

RHODE ISLAND CONVENTION CENTER AUTHORITY
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2025

A meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Rhode Island Convention Center Authority (hereinafter referred to as "Authority" "the CCA" or the "Board" was held on February 27, 2025, pursuant to notice which was posted at the Amica Mutual Pavilion, One LaSalle Square, Providence, RI and the RI Convention Center, One Sabin Street, Providence, RI.

Board members in attendance were Ernest Almonte, George Nee, Paul MacDonald, Jeffrey Hirsh, Dale Venturini, Peter Mancini, Jennifer Goodrich Coia, Esq., Oscar Vargas, and Diony Garcia, Esq.

Board member not in attendance: Carol Lombardi

Others participating were Daniel McConaghy, Dana Peltier, Linda Maroun, and Melissa O'Connor Convention Center Authority; Dan Schwartz, Mike Gravison The VETS; Alan Chile PFM/The VETS; Lawrence Lepore, Chris Spolidoro, Cheryl Cohen, Casey Hoover, Christina Montanaro, Robert Gemma, and Tim Sullivan Convention Center and AMP; Kristin Adamo and Alana Cerrone O-Hare, PWCVB; Bruce Leach, Legal Counsel; Michael Crawley, Citrin Cooperman; Hank Abate, OVG Corporate; and Debra Polselli, Recording Secretary.

1. Call to Order

Chairman Almonte called the meeting to order at 9:04 a.m.

2. Announcement of Next Board Meeting Date

Chairman Almonte stated that the next meeting will take place on Thursday, March 27, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

3. Consent Calendar Items

- a. Approval of minutes of the December Board Meeting
- b. Approval of the Marketing Committee Report
- c. Approval of Finance Committee Report

Chairman Almonte requested a motion for the Consent Calendar Items. Upon a motion from **Mr. MacDonald**, which was seconded by **Mr. Mancini**, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the minutes of the January Board Meeting, the Marketing Committee Report, and the Finance Committee Report.

4. Finance Committee Report – Chair Jeff Hirsh

- a. Review & Consideration for Lease at the IDG

Mr. Hirsh deferred to Mr. McConaghy for the Finance Committee Report. Mr. McConaghy stated that moving forward the Finance Committee meeting will take place at 11:00 a.m. followed by the Marketing Committee meeting at 12:00 noon. Mr. McConaghy then reported on a retail lease proposal at the IDG (see attached) for the remaining retail space that is available at the garage. He stated that it is a little over 3k square feet of space and a high-end spa owned by G&T, LLC, is interested in breaking away from their existing group and going on their own. He stated that all improvements to the space will be made by the tenant, and the lease would be ten (10) years with two (2) 5-year options. He stated that they used the same lease format as Dunkin' Donuts. **Ms. Venturini** asked what was going on across the street from the garage, and Mr. McConaghy replied an apartment complex. Mr. McConaghy reviewed the protections with signage and indemnification language and noted that they are 75% there but there is still a lot of work to do. He reported that the Finance Committee agreed to continue to pursue the lease proposal, but the potential tenant is aware that it requires Board approval. **Ms. Venturini** asked if parking is part of the deal, and Mr. McConaghy replied yes they would offer validations to their clients, and we would bill them accordingly.

Vice Chairman Nee asked if they will provide parking for their employees, and Mr. McConaghy replied yes. **Mr. MacDonald** questioned if the rent scale is the correct scale with the cost of rent for people moving from Boston and New York. Mr. McConaghy deferred the question to Ms. Goodrich Coia, since this is her area of expertise, and **Ms. Goodrich Coia** stated that the rent scale used is very much in line. Mr. McConaghy mentioned that there is not a lot of demand for retail space in Providence. Ms. Adamo commented that this will allow for more marketing opportunities. With there being no other questions or discussion,

Chairman Almonte requested a motion for the approval of the retail lease proposal. Upon a motion from **Ms. Venturini**, which was seconded by **Vice Chairman Nee**, it was unanimously

VOTED: to approve the retail lease proposal.

