CACVB Board Meeting

August 24, 2026 – 1:00 p.m.

Keller Williams Conference Room – 3510 Remson Court, Suite 401, Charlottesville VA

PRESENT: Olivia Branch, Kelly Brown, Chris Engel, Lisa Jevack, Bea LaPisto-Kirtley, Jennifer Lyon, Zach Roberts, Danny Shea, Amy Smith, Brad Uhl, Juandiego Wade, Darcie Weigand

ABSENT: Andrea Copeland, Athena Eastwood, Zarina Yafizova

ALSO PRESENT: Courtney Cacatian, Anna Whitlow, Cassie Ivey, Hasmukh Shah

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Wade called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m. Mr. Wade welcomed Ms. Smith to the Board. Ms. Smith is the director of Albemarle County Parks and Recreation, and has worked for the County for 33 years. She is the designated representative of the County Economic Development Office.

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of previous meeting minutes
2. July 2026 financial statement
3. Fiscal year 2026 draft year-end report

Mr. Engel raised a question regarding the FY2026 financial report. The report indicates a significant sum of unspent advertising funds. He chose to raise this in light of the proposal to draw from the CACVB fund balance.

Mr. Engel moved to approve the consent agenda, and Ms. Lyon seconded the motion. The consent agenda was approved unanimously.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Ms. Cacatian began her presentation with an overview of the organizational structure of the CACVB. Drawing from the lessons of recent Board meetings and her performance review, she sees a need to build a unified understanding of the CACVB's purpose and mission through ongoing Board education.

The CACVB has destination developers, who help to build the visitor experience ecosystem with local tourism partners. The Marketing and Sales team look at the existing ecosystem, find out what potential visitors are looking for, and use advertising and sales missions to connect visitors to opportunities; Sales specifically works with groups of ten or more people planning to travel. Visitor services run the mobile visitor centers and answer inquiries from the CACVB offices. The work of the whole team informs the strategic decision making of the leadership.

Board members are chosen to represent specific stakeholders with an interest in the tourism ecosystem. The CACVB focus is primarily on hotel occupancy due to the organization's funding structure; the CACVB is funded through a portion of the transient occupancy taxes (TOT) levied by the City of Charlottesville and Albemarle County. Ms. Bohdan, representing the County Attorney's Office, explained how the structure of the CACVB is informed by the Code of Virginia – the relevant sections are referenced in the CACVB Operating Agreement.

Ms. Cacatian noted that the Board is meeting in the offices of Keller Williams due to recent flooding in the CACVB offices (on the ground floor of the same building). The landlord is leading reconstruction, which will not impact the CACVB budget.

Ms. Cacatian briefed the Board on the CACVB's contributions to the County and the City, outside of generating tourism-related income. For the County, the CACVB: contributes to the annual financial plan, helping to secure AAA bond rating; provides tourism insight to County departments; collaborates on crisis communications, connecting emergency services to hotel services; provides letters of support for grants; provides contact lists; coordinates VA250 work; serves as ACPS curriculum advisors and partners through Scholar Studios and Senior Stay Day. The CACVB is referenced in the County Comprehensive Plan, Economic Development Strategic Plan, and Parks and Recreation Plan.

For the City, the CACVB: provides tourism insight to City departments; collaborates on crisis communications; provides arts council strategic direction; serves as VA250 coordinator. The CACVB is referenced in the City Comprehensive Plan, Economic Development Strategic Plan, and Parks and Recreation Plan.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked CACVB about photography resources. The County or City can request photos from the CACVB. For example, the CACVB took July 4th photographs on behalf of the City's Economic Development team.

The CACVB works extensively with local lodging partners. The lodging industry puts hotels into different categories. The Charlottesville-Albemarle region has five small boutique full service hotels, with a total of 99 rooms; four standard full service hotels of 150-400 rooms, with a total of of 856 rooms; two resort 80-500+ room hotels, with a total of 250 rooms; 29 limited service hotels, with a total of 3,111 rooms; and no large convention hotels with 400+ rooms. Full service hotels have meeting spaces and can host large events with food and beverages. Limited services hotels have no food and beverage facilities or meeting spaces, but benefit from group travel. 50% of the CACVB sales budget is dedicated to

generating visitation to full service hotels, 25% to limited service hotels, and 25% to attracting travel groups.

