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MINUTES
VIRGINIA TOURISM AUTHORITY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING

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Virginia Tourism Corporation
901 E. Cary St. Suite 900
Richmond, Virginia 23219
Board Room

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December 05, 2024

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Members Present: Mr. Justin Beale, Mr. Eric Jones, Ms. Lisa Meriwether, Ms. Jill Mills, Ms. Susan Payne, Mr. Christian Pinkston, Ms. AJ Robinson, The Honorable Winsome Earle-Sears, Mr. Terry Stroud, and Ms. Lori Waran

Members Absent: The Honorable Stephen Cummings, Mr. Damian Dajcz, Mr. Moses Foster, Mr. Justin Reid, The Honorable Matthew Lohr, The Honorable Caren Merrick, and The Honorable Travis Voyles

VTA Staff Present: Ms. Diane Béchamps, Mr. Andy Edmunds, Ms. Danielle Emerson, Mr. Tom Kirk, Ms. Staci Martin, Ms. Michael McMahon, Ms. Rita McClenny, Ms. Lindsey Norment, Mr. Dan Roberts, and Ms. Carolyn Wren

Guests Present: Ms. Liza Abbe – Office of the Lt. Governor, Ms. Maggie Beal – Office of the Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Mr. David Crane – Office of the Lt. Governor, Ms. Elizabeth Myers – Office of the Attorney General, Mr. Jason Powell- Office of the Secretary of Finance, Ms. Paige Read – VADMO, Assistant Secretary Corey Scott – Office of Natural and Historic Resources, and Mr. Stock Watson – Department of Wildlife Resources

I. **Call to Order**

The winter meeting for the Virginia Tourism Authority was held on Thursday, December 5, 2024, in the Virginia Tourism Authority Board Room, Richmond, Virginia. Chairwoman Jill Mills called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. and welcomed everyone. A quorum was present.

II. **Investiture of New Members**

Lisa Meriwether

Lisa Meriwether is a seasoned professional with over 40 years of experience in hospitality, sales, and tourism. She specializes in aligning resources and fostering collaboration among hotel properties, attractions, and tourism partners to create successful events and conferences.

Her career includes key sales roles with major hotel chains and luxury properties, including The Jefferson Hotel in Richmond. She has also served as Vice President of Tourism for the Lynchburg Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau and as Tourism Sales Manager for the City of Lynchburg's Office of Economic Development & Tourism.

Lisa is a recognized leader in the travel industry, having held leadership positions with the Virginia Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus and Meeting Professionals International, Virginia Chapter. She has received multiple industry accolades, including the 2024 Jim Ricketts Award for Destination Marketing Organization Employee of the Year and the 2023 Associate Member of the Year by the Virginia Society of Association Executives. In July 2024, Governor Glenn Youngkin appointed her to a six-year term on the Virginia Tourism Authority Board of Directors.

Christian Pinkston

Christian founded Pinkston with the goal of creating a strategic communications firm with the flexibility and ingenuity to provide individualized solutions for clients in virtually any industry. He set out to provide smarter, more strategic services that establish individuals and organizations as respected leaders in their fields.

Since launching the company in 2001, Christian and his partners have grown Pinkston into a national firm with an eclectic client base of innovators and difference-makers. Its services now span a wide range of communications, marketing, digital, research and business strategy capabilities. By bringing together these services under one roof, Christian and his team can ensure that all elements of a client's communications and business strategy work in complementary fashion, maximizing impact towards overall goals.

Prior to founding Pinkston, Christian was vice president of public policy at Ogilvy Public Relations. He has directed communications for a presidential campaign, been the spokesman for two former Cabinet officials, and served on the staffs of a congressman from California and a U.S. senator from Maine.

Lori Waran

Lori Collier Waran serves as Richmond Raceway's first female track President. Lori launched her career in Washington D.C., entertaining government dignitaries, professional sports teams and corporations with Sodexo Marriot. After 8 years, Lori and her family moved to her hometown of Richmond, Virginia where she joined Auto Trader and started her nearly 20-year career in the media and communications industry. In 2006, Landmark Media tapped Lori to take the helm of the Richmond based media company, Style Weekly Media as Publisher where Lori led the team for nearly 15 years. She was the youngest Publisher in the United States for an alternative weekly at that time.

III. Approval of Minutes

Eric Jones moved to adopt the minutes from the Board Meeting on June 6, 2024, and Lori Waran seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. Report of the Secretary of Commerce and Trade

Deputy Secretary Maggie Beal gave the report on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce and Trade and celebrated record levels of tourism spending and highlighted the impact of this growth across the Commonwealth. The Governor's

97 budget will be released on December 18, marking the start of the General Assembly
98 season.
99

100 VTC is proposing a new sports tourism grant for localities bidding on amateur sports
101 tournaments. This performance-based grant program aims to provide Virginia with a
102 competitive edge. Notable tourism achievements include record-setting visitation
103 at the Blue Ridge Parkway.
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105 **V. Chairwoman's Report**

106 Chairwoman Mills reported on her engagement with events throughout the
107 Commonwealth and emphasized the importance of collaboration with the VTC
108 team to provide support where needed.
109

110 **VI. Staff Reports**

111 Mike McMahon provided a budget update. Discussion followed including an inquiry
112 about merchandising income, VTC Welcome Center Blitzes, questions regarding
113 federal deadlines for unused agency allocations, and if additional funds were
114 allocated to the budget to cover Hurricane Helene relief efforts in Southwest
115 Virginia.
116

117 Lindsey Norment provided an update on the Flagship Campaign, discussion
118 followed with questions about geographic and ad targeting strategies for travelers
119 interested in Virginia. Additional discussion about Virginia's competitive advantage
120 over neighboring states and whether Virginia captured affiliate fees as part of its
121 tourism marketing strategies.
122

123 Diane Béchamps and Lindsey Norment provided an update on the use of AI at VTC.
124 Applications include assisting with outlines for creative briefs, brainstorming, and
125 operational tasks. Danielle Emerson and Tom Kirk answered questions from the
126 board.
127

128 Mr. Andy Edmunds reported on film office activities and upcoming projects.
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130 Mr. Dan Roberts discussed recent research and performance metrics.
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132 Additional Announcements: Lt. Governor Sears commended Rita McClenny's
133 efforts in bringing the Aerospace Conference to Virginia Beach in 2025; Chairwoman
134 Mills announced updates regarding Washington Dulles International Airport,
135 including significant international visitation growth and infrastructure expansions;
136 and Ms. Lisa Meriwether noted the upcoming opening of the Caesars Resort in
137 Danville, Virginia, and its role in hosting VA-1 in 2025.
138

139 **VII. Adjournment**

140 Mr. Terry Stroud moved to adjourn the meeting, and Mr. Eric Jones seconded the
141 motion. Chairwoman Mills called for a voice vote, and the motion was approved
142 unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 12:00 p.m.