

**WILLIAMSBURG TOURISM COUNCIL
MEETING
STRYKER CENTER, WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA
August 20, 2019
Meeting Notes**

A meeting of the Williamsburg Tourism Council convened at 1:01 p.m. on August 20, 2019, at the Stryker Center, City of Williamsburg. A quorum was present with the following attendees:

Tourism Council Members Present:

Honorable Jeffrey D. Wassmer,	District 4 Supervisor, York County Board of Supervisors
Honorable Ruth Larson,	Chair, James City County Board of Supervisors
Honorable Doug Pons,	Vice Mayor, City of Williamsburg
Neal Chalkley,	President, Williamsburg Hotel & Motel Association
Honorable Mickey Chohany,	Williamsburg Area Restaurant Association/Second Street Restaurant
Philip G. Emerson,	Executive Director, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation
Kym Hall,	Superintendent, Colonial National Historical Park
Julie O'Neil,	Director of Marketing, Busch Gardens Williamsburg
Dr. Mitchell Reiss,	President, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
Cheri Green,	Chair, Board of Directors, Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance

Staff Members Present:

Vicki Cimino,	CEO
Joanna Skrabala,	Associate Director of Digital Marketing
Dave Potter,	Director, Marketing Communications
Robyn Gentry,	Social Media & Web Manager
Jodie Lumley,	Coordinator, Sales & Publications
Lisa Pacheco,	Director of Sports Development
Jill Pongonis,	Media Relations Manager
Vivian Bunting,	Associate Director of Group Tour and Consumer Sales

I. Call to Order

Jeff Wassmer called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. He welcomed two new members to the Council: Cheri Green, Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance, and Julie O'Neil, Busch Gardens.

II. Public Comment

Ron Kirkland, Williamsburg Hotel Motel Association, suggested using the \$2 room tax collection, meals/sales tax collection, and Smith Travel research as additional measurable for success. Mr. Kirkland said they were all free resources, with the exception of Smith.

III. Minutes

The June minutes were approved without comment.

IV. Treasurer's Report

a. Budget Update

Ruth Larson reported there was a finance meeting on August 19 and everyone should have received an email invitation. She reminded the group this was still a transition period, however, a finance director position has been posted. Ms. Larson said she was thankful to have had the assistance of Beth Zambella and John Heck during this time.

Ms. Larson reported, when the reports were developed, the projected revenue for 2019 was \$12.6 million; however, that figure has since increased to \$16 million. Ms. Larson said the SB 942 tax collections were coming in higher than originally projected. She said the budget was been increased before due to the same revenue increases.

Ms. Larson reported that the Commonwealth of Virginia stated June's tax revenue would not be coming through until possibly June.

Kym Hall asked how the marketing funds compare to previous years. Vicki Cimino replied that the budget is much higher this year. Ms. Hall then asked if we should feel comfortable with how everything is going based on what is projected. Ms. Cimino said she would speak to planning later in the presentation, but the destination should feel good.

Ms. Larson continued her report and said the transient tax is again one month behind. She also said there was a glitch and the City of Williamsburg omitted from the presentation chart.

Mickey Chohany asked if the year's projections would change based on the increases in SB 942's collections.

Mr. Wassmer said the months that have occurred uses actual data, which is why the final projections have been higher. Doug Pons asked if amendments to August and September projections should be done. Ms. Larson said this would be reviewed.

Mr. Pons noted that there were slides that were not included in the packet. Ms. Cimino asked if it would be beneficial to send out the entire presentation deck prior to the meeting.

V. Executive Director Report

a. Late Summer/Fall Campaign

Ms. Cimino noted that Smith Travel reported the destination was down 2.4% in June and this prompted Visit Williamsburg to push a late-summer campaign for overnight visitation. Ms. Cimino said direction was given to the agency to focus on the drive market, to include young families, active adults, and young couples. She said this was mainly a digital effort with social media included.

Ms. Cimino shared examples of some of the digital ads, which included a “Book Now” call-to-action button. She said the campaign has a total spend of \$350,000 and has already begun, continuing through September 3rd.

Neal Chalkley noted that his numbers show a 1.3% decrease in visitation YTD, but July was reporting better. He said that if August does just as well, the year could break event.

Ms. Cimino said they increased the fall campaign budget by \$500,000 to push bookings through November toward the holiday season. She said she would everyone the Council a recommended media plan for the fall. She also said the campaign would be primarily digital.

Mr. Chalkley reported that based on his current projections, September looked flat, October is down 8%, and November is down 46%, as compared to last year’s pace. He said this was very concerning, but the fall plan sounds great.

Mr. Chohany asked that as they get requests for additional spending, what the ROI would be on the extra money spent. Ms. Cimino said that part of the scope of work for research should be about ad effectiveness. She said she used this research model before and said it would account for incremental travel.

Phil Emerson noted the 2019 American Evolution Commemoration was getting a lot of great media attention and could be leveraged for the destination’s efforts. Mr. Emerson also referenced the lack of a retail component or booking engine on the website.