Mr. Uhl asked whether the percentages were reflective of the time committed by CACVB Sales staff. The match is inexact; group travel takes more staff time due to groups having specific and unique requirements. Ms. Brown pointed out that generating visitation to full service hotels has a positive knock-on effect on limited services hotels, which take on the overflow.

Ms. Cacatian stated that she plans to brief the Board on the expectations and roles of food, tourism attractions, Monticello, and UVA in the work of the CACVB at the next meeting.

Ms. Cacatian overviewed the annual flow of CACVB Board meetings. The Annual Meeting is in February (due to the timing of appointments from City Council and the County Board of Supervisors). Meetings are generally scheduled for Mondays, as this day is usually quiet for tourism industry representatives. The draft fiscal year budget is first presented to the Board in February, which allows the Board time to review the draft before the deadline to approve the budget during the April meeting.

Last fiscal year (FY2026) was impacted by staff changeover – both the marketing manager and the operations manager were hired last year. Additionally, the CACVB onboarded a marketing agency in FY2026. The disruption in spending has led to a build up in the CACVB fund balance. Ms. Cacatian will bring a proposal to the Board during the meeting to spend down some of the fund balance.

In the upcoming October Board meeting, the CACVB Board will be briefed by a destination management professional from outside of the region, who will explain the process for the CACVB completing the Destination Management Accreditation Program. In December the Board will be briefed on progress on the CACVB Strategic Plan. Year Two if the Strategic Plan began on July 1.

The CACVB is updating its website to remain competitive in the destination marketing market. As well as organic visits, the CACVB website is extensively used by AI agents, so it is important for the information on the website to perform well along those metrics. As well as updating the web content, the project will improve navigability and add micro-sites for specific types of users (for example, group travel planners).

Ms. Brown asked if the web redesign would include a request for proposals (RFP) link for group planners. Ms. Cacatian said that the vendor, Tempest, will include an enhanced RFP feature.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked when the update is due to be completed. Ms. Cacatian said that the due date for completion is June 30, 2027. Ms. Lyon said that Monticello recently finished a website redesign that took a similar amount of time. She also emphasized that the CACVB website has performed highly on search engines, and a redesign will continue the website's impact on the tourism ecosystem. Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked Board members for a show of hands as to whether they personally used the CACVB website frequently. All Board members raised their hands.

Mr. Uhl asked when the website last underwent a redevelopment. Ms. Cacatian answered that the current iteration is about five years old. The CACVB used the period of low visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic to focus resources on web redesign. A portion of the project was paid through ARPA funding.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked how frequently web redesigns should be done. Ms. Cacatian said that the current website contract has four more years, and at the end of the contract the web development work will be put out for competitive bidding. At that time, the contract will include website redesign.

The cohort application for Tourism for All closed on August 24. The CACVB is bringing in more local partnership and expertise to maximize the impact of the national Tourism for All curriculum. CACVB has been working on accessibility assessments with Wheel the World for several years; Ms. Ivey, the CACVB Director of Visitor and Community Engagement, is considered an expert by the broader destination marketing industry. By the fall, there will be 72 assessed properties in the Charlottesville-Albemarle region, a large number for this size of community. The CACVB is partnering with Piedmont Virginia Community College on Tourism for All to leverage their learning management system. PVCC will host the 2027 Tourism for All conference.

The CACVB's first Industry Sprint concluded on August 21. The project aimed at concentrated partner engagement, explaining to partners how engagement processes work and what services CACVB offers.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked about whether the CACVB markets local farm to table options. Farm to table is one of the Charlottesville-Albemarle region's big attractions, so CACVB market that, particularly on social media. Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked how many restaurants source locally. Ms. Cacatian said it is impossible to have comprehensive information, but the CACVB encourages and promotes local farm to table programming.

