

RHODE ISLAND CONVENTION CENTER AUTHORITY  
MARKETING COMMITTEE MEETING  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2025 AT 12:00 PM

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A meeting of the Marketing Committee of the Rhode Island Convention Center Authority (hereinafter referred to as "Authority" "the CCA" or the "Board" was held on January 28, 2025. The meeting was held in the McCarvill Boardroom, Second Floor, Rhode Island Convention Center, pursuant to notice at the Rhode Island Convention Center, One Sabin Street, Providence, RI and the Amica Mutual Pavilion, One LaSalle Square, Providence, RI.

Board members in attendance were Ernest Almonte, Paul MacDonald, Dale Venturini, Jeffrey Hirsh, Peter Mancini, Oscar Vargas, and Carol Lombardi

Board members not in attendance were George Nee, Diony Garcia, Esq., and Jennifer Goodrich Coia, Esq.

Others participating were Daniel McConaghy Convention Center Authority; Dan Schwartz and Mike Gravison The VETS; Lawrence Lepore, Christina Montanaro, Cheryl Cohen, Rebecca Ponder, and Hannah Capece RI Convention Center and AMP; Kristen Adamo and Tom Reil, PWCVB; Bruce Leach, Legal Counsel; and Debra Polselli, Recording Secretary.

1. Call to Order

**Ms. Venturini** called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

2. Announcement of Next Meeting Date

**Ms. Venturini** stated that the next meeting will take place on Tuesday, February 25, 2025 at 12:00 p.m.

3. Approval of December 2024 Marketing Committee Meeting Minutes

**Ms. Venturini** requested a motion to approve the December 2024 Marketing Committee Meeting Minutes. Upon a motion from **Mr. MacDonald**, which was seconded by **Chairman Almonte**, it was unanimously

**VOTED:** to approve the minutes of the December Marketing Committee meeting.

4. Marketing Updates

a. PWCVB – Kristen Adamo/Tom Riel

Mr. Riel reviewed the PWCVB December report before the Committee (see attached). He stated that December was a great month with twenty (20) pieces of new business, six (6) of which are related to the Convention Center. He reported that 57% of the definite room nights are associated with Convention Center bookings. He stated that room nights are up and there is good growth. In some cases, same piece of business but over several years. He then reported on the recent news of the federal government's plan to no longer fund wind farms, etc. and there are a lot of conventions in this industry that rely on government funding. He stated that a wind energy conference that was in the proposal process reached out to them, and they are not delaying their conference, but cancelling it. **Ms. Venturini** questioned how we handle signed contracts and deposits when a conference cancels, and Ms. Ponder replied that contractually we can keep any deposits and did not think this was a force majeure event. Mr. Riel stated that a force majeure event would be if the government imposes travel restrictions. Mr. Lepore stated that as a rule, we normally do not keep a deposit. Mr. Riel stated that while he does not want to send panic, there may be more cancellations due to changes with the federal government. Mr. Riel then reported there was a \$37 million economic impact due to the Convention Center, which is 64% of everything the CVB has booked at the Convention Center. He then reported on the December hotel stats stating that it was a typical December with the percentage of occupancy and average daily rate. He stated that they have concentrated on filling up hotels. He reported that the sales teams are where they need to be. He stated that we compete more often with larger cities, and as we move forward even though smaller venue, we are booking the same customer on a smaller scale. He reported that they plan to bring more sales team members to conventions next year to increase our presence. Ms. Adamo stated that they have TID funds that will allow them to do so. Mr. Riel then reported on Sports.

He stated that we will welcome over 44k cheerleaders, coaches, and family members to the State. Mr. Riel concluded his report by stating last year at this time, they did not have any prospective business four (4) years out and this year there are 44k room nights already booked. Ms. Adamo addressed the Committee and provided the marketing and communications update. She discussed Bandwango and explained how the app works, as well as their upcoming promotions – Dinner & A Show, Restaurant Week, and the full slate of happenings for the upcoming Providence Culinary event. She stated that tickets will be going on sale at the end of this week and that the lineup is confirmed with a lot of good, talented chefs. She noted that *Saveur* magazine has been a great partner, and the editor is from Pawtucket. She reported that they are gearing up for March Madness and that there were two (2) Providence mentions, specifically affiliated with Johnson & Wales University, in *Martha Stewart Living* magazine. Mr. Lepore asked if there was any news on the James Beard nominees, and Ms. Adamo replied nothing yet and that the CVB may decide to do a dinner or lunch at the James Beard House in May to kick off the summer. She stated some of the nominees will be involved in their culinary event. Ms. Adamo then reported on their “Year in Review” and summarized the hard work and dedication of their PR firm, specifically Alanna. Mr. Riel then stated that they are losing their Director of Sales. **Ms. Venturini** commented that Alanna always has a smile on her face, works hard, and she is amazing. She noted that everyone needed to meet her. Chairman Almonte suggested her as an Employee Highlight. Ms. Ponder mentioned that the Convention Center was losing one of their sales managers, Briana Corcoran, and Ms. Cohen stated that Veronica VanJura has also left to pursue another opportunity.

