



Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation Board of Trustees

Thursday, September 10, 2026 at 4:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order and Welcome - Senator Todd Pillion, Chair

2. Roll Call - Kim Davis, Secretary

Attending: Senator Todd Pillion, Senator Travis Hackworth, Delegate Israel O'Quinn, Delegate Mitchell Cornett (v), Delegate Lily Franklin (v), Ruby Rogers, Michael Cochran, Becky Nave, Dr. Adam Hutchinson, Dr. Tamarah Holmes, (v), Deborah Milton (v), and Daniel Pinard (v).

v = Virtual

Absent: Josh Hess, Scotty Wampler, Kevin Byrd, Saul Hernandez, Julie Walters Steele, Sharon Buchanan, Hayley Allison, Steve Lawson, Ellen Reynolds, David Matlock, and Rita McClenny.

Staff Attending: Kim Davis, Tina Murray, Paula Hurt, Jen Otey, Catherine Fox, and Tracey Childress (v).

3. Public Comment - Senator Todd Pillion, Chair

No individuals registered to present public comment during the meeting.

4. Adoption of Agenda - Senator Todd Pillion, Chair

A motion to accept the agenda was made by Senator Travis Hackworth and seconded by Mr. Michael Cochran. The motion was carried unanimously.

5. Approval of Minutes from June 2026 - Senator Todd Pillion, Chair

A motion to accept the minutes was made by Mrs. Becky Nave and seconded by Mrs. Ruby Rogers. The motion was carried unanimously.

6. Executive Director Report - Kim Davis

Mrs. Davis reported that the Foundation's fiscal year 2025-2026 expenditure and revenue report had been submitted to the Governor and the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees. She then presented organizational accomplishments and major regional initiatives completed or advanced since June.

Destination Southwest Virginia - Mrs. Davis reported that 18 of 21 focus groups had been completed and that the regional survey had received more than 1,000 responses. Headwaters Economics is developing baseline economic impact measures, and staff are compiling a creative economy asset inventory and regional plans. The initiative will produce a ten-year regional strategy and a data dashboard to support local planning and grant development.

Southwest Virginia Tourism Awards - The Foundation co-hosted the Southwest Virginia Tourism Summit and Tourism Awards with Virginia Tourism Corporation and Visit Wytheville. Approximately 250 people attended, and 31 awards recognized tourism leaders, organizations, and projects from throughout the region.

Regional Community Mural Initiative - Mrs. Davis reported that the Pulaski mural was completed and unveiled as the second installation in the regional initiative. Planning is underway for the next mural in Big Stone Gap.

Tourism Ready Southwest Virginia - The region's first coordinated hospitality and tourism workforce training program will launch in October. Sessions for frontline employees, managers, attraction staff, and event personnel are planned in Floyd, Norton, and at Heartwood. The program is designed to strengthen regional knowledge and help visitors move among Southwest Virginia communities and experiences.

Three Rivers Destination Center - Friends of Southwest Virginia entered into an agreement with Russell County to serve as project manager for the Three Rivers Destination Center. Contract negotiations and architectural and engineering procurement are expected during the fall. Russell County will own the facility and retain responsibility for its operation.

7. Financial Report - Director of Finance and Administration Paula Hurt

'Round the Mountain Financial Review - Mrs. Hurt reported fiscal year-end cash of \$81,439, approximately \$132,000 in receivables, and net income of \$8,203. Most receivables reflected Appalachian Regional Commission and Tobacco Commission grant funds, which had been received by the meeting date. Payables primarily reflected amounts due to Friends of Southwest Virginia for grant-related expenditures advanced on behalf of 'Round the Mountain.

Friends of Southwest Virginia Financial Review - Mrs. Hurt reported fiscal year-end operating cash of approximately \$257,000, savings of approximately \$353,000, receivables of approximately \$758,000, payables of approximately \$80,000, and net income of \$53,867. The majority of receivables and payables were associated with reimbursable grant activity, and most outstanding amounts had been collected or paid by the meeting date.

8. Old Business

Heartwood Building Name - Mrs. Davis reviewed the history of the facility's public name and the legal and operational due diligence completed since the June meeting. Legal counsel advised that no significant legal issue prevents restoration of the Heartwood name. The 2009 ground lease references Heartwood, and the proposed action changes only the facility's public-facing name. Staff have coordinated with Virginia Highlands Community College, the Virginia Community College System, the Virginia Department of Transportation, and other partners regarding notice, signage, and implementation.

A motion to approve changing the public name of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Center and Marketplace back to Heartwood and to authorize the Executive Director and appropriate officers to take the necessary steps to implement the change was made by Mrs. Deborah Milton and seconded by Senator Travis Hackworth. The action does not change the name, structure, responsibilities, or existing lease arrangements of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation. The motion was carried unanimously.

9. New Business

Operating and Management Agreement - Dr. Tamarah Holmes presented the proposed Operating and Management Agreement between the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation and Friends of Southwest Virginia. She explained that the agreement formalizes the existing partnership, clarifies governance and financial responsibilities, and establishes clear roles for the two organizations. The Foundation retains its statutory duties and public stewardship of Heartwood, including property, leases, public assets, and oversight, while Friends continues its broader regional mission and day-to-day operation of the facility.

The agreement does not merge the organizations, transfer ownership of Heartwood, place all Friends programs under Foundation governance, or replace existing lease, reserve fund, loan, or other controlling agreements.