5. Marketing Committee – Chair Dale Venturini

a. Overview of the PWCVB & PFM Collaboration on the Providence Culinary Collective & Lil Rhody Laugh Riot

Ms. Venturini stated that there will be two (2) presentations from Ms. Adamo and Mr. Schwartz on what is coming up the end of March (see attached). She stated that these events started as dreams, and they have always been something they wanted to do and now it is a reality. Mr. Schwartz addressed the Board about the Lil Rhody Laugh Riot and stated that they have been talking about this for a long time and there will be a lot of exciting things happening in Providence in the last weekend of March. He stated that there will be many events starting in the daytime across all price points, and even if someone cannot afford an event, there are free things to do during that time. He stated that he is still getting calls from artists looking at next year already. He commented that this event is much larger than they thought it would be in year 1. **Vice Chairman Nee** asked what the price range is for tickets, and Mr. Schwartz replied tickets range from free to \$175 and the average ticket price is \$45-\$50. **Chairman Almonte** expressed his gratitude and mentioned that he and Mr. McConaghy met with the Governor last week and he was aware of the event, so the word is out. Ms. Adamo then addressed the Board on the Providence Culinary Collective event that will be running at the same time as the comedy festival. She stated that it boasts high end wine and dinner events that cost as high as \$200 and as low as \$20. She stated a lot of businesses wanted to participate and it being the first year they were nervous about getting the funding necessary to host this event successfully. She stated that they are getting good coverage, especially with the editor of *Saveur* magazine being from Pawtucket and a lot of the restaurants being creative and offering fun events. **Ms. Venturini** expressed appreciation for everything they have done thus far to make this event successful. Ms. Adamo mentioned that they are working together to save money on ad buys. **Ms. Venturini** mentioned Commerce offering billboards at no charge from Virginia to Maine advertising the events. Mr. Schwartz commented that they want people to come for the weekend and enjoy all the City has to offer. **Mr. MacDonald** asked how we hold onto these two (2) events without someone stealing our ideas, and Ms. Adamo stated that they applied for a trade patent and bought domain names. Mr. Schwartz commented that on the comedy side he did not think Mr. Singleton would allow that to happen here. Ms. Adamo commented that we were the first to do “Restaurant Week” outside of Boston. **Mr. MacDonald** recalled a situation with a boxing event and another venue took it away from us. Ms. Adamo stated that it will be hard to take “Providence” away from us. **Mr. Garcia** asked how quickly they will start planning for next year, and Mr. Schwartz replied that they have already started planning for next year and once this year’s event has concluded they will put a survey together. He further stated that they work with agencies all year long and there will be six (6) photographers taking photographs and creating content for next year. **Mr. Garcia** asked if another city is looking to do a comedy festival, and Mr. Schwartz replied that Boston and New York already have comedy festivals. He stated that the Boston festival is small, and the New York festival is across all five (5) boroughs, and we are working to make this the “known” one in New England. **Chairman Almonte** thanked them for making this such an exciting time for our City and State. **Ms. Venturini** urged fellow members to go on the websites and check them out. **Chairman Almonte** asked if the two (2) links could be forwarded to all members so they can share it across their socials and both Ms. Adamo and Mr. Schwartz agreed to send to Mr. McConaghy to forward to all the members. **Mr. Hirsh** stated that he knows it was discussed at the Finance Committee meeting but asked if restaurants will offer free tickets to the comedians, and Ms. Adamo stated that they are working on it. **Ms. Venturini** stated that there is a lot happening and it is so symbiotic that we are pulling this off successfully.

6. Employee Highlight

a. Alana Cerrone O'Hare (Sr. Director of Communications and Special Projects – PWCVB)

