

ATTACHMENT A
WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL MEETING
Williamsburg, Virginia
March 16, 2021
Approved Meeting Minutes

A meeting of the Williamsburg Tourism Council (WTC) was convened at 1:00 p.m. on March 16, 2021, by zoom/conference call. 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

Mickey Chohany, Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association (WARA)
Christy Coleman, Executive Director, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
Chad Green, Chair, York County Board of Supervisors
Cheri Green, Chair, Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance (GWCTA)
Denise Kellogg, Director, Development, Jamestown Rediscovery Foundation
Ron Kirkland, Executive Director, 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
Miranda Jarrell, Communications Director
Julie O'Neil, Marketing Director
Joey Pierce, Content Manager
Jill Pongonis, Familiarization 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.
- Victoria Cimino stated, "Due to the Governor's Declared State of Emergency due to COVID-19, it is impractical and unsafe for the Tourism Council to assemble in a single location; this meeting is being held electronically pursuant to 2020 Amendments to the 2019 Appropriations Act. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss or transact the business statutorily required or necessary to continue operations of the Tourism Council and the discharge of its lawful purposes, duties, and responsibilities. The public is welcome to use the Zoom link to attend electronically. The Tourism Council will make available a recording or transcript of

the meeting on its website in accordance with the timeframes established in Sections 2.2-3707 and 2.2-3701.1 of the Code of Virginia.”

- James Horn was represented by Denise Kellogg

II. Public Comment

No public comments were presented.

III. U.S. Travel Association State of Travel Briefing, Roger Dow, President and CEO

- U.S. Travel Association President and CEO Roger Dow shared impacts of COVID-19 on travel industry
 - \$500 billion loss and millions of jobs lost
- American Rescue Plan
 - The current plan does not include an extension of the Payroll Protection Program
 - U.S. Travel advocating for a stimulus for individual and business travel
- BrandUSA is heavily impacted by lack of international travel; U.S. Travel is advocating for grant assistance
- Destination Capitol Hill, a virtual advocacy event, taking place on March 17
- U.S. Travel Policy Platform looks beyond recovery to include the future of mobility, innovative technology in air travel, infrastructure investment, and electric car readiness
- Cimino asked for anecdotal evidence of travel recovery
 - Dow noted there is a sense of optimism; consistency in state, federal, and international travel policy will help in recovery
 - Corporate travel policy will be necessary; business and event travel are necessary components of the travel sector
- Chad Green asked about evidence of Americans intending to spend stimulus funds on travel
 - Dow noted Americans' savings levels are high, as well as their desire to travel, so it does stand that stimulus money and savings could be spent on travel
- Christy Coleman expressed concern around reopening travel too quickly, citing Florida's positivity rate, and asked about policy for encouraging vaccination
 - Dow verified U.S. Travel's advocacy for vaccinations and dedication to monitoring statistics and scientific recommendations for the reopening process
 - Dow cited an estimated 250 million Americans will be vaccinated by Memorial Day

IV. Virginia Tourism Corporation Briefing, Rita McClenny, President and CEO

- McClenny stated the Rebuild Virginia program will add \$25 million, picking up where the previous \$100 million left off
 - A special session of the General Assembly will convene to discuss appropriations for an additional \$4 billion allocated from the federal government
- McClenny explained twelve Virginia representatives will participate in U.S. Travel Association's Destination Capitol Hill
- Virginia is for Lovers advertising will begin in May, and WanderLove campaign will resume at the end of March
- Governor Northam's office is expected to announce changes to Executive Order 72 on April 1
- The advertising co-op program will continue with Blue Ridge Outdoors, Leisure Media 360, TripAdvisor, Google, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, and a research component
- Mickey Chohany asked for clarification around Rebuild Virginia, asking if funds will be provided to those who applied during its previous iteration
 - McClenny confirmed the additional funds are intended to begin with those who previously applied; however, it is the hope that additional funds will be added to this program once the General Assembly special session takes place
 - Chohany expressed concern regarding the taxable status of PPP loans and the ramifications on hospitality small business owners
 - Ron Kirkland thanked McClenny for VTC's efforts
 - McClenny added that Senate Bill 1398 provides additional resources, initially \$2.1 million will be awarded through a grant program for promotion

