



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING
Wednesday, August 19, 2026

Commissioners Present: Pace Halter, Chair; Sherricka Day, Vice Chair; Dan Gilbert, Secretary/Treasurer; Pete Jones, Miller Robinson, Amy Bryan, Alex Naik, and Hudson Terrell, Mayor Skip Henderson

Commissioner Absent: Michelle Spivey

Staff Present: Ashley Woitena

Call to OrderPace Halter

- The meeting was convened by Pace Halter at 8:31 am.

Secretary Treasurer Report.....Dan Gilbert

- Dan Gilbert presented the consent agenda that included minutes for the June 2026 meeting and financials for June and July 2026. He then turned the floor back to the Board Chair. Pace asked if there were any further questions or discussions. There being none; a motion was made by Sherricka Day to approve the minutes and financials, seconded by Pete Jones. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

Chair Report.....Pace Halter

- Mr. Halter informed the Board that there will be members whose terms will conclude at the end of the calendar year and discussed succession planning. No action was taken at this meeting. Mr. Halter noted the need to fill upcoming vacancies on the Executive Committee and indicated that nominations and a vote will likely take place at the next Board meeting. Board members were encouraged to contact either Mr. Halter or Ashley directly with recommendations or interest.
- Pace gave an update on Columbus Ahead and discussed the board meetings and the success of the marketing director's meeting. There was discussion around the popularity of Theo of Golden, the tourism impact that has happened, and the continued collaborative efforts between VisitColumbusGA and Columbus Ahead.

President's Report.....Ashley Woitena

- Ashley Woitena reviewed the 2027 Legislative Agenda that was cross referenced with both Georgia Hotel Lodging Association and Georgia Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus. She then turned the floor back to the Board Chair. Pace asked if there were any further

questions or discussions. There being none; a motion was made by Amy Bryan to approve the 2027 Legislative Agenda, seconded by Miller Robinson. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved.

- Ms. Woitena then discussed several organizational and operational highlights. She discussed staff updates that included the implementation of the Community Engagement Department. She referenced Joel Slocumb has transitioned to the Community Engagement and Special Projects Manager. Joel serves as the organization's primary liaison to Fort Benning, attending key meetings and orientations on/off the installation, while working with Fort Benning to understand and compile graduation details that can be shared with our partners. He will continue to manage incoming film and production inquiries and provides direct project support to the CEO on high-priority destination initiatives. Ashley also welcomed back a familiar face in tourism, Latvia Rivers who has joined the VisitColumbusGA team in a part-time capacity with the title of community and partner engagement specialist. Lastly, she made the board aware of the newest hire for the sales department, Gyanna Blackmon, who will serve in the capacity as a sales administrator, where she brings extensive experience and knowledge in coordination and administrative support.
- Ms. Woitena made the board aware that the companion piece to the 3-year strategic plan, the FY 27 Business Plan, coined, the FY 27 Playbook has now been professionally put together for digital distribution, she walked the board through the 5 key strategic initiatives the team has set and will send the digital copy to the board following the meeting.
- Ms. Woitena informed the Board of an Executive Decision to revise the organization's healthcare eligibility policy by reducing the waiting period for benefits from 60 days after hire to 30 days. She explained that this change aligns with the City government's policy and provides employees with more timely access to health insurance coverage. Ms. Woitena reminded the Board that, due to the cost of group health insurance, eligible staff members currently obtain coverage through the Health Insurance Marketplace. The policy update is intended to prevent employees from experiencing a gap in coverage, as individuals without insurance for an extended period may be required to wait until the next open enrollment period to secure coverage. The Board was informed that this change supports the organization's commitment to ensuring employees have continuous access to health insurance benefits.
- Ms. Woitena provided a brief sales and business development update, highlighting two key opportunities currently being pursued by the sales team. She reported that the Georgia Society of Association Executives (GSAE) recently hosted its Board Retreat in Columbus, bringing approximately 45 association and supplier leaders to the destination. During their visit, attendees were invited to participate in an optional familiarization (FAM) tour, which included a tour of the Columbus Convention & Trade Center and their choice of a whitewater rafting experience or an arts and culture tour. The visit concluded with attendance at a Columbus Clingstones baseball game. Ms. Woitena noted that the long-term objective is to position Columbus as the host destination for the GSAE Annual Conference in 2028 or 2029.
- She also informed the Board of an upcoming site visit with the leadership team of Rendezvous South, a premier appointment-based meetings marketplace for the Southeast. This visit is part of the organization's ongoing strategy to showcase Columbus directly to meeting planners and

industry decision-makers, demonstrating the destination's meeting facilities, attractions, and hospitality offerings in an effort to attract future conferences and events to the community. She informed the board that if there were opportunities for board participation she would make everyone aware.

- Next, Ms. Woitena focused on Strategic & Collaborative Efforts. She mentioned the organizations effort to not only increase their visibility in the community through mobile pop-up activations, but also outside of Columbus, in key origin markets. The first opportunity will be an activation inside of the battery at a Braves home game in September. As part of the collaboration with the Braves, they will host two additional activations with the Braves next season. She then gave an update on Collaboration Efforts between VisitColumbusGA and the Georgia Department of Economic Development Tourism Division (Explore Georgia) which include:
 - FIFA World Cup Activation, Georgia the Whole Day Through – She provided an update that the entire activation saw over 70,00 people and of the people the VisitColumbusGA team and partners engaged with many for from Georgia/Southeast, of the ones that did fly, many were only staying a night or two then going back home or to another destination. Ms. Woitena discussed that she heard from many attendees that Atlanta was the most affordable FIFA experience between flights, hotels, ticket prices, and in-stadium prices. She also showed a chart from the Georgia Hotel Lodging Association Breakfast that she attended that showed that while Atlanta's rate grew, demand did not. Which was shown throughout major convention cities that were host cities, as this pushed their convention business. She followed this conversation by expressing the shared interest in becoming a basecamp city for a team for the 2031 FIFA Women's World Cup.
 - Travel South:
 - Familiarization Tour (FAM) tour after the conference concludes in Nashville. Based on sign-up. Partnership with Macon and Augusta.
 - Michelin Guide to Georgia- Georgia is the only State that is not part of the Travel South Michelin Guide to the Southeast. Preliminary meeting between Michelin, Travel South, Explore Georgia, and Georgia Destination Marketing Organizations.

Adjournment.....Pace Halter

- With no further business, Mr. Halter adjourned the meeting at 9:17 am.

Executive Session.....Pace Halter

- The Board then went into Executive Session for the purpose of a personnel matter. Mr. Halter excused non-voting attendees for the purpose of the meeting.