

Travel and Recreation Council Meeting Notes

Thursday, January 16, 2025 | 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

at Calvin Coolidge Conference Room, Deane C. Davis Building, 6th Floor, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier

Board members in attendance: (in-person) Amy Spear, Molly Mahar, Jeff Lawson, Willie Docto (virtual) Matt Harrington, Karen Duguay, Maricella Ehmann

Board members absent: Steve Wright, Jody Fried

State of Vermont staff in attendance: (in-person) Heather Pelham, Sara DeFilippi, Maureen McCracken, Katharine Ingram (virtual) Jackie Dagger, Kristen Carrese, Selina Rooney, Alicia Heber, Kristina Kiarsis

Guests and members of the public in attendance (*as known, not an exclusive list*): (in-person) Kimberly Jessup (virtual) Kelly Ault, Maureen Herbert, Bryan Rivard, Carrie Simmons, Catharine Crawley, Emily Berger, Mark Plouffe, Katerina Bacevicius, Maggie Talty

Time	Topic	Discussion Lead(s)
10:00 am	Call to Order <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions from TRC Board Members • Election of new Board Chair 	VDTM Commissioner
NOTES: Molly Mahar was nominated by Amy Spear to be the New Chair. Matt Harrington seconded the nomination. Motion passed.		
10:10 am	Legislative Update	Molly Mahar
NOTES: More details to come on January 28 from Gov. Scott on his plans around education finance in budget address. Priorities this session expect to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Funding and Property Taxes • Housing • Healthcare affordability / access • Data privacy • Climate (Clean Heat Standard) • Land Use: Act 250 as well 30 by 30 • Advocacy days coming up: Outdoor Recreation Day 2/12; Tourism Economy Day 4/10. Save the dates are going out for both now. 		
10:25 am	State of the Industry Updates & Discussion	TRC Board Members
NOTES: Matt Harrington <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamber received T-TERM grant but running into issues finding a marketing agency to apply for the RFP. Annual membership meeting coming up next month. Maricella Ehmann <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National wedding trends: 25% drop in bookings compared to this time last year. 15-18% increase in operating costs. 		



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- As a result, people are trimming guest lists and budgets and hometown weddings, seeing this more often in VT.
- New opportunities? Micro weddings are more popular, smaller venues can lean into this, also in line with Vermont brand, embedding weddings into the visitor experience instead of pursuing larger events. Good timing to encourage folks to get off the beaten path. Guests benefit from the experience and lower cost, while providing a more intimate event.

Karen Duguay

- Vermont Attractions Association renewals are strong.
- Working on the VAA map and looking to bring more resources to VAA to help members to learn more about what they are interested in.
- Inspiration Guide with VDTM coming along nicely, including more quirky and unique attractions/experiences. Adopted the 14 regions as part of the magazine this year.

Willie Docto

- B&B had a great holiday season, better than last year. 4 families took over the whole lodge (one at a time). One family went skiing, everyone else just enjoyed winter in VT.
- Mad River Valley Chamber is working on a new initiative with a consultant to coordinate all sectors to work to become one united voice for the MRV.

Jeff Lawson

- In post-production for video campaign from T-TERM grant. Will launch in April in New York, Boston and Montreal.
- Adding AI tools to Hello Burlington website. Will provide good feedback loop on what visitors are seeking.
- Promoting conference and meeting sales is a priority focus. Hosting an event in early June to bring event/meeting planners, options for FAMs, sponsorships and a passport program to get attendees around the city.
- Advocacy/local politics is still an issue in Burlington. Inquiries about public safety tough for staff, every response needs to be unique. Continuing efforts for more coordination between City Hall and UVM, campus visits following same trends as tourism, everyone is impacted. Big win to get UVM parade downtown, should help to unify, Sunday 1/26.
- Long-term, thinking about programming for Vermont 250. Talking with UVM history department to help tell Revolutionary War story in an entertaining way.

Molly Mahar

- Slow start to ski season in November but going strong now and recent natural snow has helped to make up some key days.
- Ski Vermont held two pre-season media events in Boston and NYC. 65 media attendees between the two. Just hosted several Toronto media influencers.
- Doubling-down on working with existing contacts and working more closely with VDTM in hosting influencers to get the most of their VT visit.
- January is National Ski Safety month. Members are active in getting the message out, sent a press release, plus safety content on website and other activations.

