

RHODE ISLAND CONVENTION CENTER AUTHORITY
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
THURSDAY, MARCH 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 March 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., and Oscar Vargas.

Board members unable to attend included: Carol Lombardi and Diony Garcia, Esq.

Others participating were The Honorable Dan McGee; Governor, State of Rhode Island; Daniel McConaghy, Dana Peltier, Linda Maroun, Trish Verrecchia, and Melissa O'Connor Convention Center Authority; Alan Chile PFM/The VETS; Lawrence Lepore, Chris Spolidoro, Cheryl Cohen, Becca Ponder, Casey Hoover, Samantha Bottoni, Christina Montanaro, Robert Gemma, Steven Simas, and Tim Sullivan Convention Center and AMP; Tom Riel, PWCVB; Bruce Leach, Legal Counsel; Michael Crawley, Citrin Cooperman; Laura Hart, Governor's Office; Debra Polselli, Recording Secretary.

1. Call to Order

With a quorum present, **Chairman Almonte** called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

2. Announcement of Next Board Meeting Date

Chairman Almonte stated that the next meeting will take place on Thursday, April 24, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

3. Consent Calendar Items

- a. Approval of minutes of the February 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. Hirsh**, it was unanimously

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

Chairman Almonte requested a motion to move Agenda Item #6 to Agenda Item #4. Upon a motion from **Ms. Venturini**, which was seconded by **Mr. MacDonald**, it was unanimously

VOTED: to move Agenda Item #6 to Agenda Item #4.

4. Finance Committee Report – Chair Jeff Hirsh

- a. Update on Healthcare Benefits for OVG Employees

Mr. Hirsh reported that the Finance Committee had a great meeting on Tuesday with OVG and asked Mr. McConaghy to report the outcome of the discussion as it relates to healthcare benefits for OVG employees. Mr. McConaghy stated that Mr. Abate is away this week, which is the reason he is not present at the meeting today. He stated that he and Mr. Lepore discussed with Mr. Abate the Board's desire to adjust the health benefits for OVG employees here in Providence and convinced OVG to go to Blue Cross/Blue Shield, which is a much better benefit package for employees and contributions to the plan are level with as in the past.

He reported that it would be a \$90k savings for the Authority. He thanked the Board for their assistance, as well as Mr. Lepore and Mr. Abate for convincing OVG to make the change, which will go into effect on May 1. He said that this news was well received by the employees affected and they expressed their appreciation to the Board for looking out for their interest. **Mr. MacDonald** thanked everyone for their effort and stressed the importance of this issue. **Mr. Mancini** commented that during OVG's presentation, they assured the Board that benefits would remain the same. Mr. McConaghy stated that it was a bump in the road, but it has been rectified so all is well.