Ms. Adamo stated that a few meetings ago while she was giving her report she had stated that “Alana is doing this, and Alana is doing that” and the Board suggested bringing her in to meet the Board. She introduced Ms. Cerrone O'Hare and stated that she is always a bright spot on every day. Ms. Cerrone O'Hare thanked the Board for having her and stated that Ms. Adamo has always been her mentor. She stated that she is a lifelong Rhode Islander, loves the State, and lives in Cumberland. She stated that she always wanted to get into TV news and before that, wanted to be an actress. She stated that she worked at Channel 6 as an Assignment Editor where she learned everything because that position is the pulse of the newsroom. She stated that she would shadow reporters and create her own reel and worked on getting her own spot. She said she saw an opportunity and knew she could do it. She stated that she eventually became a full-time reporter then anchor. She stated that after her second baby was born, she transitioned to PR and went to work as a Press Secretary for Governor McKee and was there for a year and half. She stated that she transitioned to unemployment looking for the right fit that would work for her family and met with Ms. Adamo about her current position, which was a perfect fit for her giving her the opportunity to work with not only local reporters, but national food and travel writers, designers, architects and continue to put Providence and the State in the spotlight. She said it is easy to promote the upcoming event in March since we are a culinary destination. She agreed with Ms. Adamo that Providence deserves nice things, and we should not be surprised when people talk positively about us. She said sometimes it takes people coming here to see everything we have to offer. She further commented that Rhode Islanders like to keep secrets about things, and she always encourages Rhode Islanders to visit the City more to see what a gem it really is. She concluded by stating that she has 2.5 kids, a dog, and enjoys frozen mudslides when she is not pregnant and recently started rating mudslides in the State. Mr. McConaghy asked where someone can get the best frozen mudslide, and she replied that the best in the State is at Champlin's on Block Island, but on the mainland, Chelo's on the Water has the best frozen mudslide. Mr. Lepore asked Ms. Cerrone O'Hare to comment on growing up with her dad (Al Cerrone), uncle, and the Farrelly brothers, and recalled fond childhood memories of sitting with them and her grandmother and always laughing. She said as a middle child, she grew up having very thick skin. **Chairman Almonte** then asked how she defined success, and Ms. Cerrone O'Hare stated that she defined success by maintaining balance and harmony both professionally and personally. She stated that work/life balance is so important, and she is thankful to have found this at the CVB because she does not want to feel guilty about going to her kid's hockey practice instead of doing work that can wait until the following day.

7. Executive Director's Report – Daniel McConaghy

a. Chairman and Executive Director Meeting with the Governor's Office

Mr. McConaghy stated that there are a couple of follow-up issues. He reported that he and the Chairman met with the Governor. **Chairman Almonte** stated that it was a good meeting, and the Governor asked to come to the next meeting for an update. He stated that we had a good year last year, and they brought the Annual Report and walked the Governor through all the improvements that were completed with the money the State gave us for improvements. He stated that they reported on a successful OVG transition and made a request for continued funding for improvements in the buildings and payments for the garage. He stated that the current debt payment on the garage is just over \$3m annually. Since the bonds on the Convention Center are expiring in 2026 and 2027, we are considering another round of financing to complete a myriad of other projects. Chairman Almonte said we also discussed the State taking over the \$3m in bond payments in the 2026/2027 timeframe as well to allow the Authority to consistently remain in the black. Mr. McConaghy stated that he was happy they met and gave them something more tangible to see. **Chairman Almonte** commented that they were able to do this because of everyone's hard work and is the reason they had a successful meeting with the Governor.

b. Follow-up Regarding PC Fan Behavior

Mr. McConaghy reported that a meeting took place on February 7th with John Sweeney, Steve Napolillo, and the student affairs rep from PC, as well as Chairman Almonte and Mr. Lepore. **Chairman Almonte** stated that everyone was aware as to why they were meeting, and we brought a stack of fake IDs and broken chairs from the last three (3) games. Mr. McConaghy stated that it was good meeting, and they were trying to determine the temperature of PC in this situation. He stated that some specific changes will be put into place with only two (2) games left. Mr. McConaghy reported that they have increased the number of police officers to four (4) total in the student sections at Providence College's expense. He further reported that we have agreed to install more cameras for next season that are of higher quality because the cameras we have now are not that great. **Chairman Almonte** stated that they agreed to take the IDs and engage with their Board on student discipline, He stated that overall, they were very concerned about addressing the issue and want to sit down again because this cannot happen next season.