Ms. Brown said that the Forum hotel hosts happy hours that feature Virginia wine. She asked for more details about Industry Sprints. Ms. Cacatian compared Industry Sprints to donor recruitment at a nonprofit; an effort to get a partner engaged with and enthusiastic

about the work of the CACVB. The most recent Industry Sprint focused on ensuring partners understood the basics of engagement. The long term goal of the Industry Sprints is to create more engaged, collaborative partners who work together towards CACVB strategic plan goals. Ms. Brown asked how the CACVB tracks success for the Industry Sprints. Ms. Ivey measured the most recent Sprint by tracking new website listings. The Industry Sprint model allows destination development managers to focus their partner engagement and helps marketing unearth new visitor attractions. The marketing team use the information raised in Industry Sprints to activate partners during media promotion.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked what future Industry Sprints will look like. Ms. Ivey said that they will be organized according to Strategic Plan priorities.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked how the CACVB tracks success in promoting midweek hotel occupancy. Ms. Cacatian said the CACVB looks at occupancy and revenue per available room rates. As well as midweeks, the month of January is a low period for regional visitation, as many attractions are closed or operating limited hours. Restaurants in particular focus on locals rather than visitors, and the CACVB is working with local food and beverage partners to help them encourage visitation. Visitor incentives have been considered by the CACVB, but the expense would have to come from the advertising budget. In addition, post-COVID management turnover at local hotels increased the risk of an incentives program.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked how the CACVB works with hotels on increasing visitation in slump periods. The CACVB works closely with hoteliers, but information sharing is challenging due to hotels competing with each other.

Mr. Engel said that the Charlottesville-Albemarle region has been outperforming the rest of the state in visitation. In July, the occupancy rate was the third in Virginia. The high occupancy rate means there is less incentive for hotels to collaborate in incentive programming.

Ms. Brown pointed out that the high occupancy rates were limited to specific days (weekends). Charlottesville is a competitive location for large groups midweek, but transportation and meeting space are challenges.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked whether the CACVB was looking only at industry or corporate group travel, or also at leisure group travel. Ms. Branch said there is a large market for leisure travel – Keswick recently hosted a leisure group. Ms. Cacatian said the CACVB sales budget is split evenly between corporate and leisure travel groups.

Ms. Brown asked what the cost of bringing in a consultant to look at market gaps would be. Ms. Cacatian pointed out that a consultant's recommendations are only useful if the hotel

industry is prepared to implement them, and that the money would be wasted otherwise. Ms. Brown suggested that the CACVB try to engage hotel ownership groups rather than local management to ensure better collaboration.

Mr. Wade suggested that a convention center in downtown Charlottesville would help boost midweek business for hotels. Charlottesville's City Manager is investigating the idea. As Charlottesville's mayor, Mr. Wade regularly speaks to large meetings in downtown hotels like the Omni. Ms. Cacatian said the CACVB are looking into this issue, and that it would make sense to move the project forward. A large facility would increase capacity for meetings and stabilize rates, which have been challenges for attracting meetings.

Mr. Engel suggested assessing how the Virginia Guesthouse is absorbed into the market and apply the lessons to assessing market interest in a bigger facility. He reminded the Board that every convention center is supported in part by local taxes. The City and the County already have comparatively high TOT rates, and funding the construction and operation of a convention center would necessitate raising those rates. Ms. Cacatian agreed, pointing out that group travel planners factor TOT rates into their plans.

The CACVB is in the process of meeting hospitality partners to discuss how to create a workforce pipeline from local schools and PVCC.

Ms. Cacatian recommended that the CACVB keep the strategic plan goal of fostering a stronger relationship with UVA. Recent collaboration between CACVB and UVA partners connected to the Board have shown a path forward for this goal.

Ms. Cacatian shared print outs from a recent statewide tourism planning meeting and a consultant-run data analysis tool.

Mr. Uhl asked whether Ms. Cacatian had any updates regarding new routes from Charlottesville Airport. The new route to Newark is confirmed, and the proposed route to Boston is looking favorable. The next announcements from CHO are due in January.