5. Special Guest – The Honorable Daniel J. McKee, Governor of Rhode Island

Chairman Almonte welcomed Governor McKee to the meeting and expressed the Board's appreciation for the Governor's ongoing support. He stated that the Board is proud of what they have done and is grateful for his support. He reported that through the Governor's term, \$150 million in ARPA funds and bond payments have been received for the Complex. He made special note of the new roof at the AMP, the nearly completed renovations on the 5th floor of the Convention Center, and the OVG Hospitality compost project at the Convention Center. He commented on how proud the Board is of the staff and these achievements and that we are successful because of everyone in this room and those not in the room who are also a part of our success. **Chairman Almonte** stated that we just finished with back-to-back weeks of NCAA Wrestling with Johnson & Wales and six (6) sold out games with NCAA Men's Basketball. He stated that Charlie Baker, president of the NCAA, commented that Providence should host the NCAA every year. **Chairman Almonte** stated that we are still tallying the economic impact of these two (2) tournaments but mentioned that \$1.2 million was spent in food and beverage during the NCAA Men's Basketball tournament, which broke every record at the AMP. **Chairman Almonte** then turned everyone's attention to latest version of the Governor's RI 2030 Plan, which was contained in their package, and introduced the Governor. The Governor thanked everyone for the opportunity to come and talk about the RI 2030 plan. He stated that he is very much aware of the importance of these buildings, especially during the pandemic with the Convention Center becoming a hospital, and the AMP becoming a vaccine site, and building test kits. He stated that coming out of Covid led the State into a strategy that is simple, which sometimes is the best strategy. He commented that the goal is to get the RI 2030 Plan out to 50k people because the more people that are aware of the State's plan the better. He stated that the Plan is based on a common sense strategy. The Governor then reviewed each of the areas starting with "Strengthening K-12 Education" noting the importance of working with all the municipalities. He then reviewed "Building a Rhode to Prosperity" noting raising personal wealth and growing our economic development. He stated the importance of creating positive momentum, especially when you have negative force every day. He then reviewed "Creating a Healthier Rhode Island" noting the importance of investing in children and families, seniors, and veterans and strengthening Rhode Island's healthcare system. He commented on the unsettled environment we all live in with the current federal government administration and that as a Governor, he would work with other Governors to handle what is coming out of Washington and figure out a way to manage the chaos. He noted the importance of not letting it get in the way of the goals we have set here in Rhode Island. He then reviewed "Advancing Infrastructure and Clean Energy" stating that we have the fastest growing airport in the country, and we did not do destination marketing until he came on board as Governor. He commented that they will continue to do that, and tourism is up six percent (6%). He further stated that there are billions of dollars in the pipeline putting people to work on good paying jobs and those jobs will pay dividends for the future. He mentioned the improvement of facilities, specifically the AMP, so we can continue to host NCAA tournaments, improvements at the University of Rhode Island with \$150 million in Bay Campus, and an \$80 million bond for Life Science Building. He mentioned the Cyber Security School at Rhode Island College that Congressman Langevin is heading up, which was not here before he became Governor. He mentioned building a \$75 million school building with 1000 students who will have 6 figure jobs upon graduation. He then talked about the fact that Rhode Island College was in trouble when he became Governor and always running the red but is now in the black. He mentioned the scholarship program where tuition gets picked up with the State putting up a piece along with Rhode Island College. He then talked about \$40 million going to Fishery & Wildlife and the building being taken down across from the Port of Galilee. He mentioned the new soccer stadium opening up, especially with the World Cup coming to the area and more people will be coming in. He stated the importance of keeping people working and there was a \$150 million investment from that one developer of the soccer stadium. He noted that the Convention Center is an example of excelling, and we cannot let the State budget negatively impact the Convention Center. He stated that the more people who understand the Plan will allow them to get a lot more done. **Mr. Vargas** asked the Governor if the RI 2030 Plan is available in Latino, and the Governor replied that the website offers a translation in multiple languages. **Mr. Vargas** then asked about parking for the new stadium and whether or not buses will be provided for the grand opening because there is no parking. The Governor replied that he is in contact with the leadership and will ask what the plan is to deal with transportation. The Governor then talked about being the tie breaking vote for the stadium project noting that they already had plans for the bridge as well as 400-500 affordable housing apartments and without breaking the tie vote in favor of the project, we would not get the bridge or the apartments.

Mr. MacDonald commented as a member of URI building trades and being a Teamster, if you did not have a job, then you did not want to work. He stated they are organizing more than ever, and the Teamsters union has the best contracts it has ever had in the past. He stated that we are busy and expect to stay busy because of the Governor and his agenda and as he always tells him, he is “all in.” The Governor commented that there is important work being done in the trades and apprenticeship programs. He mentioned the nursing programs at Rhode Island College and their strategies to entice CNAs to continue their education and finish the nursing program. **Ms. Venturini** commented that she was not sure how much she could brag about our operation, but she stated that the staff works day and night behind the scenes making it all work. She mentioned how hard everyone works behind the scenes and how proud she is working with this team. The Governor replied that good people are always needed to execute the plan and the best way to move the State forward is one brand, the RI 2030 Plan, and everyone, including small businesses, get stronger under one brand. He stated that with a lot more positive energy out there it gives the General Assembly more confidence in what he is putting in the budget. He stated that the Washington Bridge will get fixed, and work is being done to complete the plan. He commented on the interactive site that has dashboards on students’ attendance records, trash cleanups/collections, and construction and maintenance of roads, sidewalks, and bridges, throughout all the state’s municipalities. **Chairman Almonte** commented that we always strive to hire the right employees, and we are successful because of them. He then acknowledged Samantha Bottoni, and the Governor read a proclamation for Ms. Bottoni that was signed on behalf of the State of Rhode Island and thanked her for her hard work. **Chairman Almonte** thanked the Governor for attending the meeting, and the Governor thanked Chairman Almonte and the Board.

6. Employee Highlight

a. Samantha Bottoni (Catering Sales Manager – RICC)