b. AMP/RICC – Cheryl Cohen/Becca Ponder

Ms. Cohen reviewed the AMP Monthly Marketing Report before the Committee (see attached). She reported that there are currently over 17k tickets sold for Monster Jam this weekend. She stated that the month of March is going to be incredible starting off with a hockey and basketball double header, RI Interscholastic League Basketball Championship Games, finishing up Big East conference play with Providence College, Providence Bruins hockey followed by taking the ice out for two (2) back to back NCAA tournaments, Div III Wrestling and 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Round Men’s Basketball. She then reported that Kane Brown has over 8k tickets sold, and Barry Manilow has over 6k tickets sold. She reported that a concert was just announced with Keyshia Cole & Jeezy, which will be the first time they are on stage together since they broke up. She stated the remainder of the season will be hockey, hockey playoffs, and graduations. She stated that we will be closing down for a few weeks this summer for new seating riser construction. Ms. Cohen then reported that per caps were strong in the month of December, and tickets sold through Ticketmaster during the month of December, which do not include Providence College Men’s basketball tickets because they use a different ticketing platform, totaled almost \$16 million. **Mr. Hirsh** questioned ticket sales in New Bedford, MA. Ms. Cohen replied that people who buy tickets for an event will depend on the show itself. She cited an example with WWE and that people will drive from nearby states to see WWE in Providence. She noted that sometimes we see ticket purchases from California, and we know that there is a good chance that ticket buyer is a ticket broker. **Ms. Venturini** commented that there was a situation recently where her friend was in town and purchased fake tickets to an event at The Vets and was very appreciative that Mr. Schwartz was able to help. Ms. Cohen stated that we cannot stop this from happening, but we try to manage it. Ms. Cohen then discussed the last page of her report, which is package that is sent to promoters showing them a list of all our assets to let them know how we can support them to make their show a success. She stated that we typically customize it depending on the show. If it is a Latin show, we put show demographics, radio stations, etc. to help them understand the market. **Ms. Venturini** stated that we always talk about competitive venues in our market, and she stated that she recently went on a tour of the new Tidewater Landing Stadium in Pawtucket, and she was not expecting what she saw and was impressed by it. She also stated that they are doing a lot with non-profit companies. Ms. Adamo stated that the CVB is working with them and is happy to set something up if everyone wants to go on a tour. Ms. Adamo stated that they are working with them on supporting events and trying to help them book their space. Ms. Cohen stated that we are in a highly competitive market and that the amphitheater season will be announcing their schedules soon. **Ms. Venturini** asked what was happening in East Providence, and Mr. Lepore replied that the project has stalled in light of the bridge situation. **Ms. Venturini** asked about the theater on Park Avenue in Cranston. Mr. Schwartz replied that it could very well be competition for The Vets. He stated that they have done shows The Vets has done in the past and there is so much content that he does not anticipate a huge impact to their operation. However, he did state that he was more concerned about promoters choosing that theater because it has 1200 seats, it is cheaper and is a non-union venue. He reported that they are doing five (5) shows this year that The Vets have done in the past and are shows that The Vets will not do next year. **Ms. Venturini** commented that she lives in the area and there is no parking and people have to use City Hall and street parking. Mr. Schwartz stated that he will certainly keep an eye on the fact that it is cheaper there. **Ms. Venturini** asked him if he had ever been there, and Mr. Schwartz replied that it had been a while since he was last there. Mr. Lepore commented that there is a lot of capital that is needed at the venue. **Ms. Venturini** asked what kind, and Mr. Lepore replied, HVAC. He stated that the property is probably worth more than the building. **Mr. Vargas** asked what the capacity is at The Vets, and Mr. Schwartz replied 2011 seats.

