budget by \$60K
 - Total administrative expenses were \$156K, over budget by \$416K, reflective of a \$410K budget transfer to destination marketing
 - Staffing costs were \$113K, \$436K over budget due to a budget transfer of YTD savings to destination marketing

Fiscal YTD Activity

- 2023 Fiscal YTD revenues were \$15.1M, over budget by \$9K
 - Sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$13.2M, over budget by \$2K
 - Transient tax receipts totaled \$1.4M, under budget by \$2K
 - Maintenance of Effort (MOE) revenue was \$102K, in-line with budget
 - ARPA Grant receipts totaled \$255K, over the amended budget by \$5K
 - Other revenue was \$93K, over budget by \$3K
- 2023 Fiscal YTD expenses were \$22.1M, under budget by \$277K
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$15.1M, under budget by \$160K
 - Sales activities were \$501K, under budget by \$91K due to the timing of invoices for trade events and other cooperative marketing activities for sports events and groups
 - The product development fund of \$5.2M was paid to the Historic Triangle Recreational Facility Authority (HTRFA) in line with the amended budget
 - Total administrative expenses were \$1.4M, under budget by \$21K
 - Staffing costs were \$963K, below budget by \$5K
 - Other administrative expenses were \$389K, under budget by \$16K

Cash on Hand

- The Tourism Council has \$6.0 million in the bank for operations
- Cash on Hand for Operations is over budget by \$9K as of the month of May

Sales/Transient Tax

- Sales Tax (58.1-603.2)
 - April sales tax increased \$42K or 3.4% year-over-year
 - \$1.29M in 2023 versus \$1.25M in 2022
 - The three-month moving average increased by 5.5% versus the same period in 2022
 - YTD sales tax receipts are up 1.5% versus the same period in 2022

- Transient Tax
 - April transient tax increased \$6K or 3.8% year-over-year
 - \$153K in 2023 versus \$148K in 2022
 - The three-month moving average increased by 2.6% versus the same period in 2022
 - YTD tax receipts are up 4.9% versus the same period in 2022

VIII. Executive Director and CEO report

- Key Performance Indicators
 - STR Report data
 - May 2023
 - Occupancy totaled 54.4%, exceeding 2022 (52.3%) and 2019 (54.3%)
 - Average Daily Rate (ADR) (\$144.62), flat to last year/exceeding 2019 (\$126.76)
 - RevPAR (\$78.64), exceeding 2022 (\$76.62) and 2019 (\$68.84)
 - Hotel revenue totaled \$15.9M
 - May 2022 (\$15.6M)
 - May 2019 (\$14.5M)
 - May 2023 YTD comparison to 2022
 - Occupancy increased 9%
 - Demand increased 10%
 - Revenue increased 9%
 - ADR is flat
 - May 2023 YTD comparison to 2019
 - Occupancy increased 4.7%
 - Rate increased 15%
 - RevPAR increased 28%
 - June's estimated hotel performance
 - Occupancy estimated to be 67% compared to 64% (2022) and 65.8% (2019)
 - Rate is slightly above 2022
 - RevPAR is at \$102.10, which exceeds 2022 (\$96.98)

- Top origin markets
 - Washington, D.C. remains number one
 - New York has leapt to number two
 - Philadelphia ranks number three
 - Near sources origin market data and utilizes visitor devices with a count sample size of 32,781
- Visitor-to-resident ratio
 - As expected, attractions start to see a high visitor rate throughout the spring and summer months
- Average visitor daily spend per month
 - April continues to rank highest
 - Data is collected based on on-site swipes with a cardholder sample size of 71,785
- Zartico benchmark comparison, average visitor spend per month
 - Williamsburg outperforms other destinations every month of the year
- View-to-visit window
 - Summer and fall have the longest planning windows at 48 and 43 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 new test market (Atlanta)
 - Endemic lean-in: Increasing lower-funnel booking support by bringing in new travel endemic partners
 - KPI refinement: Directing more site traffic to visitwilliamsburg.com versus partner sites
 - Cookieless expansion: Working with digital partners to ensure continued personalization in targeted insights
 - Using new identifiers to include email and IP addresses or device IDs
 - Seasonal Visitation Trends
 - More than half of visitors travel in the region during spring and summer, aligning with media flight strategy
 - Fall and winter saw growth in 2022; attributed to increased events and activities throughout the cooler months
 - Flighting Strategy
 - Media spend is winding down, but there will continue to be an "always on" approach with tactics like:
 - Influencers
 - Digital
 - Blog support
 - Paid search and social
 - For the first time, Visit Williamsburg will run a fall/holiday television spot
 - Market strategy
 - Launched in 23 markets in January, new this year: Atlanta (digital only)

- YTD: Digital advertising performance
 - Digital has driven 100,000 hotel searches and 64,000 flight searches
 - Sessions and traffic have shown gains year-over-year
- Spotlight: Juneteenth
 - Efforts included blog posts, consumer email, social media content, and Ernest Crim, historian, and social media influencer
- Spotlight: Pride Month
 - Featured content from Courtney Vondran, a social media influencer who highlighted a “Gaycation to Williamsburg;” drove hundreds of new followers
- YTD website performance
 - Website continues to outperform pre-pandemic levels and 2022
 - Site sessions increased 102%
 - Site users increased by 105%
- May/June: Influencer familiarization tours
 - Hosted four influencers, highlighting multi-generational travel, vegan dining, Juneteenth, and LGBTQ+ travel
- YTD Social Media Performance
 - Strong YoY growth across Instagram and Facebook
- May/June Media Familiarization Tours
 - Hosted three North American travel writers and four overseas journalists in partnership with Capital Region USA (CRUSA)
- Public Relations
 - May/June Earned Media
 - 390.7M impressions; 10 placements
 - “40 of the Best Affordable Family Vacations in the USA” -- *Country Living*
 - “9 Oldest Founded Towns to Visit in Virginia” -- *WorldAtlast*
 - “10 East Coast Road Trips That Will Have You Packing Your Car ASAP” -- *The Travel*
- Sales: May/June 2023 Performance
 - Shows and Events
 - Small Market Meetings Summit (May 10-12)
 - IPW (May 20-24)
 - Society of Government Meeting Professionals (June 6-8)
 - Smart Meetings National Conference (June 26-27)
 - WorldStrides and War at Williamsburg
 - Hosted client event in Charlottesville for WorldStrides
 - 46 agents within lodging, procurement, and attraction
 - War at Williamsburg held its second annual event, attracting about 800 people
 - May/June: New Business Leads
 - Throughout May and June, the DMO issued 25 new business leads, representing 7,768 room nights
 - May/June: Definite Bookings
 - Visit Williamsburg converted 18 pieces of new business, which represents 3,132 room nights

- Upcoming tradeshow and events
 - Student & Youth Travel Association (August 18-22)
 - Connect Marketplace (August 22-24)
 - Virginia Motorcoach Association (VMA) (August 22-24)
 - Selected Williamsburg as its 2024 host city; draws more than 300 people

IX. **Old Business**

- None

X. **New Business**

- None

XI. **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
- Chohany 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

XII. **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned
- The next meeting will take place on September 19, 2023