Ms. Ponder stated that Ms. Bottoni came on staff after Covid as a Catering Sales Manager. She stated that Ms. Bottoni has a positive attitude and strong work ethic so when an opening became available in the Sales department, she applied, and it was a natural fit. Ms. Ponder then introduced Ms. Bottoni. Ms. Bottoni thanked the Board for the opportunity to be before them and stated that she was born and raised in North Providence. She stated that her previous employment was with Stop & Shop, and she worked there for ten (10) years, with the last three (3) years as an Assistant Store Manager. She stated that in that position she dealt with customer issues and soon realized that it was not a career for her. She stated that her cousin worked at the Convention Center and when a Catering Sales Manager position became available, she applied and subsequently got the job. She stated that she handled a lot of sporting events and a few galas, with the most recent one being Board Member Carol Lombardi’s husband, Mayor Charles Lombardi’s event. She stated that the other event was the Hasbro Children’s Gala, which was a big production event and a tremendous success. She stated that she is excited about her future here. **Chairman Almonte** asked if there were any questions for Ms. Bottoni, and Mr. McConaghy asked her what she enjoys doing when she is not at work, and Ms. Bottoni replied that she helps her boyfriend run his landscaping business and also spends time with her family. She stated that her job gives her the opportunity to spend quality time with friends and family. **Chairman Almonte** asked Ms. Bottoni how she defines success in her personal and professional life, and Ms. Bottoni replied that from a professional standpoint if her client is happy at the end of the day, it makes her happy and successful and from a personal standpoint, she is successful maintaining a work/life balance, and **Chairman Almonte** thanked her for being here. At that point, the Governor acknowledged Samantha with a citation recognizing her hard work and dedication to the Authority.

7. Marketing Committee – Chair Dale Venturini

a. Highlights of AMP Data for Maniscalco – Cheryl Cohen

Ms. Venturini reviewed the data highlights from the recent Sebastian Maniscalco event at the AMP (see attached). She stated that she loves the information but is scared of it. Ms. Cohen stated that we began using a new platform from OVG called Placer AI which provides us with data on consumer behavior when they attend an event. She stated that we are still learning, and this platform will help us with trends and marketing. She stated that Placer AI is connected to other apps and tracks where you ate before/after an event amongst other things. She said this is important data that provides us with our patron’s journey to an event, specifically where they were prior to an event and where they went after the event. She stated that the information before them was only one show. She stated that this information will allow us to identify attendees and the opportunity for cross promotion. She stated that if we see a trend, we could go to businesses for a potential partnership. She stated that in reviewing the data, it looks like attendees were at the Omni but because the Mall garage is attached to the Omni, it does not differentiate whether or not people stayed at the Omni or parked in the garage. She then reviewed the distance map, which showed a majority of attendees came from within a 10-30 mile radius. She also stated that we are able to go back to 2017 in this platform. She stated that the Cranston and Johnston markets were the strongest for Sebastian, which was no surprise. She then reviewed the crime report and **Ms. Venturini** asked if we shared this information with the police department, and Ms.

Cohen replied not yet because we are still learning.

Ms. Venturini noted that this is very valuable information, and Ms. Cohen agreed stating that the report actually tells us what the crime was, if any. Ms. Cohen stated that the crime report allows us to tell the story of how safe we are. She stated that there will be more to come on this platform, and it will be very helpful on both the Convention Center side, as well as the arena side. Mr. McConaghy stated that we received a discounted rate for this platform through OVG, and Ms. Cohen stated that it was a significant savings for us. **Chairman Almonte** commented that when he left the committee meeting on Tuesday he put his GPS in and it prompted him to turn on location services, which he did not. **Mr. MacDonald** asked exactly how this platform works, and Ms. Cohen replied that when you are using an app like Waze your phone is pinging and picking up where you are going. She stated that we are not identifying people with the data we receive but merely collecting the data. She stated that we will do an economic review for NCAA. **Ms. Venturini** asked if we are in the forefront with this platform and it is putting us at another level, and Mr. Lepore replied that everything OVG does is driven by analytics. Ms. Cohen commented that shows want to know this information because it helps them with what they are going to do next. **Ms. Venturini** expressed how proud she is of everything we are doing, and this is important stuff for the Board to be aware of what is happening behind the scenes. Ms. Cohen further commented that this platform allows us to target certain things and ultimately determine what we spend money on to promote a show.