The Charlottesville-Albemarle region is seeing more seasonality in occupancy than in recent years, suggesting a return to pre-COVID patterns.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked whether the CACVB advertises internationally. Ms. Cacatian said that international travelers are interested in the Charlottesville-Albemarle region, especially in Monticello (which is a UNESCO World Heritage site) and Virginia wine.

Ms. Whitlow, CACVB Marketing and Public Relations Director, presented the FY2027 marketing plan. The primary goal of the plan is to increase visitor spending; the CACVB aims to hit $1 billion in visitor spending the Charlottesville-Albemarle regional economy. Marketing objectives are: reach 65 million impressions through marketing campaigns;

further define the unique value of the Charlottesville-Albemarle region; drive awareness of the region as a destination for groups and meetings. The target audience radius is expanding this year to 300 miles. Working with CHO has given CACVB more insight into flight customer demographics.

The CACVB does not advertise on all social media platforms all of the time due to budget constraints, instead targeting advertising at the most effective times per platform. The CACVB is using Sojern this year, allowing us to get data back from advertising. The CACVB will soon begin advertising on LinkedIn to connect with professional group planners.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked whether the CACVB does dog friendly advertising. Ms. Whitlow said that the marketing team often includes pets in social media posts and the website has a filter for pet-friendly options.

Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley asked if the Board could get copies of the advertisements the CACVB sends out. Ms. Whitlow agreed to send out advertising reports.

Mr. Engel asked what the "ad serving" portion of the marketing budget was. Ms. Whitlow explained that the CACVB purchases media through a marketing agency, and the agency fees are part of the budget.

Ms. Brown asked whether the CACVB pays for advertorials (magazine editorials that promote a sponsor). Ms. Whitlow said the CACVB has explored advertorials with Sojern.

Mr. Uhl asked whether there is good data on platform performance. Ms. Whitlow said that the CACVB will soon be able to get better data on what people do after seeing CACVB ads. Ms. Branch asked whether the CACVB can tell if ads translate into bookings. Ms. Whitlow said that the CACVB can track people's online journey from the point they see the ad to whether they book a trip. Ms. Branch asked if the CACVB asks hotels about bookings in connection to advertising campaigns. Ms. Whitlow said the marketing team would explore that option. Ms. Brown asked whether the proposed approach would be scalable if found to be successful. Ms. Whitlow said that options within the CACVB budget would be explored.

The CACVB is auditing social and blog posts ahead of the website update. The social media marketing manager sends over 600 messages a week to potential visitors. Since the Charlottesville-Albemarle region lacks a large convention center, the CACVB is targeting meetings with a "Make Meetings Unconventional" campaign.

Ms. Cacatian presented the Board with a proposal to draw $200,000 from the CACVB fund balance for marketing use. The CACVB Operating Agreement limits the CACVB fund balance to 25% of the average of five years' organizational budget. The fund balance has not yet been determined by the County Department of Finance and Budget. She requested

that the Board approved the resolution. Mr. Uhl moved to approve, and Ms. Lyon seconded. The Board approved unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Mr. Shah introduced himself to the Board as the new proprietor of Michie Tavern, and invited the Board members to come have lunch at their convenience.

BOARD ANNOUNCEMENTS: Ms. LaPisto-Kirtley requested statistics about the mobile visitors centers from the Visitor Services team. Ms. Ivey said she would share the data. Ms. Cacatian pointed out that the operation of a visitor center in both the City and the County is part of the CACVB Operating Agreement, and that the MVCs are more effective than brick-and-mortar facilities for encountering visitors, especially at events such as King Family Vineyards polo.

Ms. Lyon reminded the Board that 2027 will be the ten-year anniversary of the Unite the Right rally. She proposed planning for the anniversary in an upcoming meeting.

Mr. Uhl informed the Board that Selvedge Brewing took home best in show at the Virginia Craft Brewing Festival.

ADJOURN: Ms. Lyon moved the adjourn the meeting at 3:04 p.m. The Board agreed unanimously.