



Board of Directors Meeting
December 1, 2026
2:00 PM

Board Members Present (voting):

- Sam Lusk
- Todd Boggess
- Phil Lane
- Patrice Belcher
- Sam Wolford
- Ansel Ponder
- Jeff Disibbio
- Bill Regas
- Greg Puckett
- Grant Bennett
- Kim Jones
- Henry Jones
- Candace Wilson
- Susan Williams (via Zoom)

Board Members Absent:

- Jordan Maynor

Staff Present:

- Jamie Null, CEO/Director
- Karen Morris, Assistant Director
- Valerie Hendricks, Community Marketing Manager

Guests:

- Cat Grygiel
- Alexa Nagy

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at 2:10 pm

Approval of Minutes:

The board reviewed and approved the minutes from the October 2025 meeting.

Financial Report:

The financial report for October & November 2025 was presented and accepted.

New Business

Pineapple PR Updates, Presented by Cat Grygiel:

- Mercer County achieved 3.5 billion impressions and \$97.6 million in editorial value from September to November 2025.
- Year-to-date through November 2025, Mercer secured over 200 stories across 75 unique media outlets, averaging 19 placements per month.
- A strategic shift towards arts, culture, and history was initiated, with targeted outreach to creators like Appalachian Bluebird and Sarah from History on Holiday, aiming to diversify Mercer's storytelling beyond family and outdoor travel.
- The 2026 PR plan centers on elevating Mercer as uniquely Appalachian, building on the momentum of a 2 billion increase in impressions from 2025, with storytelling rooted in authenticity and cultural depth.
- The board approved continuing the Pineapple PR contract at \$60,000 for 2026 to maintain this strategic momentum.

Digital Relativity Updates, Presented by Alexa Nagy:

- The Great Outdoors campaign during 2025 garnered 6.8 million impressions, 9,000 Facebook clicks, a 1.4% overall CTR, and an exceptional 6.41% CTR on video ads, driving over 53,000 new users to the landing page with a 15.16% engagement rate.
- Mid-2025 optimization shifted campaigns from awareness to conversion, increasing guide requests and newsletter signups but reducing clicks to partner listings, reflecting a strategic trade-off focused on qualified visitor engagement.
- A blended asset strategy will combine polished professional photos for connected TV (CTV) ads with relatable UGC-style reels to engage distinct visitor personas, including hikers, explorers, golden explorers, and families.
- The strategy will also include a shift toward relaxed, authentic visuals and purchased rights to influencer-generated videos to better resonate with target audiences.
- The board voted unanimously to proceed with the Digital Relativity contract for 2026.

Budget 2026:

- The 2026 budget remains largely consistent with 2025, with a few strategic increases to support new infrastructure and anticipated hotel openings.
- An additional budget allocation was made for a new visitor center on Mercer Street, targeting completion by late spring or early summer 2026 to enhance visitor engagement.
- Advertising, marketing and administrative expenses will stay consistent, maintaining continuity in core operations.
- The budget committee (K. Jones, Lusk, and Ponder) approved a conservative budget that anticipates modest hotel tax fluctuations and includes funding for initiatives aligned with the 2026 strategy.
- The board approved the 2026 budget.

Nominating Committee:

- The 2026 board composition remains stable with no new members joining.
- Wilson is replacing Disibbio on the Executive Board.

Virginia Tech ARC Grant:

- Mercer CVB has been in talks about joining a regional collaboration led by Virginia Tech ARC to develop AI-powered marketing tools tailored to Appalachian CVBs, enhancing tourism promotion capabilities over the next two years.
- The project would include deploying AI kiosks in visitor centers to help guests plan itineraries and providing marketing specialist support.
- If approved, the two-year project would run through February 2028.

Building Updates:

- The new office space on Mercer Street is progressing and has plans to furnish it with movable furniture to retain flexibility.
- Vinyl signage is to be installed for privacy while the work on the project gets underway.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:28 pm

Next meeting: TBA

Susan Williams, Secretary

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.