Mr. MacDonald stated that he was disappointed we gave them the IDs. **Chairman Almonte** stated that we certainly do not want to ruin these kids' careers, but we need to make changes. **Ms. Goodrich Coia** agreed with Mr. MacDonald stating that she felt the fake IDs were the least egregious of the situation and they might not be the ones causing problems. Mr. McConaghy felt that we need to get to the core of the problem which he believes to be over consumption. He talked about students getting on the bus to come here and they line up early, we need to crack down on over consumption. He stated that there were a couple of students at the last game who were not allowed in. He stated that accountability needs to be addressed by Providence College. **Mr. MacDonald** stated that he was pretty certain that we will see fake IDs next year and every year after that - everyone has had one. **Ms. Goodrich Coia** stated that she does not believe it to be the core of the problem and that we are suggesting it is the same kids we are charging. **Chairman Almonte** stated that a student presenting a fake ID and then runs away, that person is trying to purchase alcohol illegally. He mentioned they talked about checking them on to the bus in line. Mr. McConaghy stated that they talked about a PC liaison that will be in the student section and can identify any students causing problems. He further stated that they talked to us about making sure that those in the student section in fact have a ticket for that section. **Ms. Venturini** commented that she was glad to hear they cared about the situation. **Vice Chairman Nee** asked if they mentioned the language issue, and Mr. McConaghy replied that there is nothing we can practically do about that. Mr. Lepore commented that we told them they need to rethink their Late Night Madness event, and Mr. Sweeney agreed and thought it should just be a concert. **Chairman Almonte** stated that he thought the President of PC would have attended the meeting, but Mr. Sweeney assured them that he can make decisions. **Vice Chairman Nee** asked if there were any games after the meeting and Mr. Lepore replied yes and that there were two (2) ejections for bad behavior and they were Brown students, not PC students. He further stated that about a half dozen students were not allowed entry because of intoxication. **Ms. Venturini** asked how the Coach was ejected from the last game, and Mr. Lepore replied that he was surprised at the ejection. Mr. Lepore stated that with the increased police presence in that area is helping the situation. **Vice Chairman Nee** stated that the students see there is a change and are behaving better because of the police presence. **Chairman Almonte** commented on the importance of the police staying in that area and not roving, and Mr. Lepore replied that it has been made quite clear. Mr. Lepore then stated that we have received enormous pressure from the State Fire Marshal on the Late Night Madness event and it may end up being just a concert. **Chairman Almonte** stated that there is a ripple effect and thinks we will see a positive change. Mr. Lepore said that we cannot just eject kids that are disruptive and intoxicated, we need to make sure they have a ride home. **Mr. MacDonald** thanked everyone for working on a solution to the situation they were all concerned about and thinks it is an important point that we did not just send an intoxicated kid out on the street.

c. OVG Update – Hank Abate

Mr. Abate did not have anything new to report and was happy to answer any questions. **Mr. MacDonald** brought up employee health insurance, and Mr. Abate stated that he is working with Mr. McConaghy on this issue. He stated that there are a couple of different ways to accommodate our employees in order to keep costs down for the Authority. He stated that another layer was added for employees to go through when it comes to reimbursement, but they are working towards reverting back to Blue Cross/Blue Shield. He stated that medical insurance has become increasingly complicated, and the cost never goes down. Mr. McConaghy stated that they are working with Blue Cross on a solution, and we need to give it time. **Chairman Almonte** expressed the Board's concern and hopes that it is concluded soon. Mr. Lepore then reported that Mr. Abate is working with Don Law at Live Nation to get more shows in the building. Mr. Abate stated that when they first came in Don Law was ignoring the building and he had some concerns and some disagreements with Mr. Lepore that have been worked out and they are definitely working with us now to get more shows. Mr. Lepore stated that the problem arose because of non-union labor in East Providence, and we have union labor here. **Chairman Almonte** raised question about looking at gross margin and indirect expenses are very high, and a deep dive is needed and hoped for an update at the next meeting since it is very alarming. Mr. Lepore stated that he has been given information that Don Law will not bring shows to the new stadium in Pawtucket. Mr. Abate stated that they may get some concerts out of the gate, but it will be too expensive for them without a capacity of 60k-70k people.

Ms. Venturini stated that she will be making arrangements for Victoria Cimino who is taking over Discover Newport to come and meet the Board. She then sadly reported that David DePetrillo passed away yesterday in hospice and that maybe the Board should do something.

Chairman Almonte stated that the Governor will be coming to next month's Board meeting to talk to them about the 2030 Plan.

8. Adjournment

With there being no further business to be discussed by the Board of Commissioners, **Chairman Almonte** asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting in honor of David DePetrillo. Upon a motion duly made by **Vice Chairman Nee**, which was seconded by **Mr. MacDonald**, it was unanimously

VOTED: to adjourn the February 27, 2025 meeting at 10:17 a.m.