8. Executive Director's Report – Daniel McConaghy

a. Discussion of Proposed Providence Tax Legislation

Mr. McConaghy reported on the Parking Services Taxation Act (see attached). He stated that the City of Providence is looking into impose the seven percent (7%) tax rate to include parking whether quasi, private, or nonprofit organizations. He stated that they have had multiple conversations with others who would be affected, and many are unaware of this proposal. He stated that the City is hoping to raise \$1-\$1.5 million, and he met with the Mayor's Office and expressed that we understand the challenges facing the Mayor and want to be supportive, but we needed to let them know the ramifications of this proposed tax. He stated that many organizations have employees work from home rather than come into work and he is concerned about the purposely vagueness of passing this tax onto the consumer and we would want it to be clearer that we can pass this cost onto the consumer. **Ms. Venturini** recalled back in the day when discussing a ticket tax, it could not be passed onto the consumer because we were a City, then state, building. Attorney Leach commented that instead of making it part of the sales tax law, it needs to be separated because of the ambiguity there. He stated that if it can be passed onto the consumer it should be clear. Discussion then ensued on the definition of parking service and changing American law when you tax a parking space mentioning the concept of property law. **Vice Chairman Nee** questioned if it would cause problems with what we charge companies like Lifespan, and Mr. McConaghy stated that it can make it more difficult because we sold a lot of group rates, and a tax could have significant ramifications to our operation. **Mr. Hirsh** asked if the City has discussed what they would do about street parking, and Mr. McConaghy replied no. **Mr. Hirsh** stated it should be brought up along with valet parking. **Ms. Venturini** commented that she was aware of this proposed tax through other Boards she serves on, and she stated that once the legislation goes in, other cities and municipalities will hop on the train. Mr. McConaghy stated that he is not sure if the legislation has "any legs," and **Mr. Mancini** commented that there will be many clarifications. **Vice Chairman Nee** asked what the cost would be to our bottom line, and Mr. McConaghy stated that we will pass onto our customers and if not, it would be a \$750k to our bottom line. **Vice Chairman Nee** stated that it did not make sense if the City is saying it would bring in \$1 million but hit our bottom line \$700k. **Chairman Almonte** stated that this was brought up. **Mr. Mancini** asked if Boston had a parking service tax, and Mr. McConaghy replied yes 20%-25% and that all big cities like Pittsburgh, Chicago, New York, etc. have a parking tax. **Ms. Venturini** commented that it is counterintuitive for us to try to get more people back in the city and then add a penalty. **Mr. Mancini** stated that in the Mayor's defense he is trying to do whatever he can to help City residents, and Mr. McConaghy stated that he understands that completely. **Mr. MacDonald** stated that this is not a new item. The City is important and in trouble, and they need to raise revenue. **Mr. Vargas** commented that because of the school department, the City is desperate to raise revenue and not put it on taxpayers. **Mr. MacDonald** asked if we are taking a stand against this legislation, and **Chairman Almonte** stated that we are just trying to educate everyone on the proposal and doing our homework and trying to figure out whether or not the bill will pass. **Vice Chairman Nee** stated that it might come up for a hearing. Discussion then ensued on raising the issues but not as a vote of the Board, just a consensus in support of or against this legislation. **Chairman Almonte** stated that we are going to be factual on the impact to us and let the legislators know. **Ms. Goodrich Coia** stated that she feels they should not do anything to discourage people from coming downtown but on the other hand she is very sympathetic to Providence's fiscal problems. She questioned maybe brainstorming ideas to generate revenue and come up with other ways to hit people from out of state coming into town and something that does not impact those here. **Ms. Venturini** commented that she has found in the past that when you give someone or something another opportunity, they will take both, so they need to be very cautious about offering up ideas. She stated that not a lot is happening during the day, and it is different when there are events.

Mr. Lepore stated that he spoke to the Mayor about the issue of enforcement on weekends and during events. He stated that he thought if enforcement was better it would help with the parking garages and people would not be discouraged from parking in one of our garages. **Chairman Almonte** commented that when you look at our financials, parking revenue is down and questioned how you raise the fee and expect the space to be filled. **Mr. Vargas** suggested bringing in the Police Commissioner and tell them what we need. **Chairman Almonte** stated that there is work to be done and they will discuss again. He stated that they will keep track of when the legislation would be coming up for a hearing and prepare bullet points for discussion. **Vice Chairman Nee** asked if the Authority still retains Andrew Annaldo as our lobbyist, and Mr. McConaghy replied yes.

With there being no other items on the agenda, **Ms. Venturini** commented that we are the center spoke of the wheel with everything that went on this past weekend in the city and what will continue this upcoming weekend. She stated that she enjoyed watching the Governor give his informative presentation and noted that she thinks people are surprised at what they do. She suggested getting other government officials to a meeting to let them see the jobs we bring into this state and that they do not have to worry about us. She suggested brainstorming about potential guests. **Chairman Almonte** noted that similar to the employee highlight, maybe we invite someone in government to come to our board meetings and put someone on the agenda every month. He suggested maybe a Legislative Day to meet the employees and learn that we are not just numbers on a spreadsheet. **Chairman Almonte** stated that he will discuss this further. **Chairman Almonte** asked if there was any further discussion, and **Mr. MacDonald** asked if there was another way to capture a Board member's absence at a meeting since he did not care for the notation, "members absent." **Chairman Almonte** deferred to Attorney Leach and asked for his legal opinion. Attorney Leach stated that he would look into it and suggested maybe excused absence and **Ms. Goodrich Coia** mentioned Robert's Rules of Order for the correct verbiage.

9. 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. Upon a motion duly made by **Vice Chairman Nee**, which was seconded by **Mr. MacDonald**, it was unanimously

VOTED: to adjourn the March 27, 2025 meeting at 10:25 a.m.