Ms. Cimino encouraged partners to share any editorial calendars so that Visit Williamsburg could use more in its efforts. She also noted her experience with booking engines in the past understanding that there are two schools of thought on a retail component. She said as the website is redeveloped, this would be a larger discussion

Mr. Pons noted that in the last year of Visit Williamsburg’s booking engine, it only accounted for about \$58,000 of revenue.

b. June/July 2019 Highlights

Ms. Cimino shared the following highlights:

- Memberships to US Travel and Capital Region U.S.A.
- Purchased Simplview, a CRM software that can also support the back-end of the website

- Jill Pongonis attended a Southern Living press event
- Vivian Bunting attended the Student Youth Travel Association (August 9-13)
- Lisa Pacheco will be attending Connect Sports and Connect Corporate (August 26-28)

Ms. Cimino also shared a slide highlighting the July familiarization tours and broadcast media coverage.

c. Procurement

Ms. Cimino shared a procurement schedule and noted it was about a month behind than what was previously projected. She said she would send it to the lawyer in a new format, as based on the public body ruling. She is hoping to have the new agencies signed on by October.

Ms. Larson asked if Ms. Cimino thought the current agencies would respond to the RFPs. Ms. Cimino said she thought the current agencies would respond alongside new agencies.

Mr. Emerson asked if the RFPs were going to be reviewed for compliance. Ms. Cimino said she had everything formatted, but would be reviewed again for procurement policy procedures.

d. Hiring

Ms. Cimino reported that some positions have been posted on Indeed.

Cheri Green asked if the finance position was for Visit Williamsburg or the Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance as a whole. Ms. Cimino said it was for Visit Williamsburg. Ms. Green said that it was common for parent companies to have one finance director. She asked if there was consideration for this, especially when thinking about the GWCTA's audit and tax filings.

Ms. Cimino said that the first consideration is to prop the Tourism Council up for success and she felt having the Council needed its own finance team. Ms. Green added there needs to be a discussion about what it all means for the entire organization. Mr. Wassmer felt there should be a single person to handle all of the reporting the Tourism Council will have to do, especially in light of the public body ruling.

e. Video/Photo Shoot

Ms. Cimino reported that Visit Williamsburg had just completed an aggressive photo and film shoot featuring older millennials with food and beverage, enjoying outdoor recreation, and shopping. She shared a sneak peek at some of the photos from the shoot. Ms. Cimino said the agency has the shoot planned already, but they reworked it a little.

f. Pure Silk Championship – Exposure Recap

Ms. Cimino shared a slide featuring the Visit Williamsburg exposure from the Pure Silk Championship. She reported the estimated added media value for the destination was \$7.8 million.

g. Cal Ripken World Series

Ms. Cimino reported that Visit Williamsburg sponsored the Cal Ripken World Series with field naming rights. She said this included broadcast impressions, 30-sec spots, banners, and more.

Ms. Cimino shared that Ms. Green was there for her son's team, as it was Williamsburg's first time making it to the World Series. She shared the Williamsburg team won the Sportsmanship award in the 8-year-old group.

VI. Chair Report

Mr. Wassmer officially welcomed the new council members, Julie O'Neil and Cheri Green. He also shared that there would be open seats from Colonial Williamsburg and Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation soon and looks to the organizations to name their successors. Mr. Emerson requested adding all alternates to the distribution lists.

Mr. Wassmer shared the Attorney General's opinion of the Tourism Council considered as a public body. He said the AG opined on three questions, which ultimately raised more questions.

Mr. Wassmer shared the AG thinks the Tourism Council should be considered a public body. Mr. Wassmer said certain processes and procedures would need to be in place and suggested reaching out to similar destinations for guidance and best practices. Mr. Wassmer said the group would still need to operate in an open format and should be more formal during closed sessions.

Mr. Wassmer said the AG said the organization is subject to FOIA, including Council members. He noted that if three or more members meet, it would be an official meeting requiring a public notice.

Mr. Wassmer reported that a FOIA officer or agency coordinator would need to be appointed to the council. He said everyone is subject to a conflict of interest report. He said the lawyer would send this information to everyone to start the process. Mr. Larson said that if anyone were already holding a public office, they would not need to repeat the process. Mr. Wassmer stated this report would need updating every January.

Greg Davis said alternates would need to complete the form, as well, if they are to vote in meetings. Mr. Emerson questioned if Visit Williamsburg staff would have to do the same.

Mr. Wassmer said the organization will fully comply with what needs to be done, it just

may take some time.

Mr. Wassmer said one of the questions raised was concerning involvement with the GWCTA and Business Council and whether the Tourism Council was a separate entity.

Mr. Chohany asked if the bylaws needed to be reviewed. Mr. Wassmer said they would need to be rewritten.

VII. Old Business

Ms. Cimino shared that Joanna Skrabala is leaving Visit Williamsburg to start a job with the City of Williamsburg.

Mr. Chohany asked if he could get a detailed revenue expense report via email and asked if this could be sent monthly.

Mr. Emerson reminded the group to look at planning timelines to adjust the meeting schedule, as needed.

VIII. New Business

None

IX. Adjournment

The next meeting will be September 17, 2019.