

The regular monthly meeting of the Winchester-Frederick County Tourism Board was held Thursday, June 17, 2021. The meeting began at 8:05 a.m. and was held at Shenandoah University's Esports arena.

Board Members Present: Laura Kerr Wiley, Kristen Laise, Josh Huff, Arthur Kearns, Julie Shaffer, Gwen Walker

Board Members Absent: Lani Pendleton, Priya Patel

Staff: Justin Kerns, Renee Bayliss

Non-Voting Board Members, Guests & Media: Judy McKiernan, Winchester City Council; Cynthia Schneider, Top of Virginia Regional Chamber; Joey Gawrysiak, Shenandoah University; Holly Redding; Old Town Advancement Commission; Dave Stegmaier, Frederick County Board of Supervisors; Rebecca Taylor, Hampton Inn North.

Call To Order: Kristen Laise, Chair, called the meeting to order.

Roll Call: Renee Bayliss

Approval of Minutes

The May minutes were approved on a motion by Josh Huff, seconded by Julie Shaffer.

COVID-19 Update/Executive Director's Report

Justin Kerns reported that hotel occupancy is up to 74%, which is very close to 2019, but noted that staffing is still an issue. He said that the CVB has seen requests for adding events to the Visit Winchester website increase. He also noted that he has been in meetings regarding updates to both the City of Winchester and Frederick County's strategic plans. They will also be using the CVB's strategic plan, to be included. The Director's Report was provided to board members.

Committee Reports:

Member & Officer Nominations Committee – Kristen Laise

The committee plans to meet in early July. Gwen Walker has agreed to continue as Vice-Chair and the committee nominated Lani to continue serving as Chair after a temporary hiatus. Arthur Kearns made a motion for Lani to continue as Chair, seconded by Laura Kerr Wiley, and all board members were in favor after a roll call vote.

Marketing Committee – Kristen Laise

Kristen Laise reported that the committee discussed the current campaign and possibilities for what marketing will be done for the fall season.

Personnel Committee – Gwen Walker and Julie Shaffer

Julie Shaffer asked Justin Kerns about the status of the new employee. Mr. Kerns replied that more than 20 applications have been received so far, and interviews will begin soon. She also asked about the need for a trolley driver and walking tour guide. Renee Bayliss responded that she has been approached by two people that are interested. The status of the Old Town Welcome Center was discussed, and the possibility of the pop-up Visitors Center.

Finance Committee – Priya Patel and Kristen Laise

The finance committee distributed a copy of the current budget. They noted that the CVB is waiting on a portion of Frederick County's contribution, so they are expecting an additional \$200,000. Josh Huff asked about the "duratrans" on the budget, which Mr. Kerns explained are lighted advertisements that the Visitors Center sells, but that he is hoping to do something different in that space. Cynthia Schneider started a conversation about marketing the gift shop, and Mr. Kerns said that sales are up 25% over 2019.

Video Featurette Ad Hoc Committee – Arthur Kearns and Gwen Walker

Gwen Walker reported that the selection for the month focusing on spirits will be Winchester Cider Works. Laura Kerr Wiley asked about the categories that are featured. Mr. Kerns, Mr. Kearns, and Mrs. Walker explained that it was decided that this project was meant to cover local businesses, rather than the attractions that are typically already covered in the CVB's other advertising. Mrs. Kerr Wiley suggested potentially adding an artisan category.

Sports Tourism Ad Hoc Committee – Josh Huff and Julie Shaffer

Julie Shaffer reported that Don Anderson reworked the two-page guiding document for the group, and they discussed how to reprioritize the initiatives that can actually be accomplished. They also discussed how to coordinate with those hosting tournaments what their needs are. Mr. Kerns noted that the point of the study is to determine the need and feasibility of possible projects. Josh Huff added that it is also about advocating and educating the community and creating awareness.

Unfinished Business:

Proposed Changes to Bylaws – Justin Kerns

Kristen Laise went over the wording changes related to the board nominations. She said that the City will see the City nominees, the County will see the County nominees, and both will see all nominees. Laura Kerr Wiley made a motion to approve the changes, seconded by Gwen Walker. All board members voted in favor. Kristen Laise noted that an updated version will be distributed to members.

New Business:

Newcomer's Event and Civil War Trails sign event – Justin Kerns

Mr. Kerns told the board that the Newcomer's Event is coming up, and there will be food by Jordan Springs, with numerous vendors attending with information. He also said that a new Civil War Trails sign focusing on African American troops will be installed tomorrow, with an unveiling event on Saturday.

City and County Liaison Comments

Dave Stegmaier asked if we have something that details the locations of all of the Civil War Trails signs, and Justin Kerns and Renee Bayliss replied that yes, they have this available in a blog post with a map on the website. Judy McKiernan did not have any comments.

Public Comments

Holly Redding informed the board of the new open container permit option that is possibly coming to Old Town. There will be an informational Zoom event to learn more later in June. Rebecca Taylor from the Hampton Inn suggested that the CVB may want to contact hoteliers to get an idea of upcoming sporting events, since they may be more aware of sporting events scheduled for the area. Mr. Kerns announced that the board will be back at the Visitors Center for the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned on a motion by Gwen Walker, seconded by Arthur Kearns at 9:17 am.

Respectfully Submitted by Renee Bayliss, Creative Design and Visitor Services Manager, City of Winchester