THE CHAMBER.
GREATER VICTORIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

# Board Meeting Minutes

## March 25, 2025

**Attended:** Christina Clarke, James Gatsi, Kris Wirk, Rose Arsenault, Jessica Stigant, Josue Dubon, Frumsa Ibrahim, Elizabeth Brown, Mary Lou Newbold, Spencer Walker, Ashka Wirk, Bruce Williams, Ashley McCartie (staff), Julia Banks (staff).

**Regrets:** Captain (Navy) Kevin Whiteside, Corey Gillon

*We acknowledge with respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən speaking peoples, known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, on whose traditional territory we are meeting today. We are grateful for their stewardship of these beautiful lands where we have the opportunity to live, work and play.*

**Motion to approve the agenda with the addition of a discussion around Otter.ai, digital assistants, and ai in the workplace.**
MOVED by Christina Clarke SECONDED by Elizabeth Brown CARRIED

**Motion to approve the minutes from the previous Board meeting.**
MOVED by Christina Clarke SECONDED by Kris Wirk CARRIED

1. Chair Report
    a. The Chair shared that the CEO Search Committee is now down to five candidates after initial screening interviews with all 19 applicants. Interviews with these five candidates are taking place April 2nd and 3rd with the CEO Search Committee and they will put two candidates forward for final interviews with the entire Board on May 9th. Out of due care for confidentiality the names of the top five candidates will not be shared with Board or Staff. All of the top five candidates can work within the hiring timeline outlined by the search committee and the search is proceeding on schedule.

2. CEO Report
    a. CEO and Senior Manager, Corporate Strategy presented the 2025 Business Plan highlighting new and retired Key Performance Indicators and the strategies that will lead to the achievement of 2025 targets. The Board asked the staff to also report on the number of events the Chamber puts on in a year at the June and year-end meetings. This metric is not part of the KPI's but is part of the budget. The Board discussed the need to evaluate whether the number of key performance indicators and associated strategies are realistic for our team size and whether these KPI's are driven by the need to report to the Board or are relevant to evaluating our work. This review will be done over the year with the staff team and will inform the development of the 2026 Business Plan.

**Motion to approve the 2025 Business Plan as presented.**
MOVED by Christina Clarke SECONDED by Elizabeth Brown CARRIED

    b. The CEO shared the City of Victoria Fee for Service agreement which includes a survey and roundtables facilitated by the Chamber on behalf of the City. We partnered with the City in 2024 to engage business owners in discussion around City Operations and Planning. The CEO realized there was an opportunity to use this as a revenue generation opportunity. The Board discussed the need to remain at arms length from government and want to ensure The City does not have undue influence on our work. We are one of the only Chambers in Canada that doesn't currently receive funding from a municipality.

**Action Item:** Senior Manager, Corporate Strategy to update the agreement to include the two-year commitment for $35,000 per year and ensure there is wording included that allows the Chamber to have input on the survey questions.

c. Office move-in tasks are almost complete. The landlords work to install the kitchen is done. Final items are connecting our phone system, finding a cleaning company, and purchasing some final pieces of furniture to round out the space and offer some additional storage. Great feedback on the office in comparison to our old office.
d. New Graphics and Marketing Coordinator has just joined our team. She has been in Canada for two years coming from Ukraine and brings valuable graphic design and marketing experience. The Chamber has just posted for a summer Co-op student position and is waiting to receive funding from Canada Summer Jobs to subsidize the students wage.
e. Stakeholder engagement
    i. Media uptick on Hudson's Bay closure.
    ii. Temporary Foreign Workers policy changes are affecting local businesses and we have met with Ocean River Sports and Hillside Canadian Tire to discuss the specific challenges they are facing in light of these changes.
    iii. Mixer at Chinook Business Advisory Ltd. last week went well
    iv. Aaron Stone, Paul Nursey, and Union staff met with the Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation to discuss how to address the tariffs. Questionnaire went out to specific members and we are receiving feedback about how their businesses are being impacted.
    v. CEO was asked to participate in the 360 performance reviews for Kevin Hall and Lane Trotter
    vi. Event with CFB Esquimalt Base Commander Kevin Whiteside was well attended and had great feedback from guests. It allowed them to learn more about developing relationships with the Base and the thousands of people it employees.
    vii. The Vancouver Sun published an Op-Ed by Chamber CEO and Walt Judas, CEO, Tourism Industry Association of BC (TIABC) calling on the BC Ferries Commissioner to invest in all 5 vessels to make a long term investment in a reliable ferry service.
    viii. The cruise industry is looking at high risk right now due to the tariffs and reduction in travel on those routes from Canada to the US. Tariffs are also impacting international ferry services between Victoria and the U.S. There has been noted a 20 – 25% reduction in travel to the US on Clipper and Coho. This could impact the Belleville terminal development.
    ix. Century Hockey Celebration is happening this weekend marking the 100th anniversary of the Victoria Cougars winning the Stanley Cup.
f. The Chamber's Annual Member Survey development begins in April. The Chamber will request input from the Board on what the survey is gathering data on to evaluate.