V. Updates

- Larson asked board members for updates to be shared or emailed to WTC
 - Lempke shared that a task force of Virginia's large entertainment venues has been in conversation with the Governor's Office regarding the April 1 restriction update, and it has been positive

VI. Minutes

- Chohany motioned to approve the minutes
 - Chohany asked if the fall/holiday click-through rate (.88%) is correct
 - Chohany suggested that "operations" be changed to "marketing" within Cash on Hand slide
 - Larson noted the suggestion would be taken into consideration
- Roll call; all in favor
 - *Note: A second was not provided*
- Minutes were approved

VII. Chair Report

- Larson noted the UHY audit is nearly complete and should be on the May board meeting agenda
- Larson included that Cimino participated in a James City County podcast to discuss Williamsburg Tourism Council programs and return on investment

VIII. Treasurer's Report

- Doug Pons shared financial statements through January 31, 2020
- January Activity
 - Total January 2021 revenues were \$1.5M – over budget by \$469K
 - January sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$974K, over budget by \$149K
 - Transient Tax receipts totaled \$65K, over budget by \$16K
 - Maintenance of Effort (MOE) revenue was \$428K, over budget by \$307K
 - Note: Budgeted at \$121K per month from January 2021 to spread \$1.45 million over 12 months
 - Expenses were over budget by \$772K for January
 - Destination marketing expenses were \$842K over budget due to the timing of invoices
 - Sales activities are under budget by \$37K from reduced or virtual sales events due to COVID-19 restrictions
 - Staffing costs were \$21K below budget due to continued delays in staff hires
 - Other administrative expenses were \$12K under budget due to reduced staffing and canceled events
- Fiscal Year to Date (FYTD)
 - 2021 FYTD revenues are \$7.9 million, over budget by \$2.7 million
 - FYTD sales tax receipts (58.1-603.2) totaled \$6.3 million, over budget by \$1.9 million
 - FYTD transient tax receipts totaled \$458K, under budget by \$172K
 - FYTD MOE revenues were \$1.2 million, over budget by \$1.0 million
 - Reminder: MOE revenue was removed from 2020 budgets at the Board's request
- 2021 FYTD expenses were \$9.0 million, under budget by \$917K
 - Destination Marketing expenses were \$8.2 million, under budget by \$471K
 - Sales activities were \$137K, under budget by \$163K due to reduced sales events and canceled tradeshow
 - Staff costs were \$644K, under budget by \$224K due to changes in hiring plans and other cost reductions

- Cash on Hand
 - The Tourism Council has \$13.0 million in the bank; \$9.8 million in operating cash and \$3.2 million reserved for product development
 - Operations is over budget by \$6.1 million
 - Note: Outstanding payments (checks not cashed) totaled \$1.1 million at the end of January, resulting in \$8.7 million of available cash
 - Product development is over budget by \$1.2 million
- Tax revenue
 - Sales Tax (58.1-603.2)
 - December sales tax decreased \$72K or 6% year-over-year
 - \$1.1 million in 2020 versus \$1.2 million in 2019
 - The 3-month moving average decreased 16.2% versus the same period in 2019
 - Transient Tax
 - December decreased \$33K or 34.1% year-over-year
 - \$63K in 2020 versus \$96K in 2019
 - The 3 month moving average decreased 41.8% versus the same period in 2019
- Cimino presented the December and January Smith Travel Research reports
 - December's occupancy was 25.7%, down by 43.3% year-over-year
 - Average daily rate was down 16.8%
 - Calendar year occupancy in 2020 totaled 26.7%, down 48%
 - January's occupancy was 21.5%, down 17% year over year
 - Average daily rate was down 11%

