

**Radford University/Radford City Joint Commission
Minutes**

**The Hub on East Main Street
August 11, 2026 @ 8:45 am**

Attendees: Kellie Artip, Todd Meredith, Sarah Turpin, Melissa Skelton, Ben Bondurant, Tricia Smith, Angela Joyner, Rob Hoover, David Perryman, Lisa Ghidotti and Nichole Hair. Kelsi Jones attended via Zoom.

The meeting agenda is created by the Commission members and designed to create an opportunity to discuss collaborative initiatives, learn about specific topics and/or areas of interest, and develop relevant action plans as needed.

I. Welcome

The meeting was opened by Co-chairs, Angela Joyner and Kellie Artip, who welcomed everyone to the meeting.

II. Radford University Branding Overview

David Perryman gave a presentation on Radford University's new eSports center. The center is roughly 10,000 square feet, with plans for partnerships, target audiences, and a planned fall opening. The team reviewed the entrance, branding, team rooms, competition spaces, shoutcasting booth, production studio, lighting, and a photo wall.

Proposed campus-wide branding was reviewed, including planetarium windows, wayfinding signage, river/mountain graphics, student recreation imagery, banners, sports facility and arts space graphics, admissions area visuals, and exterior esports signage. Several elements remain under review.

III. Radford Community Fest Update

Tricia Smith and Melissa Skelton gave an update on the preparations for Radford Community Fest on August 22, 2026. Topics included the entertainment lineup, new community stage, extended band-changeover times, vendor participation, booth assignments, waitlist procedures, mobile health clinic, and volunteer needs. Eight food trucks plus additional booths were confirmed.

IV. Highlanders Festival update

Tricia Smith also gave an update on the Highlanders Festival scheduled for **October 10**, now entering the performer-contract phase. Plans include honoring festival history, featuring high-level international competitors, a revised layout, and updated games schedule.

V. **AdventureWorks update**

Nichole Hair gave an update regarding AdventureWorks scheduled September 8–9. AdventureWorks is an outdoor economy summit hosted by Radford University, celebrating its designation as Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine's Top Adventure College.

“Outdoor Adventure Drives Economic Impact”

AdventureWorks is an Outdoor Economy Summit hosted at Radford University, celebrating its designation as *Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine’s Top Adventure College*. This inaugural event brings together community leaders, outdoor businesses, educators, and policymakers to explore the dynamic intersection of outdoor recreation, economic development, and higher education. The theme for 2026 – Outdoor Adventure Drives Economic Impact.

Through engaging panel discussions, outdoor activities, and interactive booths, the summit will spotlight the innovative efforts of the region’s tourism partners and showcase outdoor businesses. Special emphasis will be placed on the unique assets and opportunities within Virginia’s rural communities, recognizing their vital role in shaping the outdoor economy.

AdventureWorks will be held over two days to engage 100 attendees, kicking off with an afternoon outdoor activity - think biking the New River Trail, hiking one of the numerous trail systems around, and floating the New River or Claytor Lake. Attendees will be invited to a welcome reception to close out the first day and network. The following day programming continues with facilitated panel discussions and/or break-out sessions - topics could include local tourism and the outdoor economy; outdoor adventure businesses – what has worked, what has not; and higher education’s role in recreation, tourism, and outdoor adventures. At least 5 exhibition booths would be included that showcases local initiatives, organizations, and opportunities for collaboration in outdoor recreation, tourism, and economic development. Hosting the event over two days encourages attendees to arrive early, stay the night in a local hotel, and explore the surrounding communities.

Events for this 2-day event include the following:

Tuesday, September 8

12:30 – 4:30pm | AdventureWorks Experiences – advanced registration required

New River Tubing

Join Radford University Outdoors for a fun day floating on the New River! Relax, enjoy the scenic views, and spend time with friends as we tube down one of Southwest Virginia’s most iconic waterways. Transportation, tubes, and safety equipment are provided. No experience necessary!

Christiansburg Huckleberry Park: Investing in Outdoor Recreation to Drive Tourism & Community Growth

Discover how strategic investments in outdoor recreation can strengthen communities, enhance quality of life, and serve as a catalyst for tourism and economic development. This guided walking tour of Christiansburg Huckleberry Park will explore one of Southwest Virginia's premier outdoor recreation destinations and the intentional planning behind its development.

Participants will learn how the Town of Christiansburg leveraged outdoor infrastructure to create a vibrant, multi-use community asset that welcomes residents and visitors alike. From the all-inclusive playground and zero-depth splash pad to tournament-quality athletic fields, dog parks, open green space, and direct connection to the Huckleberry Trail, the park demonstrates how thoughtful recreation investments can support placemaking, attract visitors, encourage healthy lifestyles, and generate economic activity.

The excursion will begin with a welcome from Samantha Livesay (Radford University alumna, Class of 2012), Executive Director of Blacksburg-Christiansburg-Montgomery County Regional Tourism, followed by a guided tour led by Brad Epperley (Radford University alumnus, Class of 1997), Director of Christiansburg Parks & Recreation.