3. Committee Reports
    a. Shared the evolution of the Executive & Governance Committee from two separate committees into one to streamline the work of the Committees and Board. Discussed the need to evaluate the roles of Board liaisons on committees to ensure those Board members are feeling fulfilled in those roles.

**Action Item:** Executive Committee to review the Chamber policy around participating on two committees and the role of committee liaisons as outlined in policy and/or the committee Terms of Reference as we go into fall 2025 to inform the nominating committees decisions in November.

b. Finance & Audit
   i. Matt Hillyard with RBC presented to the Finance and Audit Committee on our investment portfolio. He is managing it conservatively and prudently and keeping liquidity available.
   ii. Treasurer presented the January financial statements, sharing that net operating income is down approximately $15,000 mostly due to Chamber Champion write-offs and lower than expected events revenue. We did not host a Business Leaders Event in January and hosted a joint mixer with DGV so no sponsorship revenue was realized from that event.

**Motion to approve the January 2025 financials as presented.**
MOVED by Spencer Walker SECONDED by Kris Wirk CARRIED

   iii. Treasurer presented the audited financials. Have a clean audit opinion. Overall it was a good year, although with some transition notably: Website transition caused some noise on the financials; the move caused some disruptions and higher costs; some other items of note that impacted the bottom line were write off of some Chamber Champion invoices and some vacation accruals. There were some Control Deficiencies noted in the Audit Findings.
      - Fraud risk with Management override of controls: very typical for organizations of this size and has been present on all historical audits.
      - CEO and treasurer will meet more regularly to review financial statements to have stronger reporting in place, signing off monthly and with more detail to the Finance & Audit Committee on bi-monthly basis with a specific focus on accounts receivable.
      - Champions Program was recommended to increase formality noting historically AR was booked when CEO had reached an agreement with potential Champion, recommendation from auditors were to create a written contract.

**Action Item:** The Finance & Audit committee will look at updating the internally restricted policy after the strategic planning process every three years so we are aligning it with planned growth and capital expenses.

**Motion to approve the 2024 audited financials as presented.**
MOVED by Spencer Walker SECONDED by Kris Wirk CARRIED

c. Public Policy & Advocacy Chair reported that the committee has been very active. Their current focus includes international student policy changes, temporary foreign worker policy changes, regional cohesion, indigenous business development, international relations and messaging around travel to the US, downtown Victoria challenges, and taxation. Recent guest speakers included Lane Trotter, president of Camosun College, Ian Tostenson, president and CEO of BCRFA, and Mark Brajer, CEO of Tsartlip Group of Companies. Question around how to better community our advocacy work to our members. Some overlaps with media, BizNews, op-eds, social media.
d. IDEA Chair reported on the meetings they have held to date for the year. First one was to introduce new members, highlighting how the diversity around the table is growing and informs discussions.

Victoria Airport Authority presented their hidden disabilities Sunflower Program supporting those travelling with a disability,. March heard from Gala from the Victoria Pride Society and discussed what kind of supports businesses can put in place to support this community. Chamber is participating in Pride Parade in July. Have been discussing the state of DEI right now and our role to continue to show up in a really strong way. Pin design from IDEA in 2024 will be turned into a banner to have at events to better highlight the role of this committee and the work they are championing.

4. Otter.ai is an AI agent which is a note-taking tool and provides reports back to the person using it. It is recordng data that people may not want recorded and storing that information outside of the organization and potentially out of the country. Needs to protect the sensitivity of the conversations we are having. Need to also look at the use of tools such as Chat GPT in the daily operations of the Chamber.

**Action Item:** Senior Manager, Corporate Strategy to initiate the development of a policy around the use of AI note takers in meetings and AI programs in the day to day work of Chamber staff. Guidance can be provided by our IT service providers.

**Motion to move in camera.**
MOVED by Christina Clarke SECONDED by James Gatsi CARRIED

**Motion to move out of camera**
MOVED by James Gatsi SECONDED by Christina Clarke CARRIED

**Motion to Adjourn**
MOVED by Christina Clarke SECONDED by Rose Arsenault CARRIED

Presentation from the Victoria Airport Authority – 9:00 – 9:30am

Next Board Meeting – May 27, 7:30 – 9:30am at Chamber Office

Secretary

Chair