A motion to approve the Operating and Management Agreement as presented and authorize the appropriate officers to execute it on behalf of the Southwest Virginia Cultural Heritage Foundation was made by Senator Travis Hackworth and seconded by Mrs. Ruby Rogers. The motion was carried unanimously.

10. Deputy Director of Operations Update - Tina Murray

Ms. Murray reported that Heartwood was illuminated in recognition of Virginia's 250th anniversary. Electrical service was installed at the interstate-facing triangle sign, interior and exterior windows received their annual cleaning, ledges were re-caulked to reduce water intrusion, and several declining white pine trees were removed.

Staff continue planning improvements to the 'Round the Mountain retail galleries and are working toward reopening the cafe through a shared model with a local food-service partner and a coffee program. Permitting and licensing matters remain under review. Visitor Center employees are receiving hands-on training with Virginia Tourism Corporation and regional visitor centers. Recent programming included The Crooked Road jams,

Highlands Appalachia Songwriters, the Virginia Association of Museums, United Way, Monroe Mandolin Camp, Lead Southwest Virginia, and group tours.

11. Marketing Update - Kim Davis

Experience Southwest Virginia - Mrs. Davis reported that development and advertising sales are underway for Experience Southwest Virginia, a high-quality magazine-style publication designed to tell the region's story to visitors and prospective businesses. Approximately half of the available advertising had been sold, and Ripple Creative is managing advertising sales and production in coordination with staff.

Regional Tourism Research - Regional destination dashboards are now available to localities. Current data indicate that approximately 85 percent of trips to Southwest Virginia originate outside the region, North Carolina is the largest out-of-state market, nearly 67 percent of visitors are repeat visitors, and leisure and recreation spending has continued to increase. Mrs. Davis also reported that regional visitor spending increased approximately 7 percent in 2025, with corresponding gains in employment and local tax revenue.

Digital Marketing and Website Development - Mrs. Davis recognized continued progress on regional social media, photography, videography, research, and website development. Five new organizational and regional websites are expected to launch by the end of the year.

12. Development Update - Jen Otey

Gateways to Adventure - Ms. Otey reported that SE Group began the Buchanan and Dickenson Counties outdoor recreation planning initiative on August 1. Project management and advisory teams have convened, and site visits, local meetings, and community engagement are scheduled. A parallel marketing procurement will support videos, websites, and county-specific marketing packages, with proposals due September 16.

Blue Ridge Rising - The Blue Ridge Rising Summit in Asheville included 16 sessions, more than 40 speakers and panelists, participation from Blue Ridge Parkway communities, and representation from six states. The 2027 summit will be held in Virginia. Friends continues to advocate for Southwest Virginia's Parkway communities through a broader implementation partnership with the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation.

Clinch River High Definition Stream Study - Trutta Environmental Solutions completed the on-site survey of approximately 135 miles of the Clinch River from Tazewell County to the Tennessee state line. Data processing is underway, with a draft report anticipated in November.

13. Partner Updates

'Round the Mountain - Mrs. Davis reported that 'Round the Mountain membership has increased to 240, including 175 juried members, with representation across the region. She reviewed progress on the Regional Community Mural Initiative and highlighted the Southwest Virginia Artisan Conference on November 6 and the Made in Southwest Virginia Artisan Market on November 7 at Heartwood.

Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development - Dr. Holmes reported on Appalachian Regional Commission investments, changes in distressed-county classifications affecting Southwest Virginia, broadband deployment, disaster recovery funding, housing and eviction prevention programs, building code development and training, Enterprise Zone and community business programs, Go Virginia, and Virginia Main Street. She also noted that the successful Southwest Virginia downtown redevelopment model is being replicated in Southside Virginia through the Building Opportunities on Main Street initiative.

Virginia Tourism Corporation - Mrs. Nave announced that John Matthews joined Virginia Tourism Corporation to serve the Blue Ridge Highlands region and that Brittany Brown was hired as Director of Grants. She reported that Special Events and Festivals grant applications would open September 22, partner orientation sessions would return to an in-person format in Richmond on October 14 and 15, and ten Southwest Virginia localities would participate in the International Bluegrass Music Association's World of Bluegrass. She also highlighted the Virginia is for Hokie Lovers pilot campaign, the November 18-20 VA1 Governor's Tourism Summit, and statewide visitor-spending growth.

The Crooked Road - Mr. Daniel Pinard reported that the Living Tradition concert produced with Virginia Tech sold nearly 600 tickets and that marketing for the 90th Galax Old Fiddlers' Convention contributed to a modest increase in participation. Affiliate applications for 2027 are open through September 30. The Crooked Road will launch a venue sustainability initiative that includes an economic impact study, condition assessments for ten major venues, and a part-time venue coordinator. Mr. Pinard also highlighted a Virginia Humanities video podcast, programming at Bristol Rhythm and Roots Reunion, and the hiring of Ellen Stroud as Executive Director of the Carter Family Fold.

14. Regional Updates

No additional regional updates were presented.

15. Next Meeting Date - Senator Todd Pillion, Chair

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 10, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.

16. Adjournment - Senator Todd Pillion, Chair

A motion to adjourn was made by Senator Travis Hackworth and seconded by Dr. Tamarah Holmes. The motion was carried unanimously.