Agenda — Tuesday, September 8 - continued

Mill Creek Waterfalls and What-fors?

Participants will hike together to Mill Creek Falls, a series of waterfalls that cascade through the mountains, off of the Appalachian Trail and just outside of downtown Narrows. There are multiple hikes and sections to enjoy, but from the parking lot to the falls is ~1.4 miles one way. The out and back hike will take about 1.5 hours. Participants will be joined by community volunteers who build and maintain the trails, support the park through fundraising and destination events, and local tourism stakeholders.

Claytor Lake History Boat Ride

Participants will tour Claytor Lake, hear the history of how the lake was formed, and gain insight on the impact of Claytor Lake on Pulaski County. They will tour the areas of Claytor Lake Dam, Dublin Hollow, Crescent Falls, Woolwine Springs, Godbey's Cliffs, The Poor Farm and Howe House.

Le Tour de Roanoke – Greenway Edition

Join Roanoke Parks and Recreation for a progressive lunch tour of the Roanoke River Greenway. The Roanoke region is home to over 400 miles of paved and natural surface trails and counting. The greenway provides not only connections to exercise, nature, neighbors and employment but also entertainment and local food!

The journey starts at a local bike shop along the greenway and progress through appetizers and entrees and end the afternoon with a sweet treat as participants get a feel for the greenway and river corridor and its neighborhood connections!

Agenda — Tuesday, September 8 - continued

Buffalo Mountain Ziplines Adventure

Experience Floyd County from a new perspective with an aerial tour at Buffalo Mountain Ziplines. Nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Buffalo Mountain Ziplines offers participants the opportunity to experience one of the region's outdoor recreation assets while taking in scenic mountain views and forest landscapes. This guided zipline adventure will provide insight into how outdoor recreation attractions contribute to tourism, support local businesses, and enhance quality of life in rural communities. Participants will enjoy a memorable outdoor experience while learning about the role adventure tourism plays in the regional economy.

5:30-7:30PM | AdventureWorks Welcome Reception

Selu Conservancy, Radford University
Casual Attire

6:00PM | Welcome Remarks – President Danilowicz, Radford University

Following the day's excursions and experiences, join fellow attendees at Selu Conservancy for the official kickoff of **AdventureWorks: An Outdoor Economy Summit**.

This casual evening reception provides an opportunity to connect with leaders from outdoor recreation, tourism, economic development, higher education, business, government, and community organizations from across Virginia and the region. Continue conversations sparked during the day's experiences, exchange ideas, and build relationships that support collaboration and strengthen the outdoor economy.

Enjoy heavy hors d'oeuvres and beverages in one of Radford University's most unique natural settings while networking with professionals who are shaping the future of their communities and organizations.

Reception Highlights

- Informal networking across sectors
- Heavy hors d'oeuvres and beverages
- Opportunities to connect with regional and statewide leaders
- Conversations inspired by the day's excursion experiences
- A relaxed outdoor setting designed for collaboration and relationship building

Transportation Information:

Parking at Selu is limited. Complimentary shuttle service will be available for all attendees.

Wednesday, September 9

8:00 | Breakfast, Networking & Registration

8:45 AM | Welcome & Open Remarks

- Bret Danilowicz, Ph.D., President of Radford University
 - Nichole Hair, Director of Economic Development & Community Engagement, Radford University
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9:00AM | Setting the Stage: The State of the Outdoor Economy

Kick off AdventureWorks with a fast-paced conversation on the forces shaping Virginia's outdoor economy. From rising tourism demand and outdoor recreation investments to statewide priorities and regional opportunities, this session explores where momentum is building, what challenges lie ahead, and how communities, businesses, and institutions can position themselves to lead in one of Virginia's most dynamic economic sectors.

Moderator: Angela Joyner, Ph.D., Vice President, Economic Development & Corporate Education, Radford University

Panelists:

Cassidy Rasnick, Chief Operating Officer, Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development

Maribel Castaneda, Deputy Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Commonwealth of Virginia

Katie Conner, Director of Destination Development, Virginia Tourism Corporation

Katie Boswell, Executive Director, Onward New River Valley

10:00AM | Beyond Recreation: Leveraging Outdoor Assets for Community and Economic Growth

Explore how communities are transforming trails, rivers, parks, and recreation assets into powerful engines for tourism, talent attraction, placemaking, and economic growth. Through real-world success stories and hard-earned lessons, panelists will share the strategies, partnerships, and investments that are generating measurable results and creating models others can adapt in their own communities.