**Mr. Vargas** then stated that he recently attended an event at The Vets and questioned Mr. Schwartz on why there were no trash cans in the second floor seating area and had only found one after walking into the hallway. Mr. Schwartz replied that shows do not want trash cans in the seating area, and they cannot be emptied during a show. **Mr. Vargas** then asked if any Latino promoters are interested in bringing an artist to The Vets, and Mr. Schwartz replied that they have looked at shows in the past, but promoters typically stick with Boston or one of the casinos for Latin artists. He said if they come here and struggle then they to spend a lot of money on advertising, but he was happy to look into this further. Ms. Ponder then reviewed the RICC Monthly Marketing Report before the Committee (see attached). She stated that with only the Exhibit Halls to sell, the month of January only had six (6) dark days. She reported that the recent Auto Show is not what it used to be, and the show struggled with an expected attendance of 8k but only had 4300 attendees. **Mr. Vargas** questioned who was interviewed on Channel 12 for the Auto Show, and Ms. Ponder replied that it was probably the promoter and not any one on staff at the Convention Center. Ms. Ponder stated that public shows have changed, and they are not what they used to be. Mr. Lepore asked about ATVs, UTVs, and Ms. Ponder replied that the RV show is changing this year and will be adding ATVs, UTVs, etc. and it will be a free admission. **Mr. Vargas** noted that usually kids have free admission, but the Auto Show even charged for kids. Ms. Montanaro commented that the Auto Show in New York has changed, and a lot of cities have dropped their Auto Show. She stated that the San Diego show is still big. Mr. Lepore commented that a concept car show does well but only in major markets. **Mr. Vargas** asked if there were any electric cars at the show, and Ms. Ponder replied that Ford had some. **Mr. Hirsh** questioned if the Flower Show will ever return, and Ms. Ponder replied that the Flower Show is combined with the Home Show and will not be a standalone event anymore. Ms. Ponder then welcomed Hannah Capece, the newest member of the Convention Center staff as a Sales & Event Coordinator. She stated that Hannah will be the system administrator in handling the Convention Center's new CRM system, which is a massive project. Mr. Lepore commented that this new system will help us determine what is profitable, what is marginal, and where we need to pay attention, and it will provide us with detailed reports. Mr. McConaghy commented that we have been using a previous system with this company, as well as others in the past, and asked Ms. Cohen about those systems. Ms. Cohen replied that we started off with SMG Booking, then VenueOps, and finally Momentus. Mr. McConaghy stated that we are upgrading from Momentus Elite to Momentus Enterprise, which is utilized at many OVG venues. He stated that the new system will increase reporting abilities, as well as moving all our processes to a digital platform. Ms. Ponder stated that Mr. Lawrence is happy to see us going to this system because it will really help in the area of food & beverage with BEO's, banquet invoices, etc. She commented that this system can do it all and will give us the ability to pull a lot of information. She stated that changing to a new CRM is a lot of work but will be worth it in the end. **Ms. Venturini** commented that in time we will wonder how we did without it. Mr. Lepore commented that this system will enable us to really see what is happening with all the events. Mr. McConaghy stated that the finance team will work with the new system, as well as our NetSuite software. He stated that OVG will be changing to NetSuite too. Ms. Ponder then reported on the RICC Newsletter. She stated that they have done one in the past and Ms. Dotson expressed the need to start back up. Ms. Ponder stated that they could maybe post this newsletter on LinkedIn like the CVB does. **Ms. Venturini** commented that she would love to see this keep going and that we always start something and then stop but she is glad to keep this going.

c. The Vets – Dan Schwartz/Mike Gravison

Mr. Gravison reviewed The Vets Monthly Marketing Report before the Committee (see attached). He reported that December was good month. He reviewed December events noting that The Nutcracker engagement did well considering half of the shows were before Christmas and half took place after Christmas. Mr. Gravison then reviewed January events and upcoming events booked at The Vets. He reported that the next round of artists have been announced for the Lil Rhody Laugh Riot at both The Vets and the Comedy Connection. He stated that there will be one more round of announcements, and they are in a good place from the recent announcement of Matt Rife, who now lives in Rhode Island. **Ms. Venturini** commented that the design is great on this event. He reported that that there will be a lot of radio, TV, and social media presence in February and March for this event. He explained that they are taking advantage of what Commerce has offered them, and this event will see coverage beyond Rhode Island into Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. He stated that they are getting special rates at hotels, collaborating really well with the CVB, to work outside our Rhode Island bubble. Ms. Adamo commented that this is a good example of how everyone is going in the same direction. **Ms. Venturini** asked how many tickets have been sold, and Mr. Schwartz replied that over 8k total tickets have been sold already, which is all before the very extensive marketing dollars that will be spent to promote this event. Mr. Schwartz stated that Matt Rife will be at the Comedy Connection, which they had tried to book him at the AMP, but he has a Live Nation tour and cannot perform in any arenas, only clubs. Ms. Ponder commented that it is good to see a popular artist in a small local club. Mr. McConaghy commented that it allows us to succeed at other events going on at the same time. **Mr. Vargas** then questioned Mr. Schwartz about adding TVs because seniors sometimes cannot see when they are at a show. Mr. Schwartz replied that Imagetech handles video, and they hire camera operators, etc. only when it is requested by a show. **Mr. Vargas** asked if they could just use what they have in house already. Mr. Lepore commented that some shows do not want you to record their show.