IX. Director's Report

- Cimino introduced David Seiferth of SMARInsights to discuss the recent brand health study
 - Seiferth covered COVID-19 and travel perceptions
 - More travelers are presenting signs of travel readiness, with vaccine availability providing a catalyst for travel
 - One-fifth of those surveyed are planning to travel now, coming back faster than expected
 - Seiferth stated 2,000 online surveys were completed to collect data on Visit Williamsburg's 2020 advertising campaign
 - 46% awareness was reported
 - Advertising communication rating excelled, ranking in the top 10% of SMARI's benchmark
 - Advertising impact rating showed above-average effectiveness
 - Ad relevancy scored exceptionally well with Gen X and Millennial families

- The brand health study concluded those who were exposed to 2020 advertising are more familiar with the brand, rated the brand highly, and are motivated to travel to the destination
- Victoria Cimino introduced Ted Sullivan, chief marketing officer, and Kelsey Blevins, senior data advisor, of Zartico to present information on Visit Williamsburg's new intelligence platform
 - Sullivan provided an overview of Zartico
 - Zartico brings all data into one platform for analysis
 - Data analysis will help to enhance the experience of visitors, better the lives of residents, and transform the destination marketing organization
 - New key performance indicators can be embraced with new data, such as hotel volatility, tax revenues, and visitor economy
 - Visit Lake Charles utilized Zartico's platform to prove a baseball tournament brought in visitors from new markets, drove overnight visitation, and provided economic impact to many local businesses
 - Blevins presented Williamsburg's geolocation data from July 2020 – March 2021
 - Visitation trends are showing that 2021 visitation is beginning to meet pre-pandemic rates
 - The top 10 visitation origin markets in the reporting period are showing high rates of overnight stays
 - Visitor flow data shows that visitors are exploring many locations throughout the destination
- Program Updates
 - Public Body Compliance
 - Obtained risk management insurance
 - Requested Attorney General opinion
 - Procured health, dental, and vision benefits
 - Procured retirement plan
 - Tasks to be completed include QuickBooks separation, creation of a lease and updated MOUs, and compliance training for the board and staff
- Marketing and PR
 - 2021 Media Plan
 - The 2021 media plan targets active mature couples, and gen x and millennial couples and families in 20 markets
 - Advertising launched on February 1
 - Media channel approach covers multiple platforms with a bulk of the budget dedicated to digital advertising
 - More than \$9 million in advertising spend will take place in 2021, with 33% launched in February
 - Creative samples were reviewed

- The WilliamsBLOG
 - Launched in late 2020 with approximately three pieces of new content published each week
 - Media support with inPowered
 - Overall blog traffic is up 900% YOY vs. Trip Ideas
 - Four times the number of users vs. Trip Ideas
- Education Campaign
 - Launched in January to promote hybrid and in-person education programming in destination
 - Utilizes social, programmatic targeting of teachers and parents, and school-based media
 - The campaign is wrapping up, having driven 70,000+ web sessions
- Influencers
 - Influencers drove 7.6M impressions, 328K engagements, and featured 38 industry partners
 - Added value was provided by The Busby Family, who produced four YouTube videos
- Organic Social
 - Social media is exceeding industry average engagement rates on Facebook and Instagram
- Advertising Performance
 - Click-through rates have held steady at .17%, exceeding industry benchmarks
 - Paid social engagement is improving
 - Stronger attrition with 914 hotel bookings directly related to digital advertising exposure
- Web Performance
 - Sessions up over 200%, users up over 200%, with advertising driving 63% of traffic as a result of the *Life. At Your Pace.*, education, and *The WilliamsBLOG* campaigns
- Public Relations
 - 513.5 million global impressions with 27 placements, including TripSavy, MSN, and Forbes
- Sales
 - Completed twelve sales calls and virtual trade shows
 - The resulting leads represent 6,753 room nights
- Announcement
 - Dave Potter's last day with Visit Williamsburg was Friday, March 12

X. New Business

- Pons provided a briefing on the Greater Williamsburg Chamber and Tourism Alliance transition task force

- The Alliance is working to eliminate duplicative work, rewrite bylaws, and operate in accordance with its mission statement
- Cheri Green clarified the restructuring would not eliminate the Alliance as an organization, and the restructuring is planned to be complete before the new fiscal year begins

XI. Old Business

- No old business was presented

XII. Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned
- The next meeting will take place on May 18, 2021