Moderator: Kimberly Davis, Executive Director, Friends of Southwest Virginia

Panelists:

Cora Gnegy, Tourism Director & Economic Development, Giles County
Representing Visit NRV

Debora Wright, Chief Strategist, Vice President
Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge

Pete Eshelman, Director, Roanoke Outside &
Senior Director of Creative Designs, Roanoke Regional Partnership

Allison Mays, Director, Southwest Center
Virginia Tech Center for Economic and Community Engagement

10:45AM | Break & Networking

11:00AM | From Operators to Outcomes — Running Outdoor Businesses in the Real World

Hear directly from the entrepreneurs, operators, and industry leaders powering Virginia's outdoor economy. This candid conversation explores what it takes to build and grow successful outdoor businesses, from navigating workforce and infrastructure challenges to creating memorable visitor experiences, adapting to change, and identifying opportunities for future growth.

Moderator: Heather Fay, Executive Director, Greater Roanoke Region and New River Valley Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Panelists:

Steve Pike, Spearhead Trails, St. Paul, Virginia

Michael Valach, Mountain 2 Island, Pulaski County, Virginia

Jessica Bowser, Host, Virginia Outdoor Adventures Podcast

12:00PM | Find Your Next Adventure — How Universities & Brand Builders Shape Place, Brand, and Opportunity in the Outdoor Economy

This closing conversation will explore how higher education institutions, destination marketers, and outdoor brands help shape the places where people choose to live, work, learn, and play. From attracting talent and visitors to strengthening community identity and creating economic opportunity, panelists will discuss the partnerships and strategies that transform outdoor assets into lasting impact. Join us as we connect the day's themes and look ahead to the future of the outdoor economy.

Moderator: Ryan Bowyer, Chief of Staff, Radford University

Panelists:

Kent Sanslow, Assistant Director of Outdoor Programs, Emory and Henry University

Michael Clark, Deputy County Administrator, Franklin County

Joshua Carroll, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Recreation, Parks, and Tourism, Radford University

12:45PM | AdventureWorks Concludes

1:00PM | Lunch on your own

For further information visit the website at [AdventureWorks: An Outdoor Economy Summit | Radford University](#)

To register for the event log onto click the link: [AdventureWorks: An Outdoor Economy Summit - Radford University eStore](#)

VI. Retail Strategy Update

Radford University, the City of Radford, and the New River Valley Regional Commission (NRVRC) have launched a joint effort to develop a five-year downtown retail strategy. The strategy is intended to guide the future of downtown Radford across five interconnected areas: policy, design, tourism and promotion, economic vitality, and implementation. VII.

VII. Economic Development Luncheon

The Economic Development luncheon will be held on September 10, 2026, from 11:30 – 1:00 pm. The Honorable Carrie H. Chenery, Secretary of Commerce & Trade will be the guest speaker.

VIII. Member updates:

City Representatives

- Kellie Artrip – Radford City Council Member
- Todd Meredith – City Manager
 - Bisset Park repairs will be completed, including pickleball courts
 - Radford City will be changing utility companies
- Jerry Holdaway – Radford City Chief of Police
- Sarah Turpin – Executive Director, Radford Chamber of Commerce
 - Three new businesses opened in Radford this month
 - Trick or Treat Trail – October 29
- Kim Repass – Director of Economic Development & Director of Tourism
- Melissa Skelton – Director of Planning and Zoning
 - Walmart has requested the transit be moved out of their parking lot by August 31
- Ben Bondurant - Real Estate Rep and Developer
- Kelsi Jones – Owner of BT's Restaurant

University Representatives

- Tricia Smith – Interim Vice President for Student Affairs
 - Students will return to campus the week of August 17
 - Radford University will host Esports event in March
 - Women's Flag football Jamboree – free and open to public – October 10
- Angela Joyner – Vice President for Economic Development and Corporate Education
- Bethany Usher – Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Rob Hoover – Vice President for Finance and Administration
- Eric Plummer – Chief of Police for Radford University
- Lisa Ghidotti – Assistant Vice President for Government Relations and Strategic Initiatives
- Nichole Hair – Director of Economic Development and Community Engagement
- David Perryman – Associate Vice President for Strategic Communications

Calendar updates

- Radford University Student Convocation – August 21 – Bondurant Auditorium/Moffett Lawn
- Radford Community Fest – August 22 @ 11 am – 6 pm
- Highlander Fan Fest – August 25 – Dedmon Center Practice Field – 5 pm
- Joint Commission – September 8 @ 8:45 am – 10 am
- AdventureWorks – September 8 & 9 @ 8 – 5 pm
- Economic Development Luncheon – September 10
- Radford University Board of Visitors – September 17 - 18
- Career and Internship Fair – September 24, 4 – 6 pm- Kyle Hall
- RADTalks – “History of Radford University through Artifacts” by Ashley Palazzo – September 8, 7 pm – McConnell Library
- Business Over Breakfast at the HUB – October 7 @ 8 am – 9 am
- Highlanders Festival – October 10 – 9 am – Moffett Lawn
- Joint Commission – October 13 @ 8:45 am – 10 am
- RADTalks – “Stronger Together: Advancing Youth Well-Being Through Sport and Community Partnerships” by Dr. Tiesha Martin – October 13, 6:30 pm – Radford City Recreation Center
- Radford University Alumni Homecoming – October 22 – 24