**Mr. Vargas** then questioned why The Vets does not accept cash anymore and recommended that signs be put in place to let patrons know about this policy. **Ms. Venturini** stated that she thought it was a law that we needed to accept cash as a form of payment. Mr. Schwartz replied that The Vets is in fact a cashless venue, but at this time if a patron wants to pay with cash they see the House Manager who will purchase a gift card for them. Mr. Schwartz appreciated the question and comments and will go back to their team to discuss this issue. Mr. Gravison then reported on The Vets' community outreach. He stated that they worked with Foster Forward in December and their team really stepped-up donating gifts. **Ms. Venturini** asked if they could ask Commissioners if they would like to participate because often times they want to make a donation to a worthy cause but are unsure where to give and this would be a perfect solution. Mr. Gravison further reported that their staff distributed food to over 200 families at St. Raymond's food pantry in Providence.

5. Executive Director's Report – Daniel McConaghy

a. Review of Sales & Marketing Plan for RICC Renovations & Sustainability Program – Cheryl Cohen

Mr. McConaghy addressed the Committee and stated that at the last Board meeting they discussed a sustainability plan and how to market it. He stated that Ms. Cohen has been working on creating the framework for this program, which will be a living and breathing document that will be updated as time goes on. Ms. Cohen then addressed the Committee and stated that as Mr. McConaghy mentioned, as we get more insight, we will begin to incorporate more information to provide a more comprehensive plan with a high-level look. She noted that the PowerPoint before them contains the highlights. She reviewed the goals and objectives questioning how we target new clients and create additional revenue. Mr. McConaghy stated that this has been a coordinated effort with the CVB, Mr. Morin of LiRo-Hill and Ms. Ponder at the Convention Center. **Ms. Venturini** suggested adding all partners when presenting to the Board. Ms. Cohen noted that clean initiatives mean a lot to the local media. She stated that she met with Alanna and Mr. Morin to look at everything and what everything means and turn those things into stories. She continued reviewing target audience, as well as key messages. **Ms. Venturini** asked if there would be any packaging, and Ms. Cohen replied that she was not sure what Ms. Montanaro had at this time. Ms. Adamo stated that collateral pieces, in all likelihood, will come out of the CVB budget. **Ms. Venturini** commented that when you can see something, it makes more sense, and everyone agreed. Ms. Cohen then reviewed strategies and mentioned that in talking with Mr. McConaghy a flexible timeline is needed for this Plan. Mr. McConaghy discussed the project on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, which is expected to be completed in September and the project on the 5<sup>th</sup> Floor is expected to be completed in October. He mentioned trying to tie them both together. He mentioned that the renovation project on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor is really a "new" space where there is a dramatic change. Mr. Riel asked if the sustainability study would be certified, and Mr. Lepore replied that it is almost impossible. He noted that a lot of programs that were embraced were because of federal funding which may not be the case anymore. Ms. Adamo noted that we will just need to answer questions that are asked, and Mr. Riel stated that we need to educate the staff on the Sustainability Program. **Ms. Venturini** asked if there will be an herb garden on the roof, and Mr. Lepore replied that it is very doable. Ms. Cohen stated that there will be ongoing engagement, and Ms. Montanaro will make sure you have all this information, and the information is clear, and the sales team feels comfortable talking about the Program. Mr. Riel commented how customers like to hear "energy savings" etc. Ms. Cohen noted that content will be created with a professional photographer, and there will be giveaways, rewards, etc. (i.e. if one group refers another group). Ms. Cohen reviewed the KPIs and commented that the plan is to align all strategies with the CVB and the OVG sales team with everyone working together. **Ms. Venturini** commented that there is a lot going on, and Ms. Cohen agreed that it is not an easy plan to execute, but we will put our best foot forward and make sure information is accurate.

**Mr. MacDonald** informed the Committee members that Vice Chairman George Nee was being honored by the House of Representatives at 4:00 pm. **Mr. Mancini** wished Ms. Venturini good luck with her upcoming knee surgery.

6. Adjournment

With there being no other business to be discussed by the Marketing Committee, **Ms. Venturini** asked for a motion to adjourn. Upon a motion duly made by **Mr. MacDonald**, which was seconded by **Mr. Mancini**, it was unanimously

**VOTED:** to adjourn at 1:23 p.m.