10:45 am	Commissioner's Update: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Destination Marketing Updates• EDA Project Updates	Heather Pelham
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Destination Marketing:

- Shared latest performance numbers for Summer-Fall campaign. Over 111 million impressions to date. Accommodations summary showed Fall up 6% in hotel occupancy rates, 5% up in guest nights for vacation rentals.
- Winter campaign underway, 80 million impressions projected. New Matchstick videos performing well. OOH placements in Philadelphia and southern New England thanks to Ski Vermont partnership and trade options. Accommodations data shows winter season is pacing on average with last year, hotel ADR down 9%, vacation rental ADR up 5%.

EDA Project Updates:

- Shared efforts to date on Vermont Visitor Survey. Sampling has been strong in the northern part of the state, but Contractor is still working through staffing issues to get more surveys completed in the southern part of the state. Fall results will be added to Fall 2025 data to compile one Fall seasonal report. Asking partners to continue to spread the word, shared request link for collateral materials to help promote survey.
- Regional tourism forums for the Strategic Plan announced, with link to RSVP form. Discussed possible themes for virtual ‘thematic’ sessions including outdoor recreation (Jackie Dagger), arts and culture (Catherine Crawley), agritourism/food/beverage (Kristen Cassere), meetings/business travel (Jeff Lawson). Matt Harrington suggested a session on creating a welcoming culture, but the group decided that DEI should be part of every session, not separate. Attendees asked to help promote forums and to please attend, plus more opportunities coming for engagement (survey, planning group, interviews). Asked partners to also share any strategic plans they have.

11:10 am	Staff Reports <ul style="list-style-type: none">• VDTM Staff Program Area Updates• ANR/FPR/VOREC Update• Other SOV Staff Program Area Updates	VDTM staff SOV staff
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Sara DeFilippi (VDTM):

- Creating a slate of influencers for next year. Final 2024 report to be shared at the next meeting. Welcoming an ‘outdoor adventure’ influencer this month, staying in Mad River Valley, will ski, but also hike Camels Hump.
- Last chance for suppliers to sign up for the Discover New England Summit in April.

Jackie Dagger (ANR):

- Move Forward Together Vermont report complete. National Parks reviewed and has approved SCORP. Updating web info to release it publicly on Outdoor Rec Day (2/12).

Kristen Cassere (AAFV):

- Application window for Big E vendors opens tomorrow, looking for food businesses, retail and a pottery vendor has been a goal.
- Funding for Fairs and Field Days available.
- New Agritourism campaign about ready to launch. Will offer workshops on how to get involved and use new toolkit. Effort includes printed materials, travel shows and influencer campaign, plus updates to DigInVermont.

<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/seeksavor>



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11:30 am	Update on UVM Hospitality Management Certificate Program	Maureen Hebert
NOTES: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website up and registration is open, doing a soft launch and larger PR launch with Junapr in coming weeks• Program has been promoted with RDCs, CTE directors of programs, Northland Job Corps and VT National Guard. Met with high school guidance counselors, VT Lodging Association and promoting with other groups like VT Works for Women and VT POC Network. VOBA and Ski VT have also been good partners.• Curriculum includes 3 core courses and then two electives, wrapping up with internship/capstone paid internship. Some can capstone locations can provide housing. Transferable credential for new students entering hospitality sector or upskilling opportunity for incumbent workers, also can be applied to a UVM degree.• The capacity goal is 30 for each cohort but hoping for at least 60 participants.		
11:45 am	Around the Room <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Updates and Announcements	Open to All Attendees
NOTES: <p>Kelly Ault, VOBA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The first workshop for ski techs held in September. Students received 8 hours of training to get a foundation for working in ski shops, students now working in the industry.• Planning for skill building workshops for bike mechanics and trail building underway for Spring, 5 trainings each. Will promote for those currently employed as an onboarding opportunity or to gain more skills. <p>Kimberly Jessup, AVIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shared handout on Vermont independent colleges, important to remember that of 13K students, 80% are from out-of-state and come to Vermont with their families for 4 years.		
12:00 pm	Adjourn	TRC Chair

Next meeting:

Thursday, March 20, 2025 | 10:00 am – 12:00 pm

Location: Calvin Coolidge Conference Room, Deane C. Davis Building, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier
(unless otherwise announced in advance)