



## Visit Buffalo Niagara

Board of Directors Meeting  
Wednesday, August 13, 2025  
Buffalo Convention Center

**PRESENT:** C. Abbott Letro, M. Alnutt, T. Beauford, M. Brown, A. Chase, M. Chiazza, M. Glasgow, P. Kaler, B. Karmazyn, K. Minkel, M. Roberts

**ABSENT:** T. Alford, B. Gould, D. Castle, D. Gallagher, T. Long, W. Paladino, S. Patch, S. Ranalli, D. Schutte, M. Urbanczyk

**STAFF:** J. Bialek, J. Calkins, K. Fashana, J. Flood, L. Mueller, D. Marzo, R. Toney

**CALL TO ORDER:** Vice Chair, Kim Minkel, convened the meeting of the Visit Buffalo Niagara Board of Directors at 3:55 p.m.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** A motion was made by Mr. Alnut and seconded by Mr. Long to approve the April minutes. Motion carried.

**FINANCE REPORT:** Mr. Marzo reviewed the financial statements for the month and six months ending June 30, 2025. He reported that total assets were \$7.8 million, with ninety-seven percent in cash and receivables. Liabilities were \$4.3 million, primarily deferred revenue from the Erie County grant, accounts payable, and advance revenue from ad sales and matching funds awards. Net assets totaled \$3.3 million, which complies with the County grant terms allowing up to six months of working capital.

Mr. Marzo noted that revenues through June totaled \$5.7 million, which was approximately \$723,000 ahead of budget. The favorable variance was due to a 2024 budget overage of \$1.4 million versus \$1 million budgeted, along with the receipt of \$310,000 in employer retention tax credits. Additional ad sales and joint marketing also contributed to the increase. He emphasized that specific variances were timing-related, while others were permanent.

On the expense side, through June, the organization was running approximately \$85,000 under budget. Personnel costs and benefits were below budget due to open staff positions and younger employees not participating in health insurance plans. Convention commitments were under budget by \$54,000 due to lower-than-expected costs for the African-American Travel Conference and other events. Trade shows were slightly over budget, and sales bids and promotions exceeded budget due to increased site inspections, which Mr. Marzo characterized as a worthwhile investment. He also noted that anticipated capital expenditures related to the Canal Side Visitor Center will reduce some of the overage. Overall, he projected a year-end increase in net assets of approximately \$700,000, which will allow for the establishment of a reserve fund.

Mr. Marzo also reviewed activities for the Foundation and the Sports Commission. He reported that Foundation activity was centered around the mobile Visitor Center as well as the Paul Murphy

Scholarship Fund. In June, four scholarships were awarded to deserving students. He noted that the Sports Commission had no current quarter activity. However, in the first quarter, it was utilized to accommodate payment of specific sports-related commitments, which provided budget relief to the overall organization.

A motion to approve the financial report was made by Mr. Beauford and seconded by Mr. Long. The motion carried unanimously.

**PRESIDENT’S REPORT:** Mr. Kaler delivered the Q2 President’s Report. He mentioned that Canadian visitation continues to lag, although overall occupancy and revenues stay steady. Cross-border traffic is down 14.7 percent year-to-date. He pointed out that the sales pipeline indicates a softer outlook for 2025, mainly due to pandemic-related rescheduling, with a strong recovery expected from 2026 through 2028. Website search impressions and engagement are improving, with new campaigns planned for later in 2025.

Ms. Mueller reported that the sales and services team achieved and surpassed all sales goals by approximately twenty-five percent. During the quarter, the team attended ten trade shows, including the Helms Briscoe Annual Conference in Toronto, IPW, and several sports conferences. The team hosted sixty-one events in Q2, such as the African-American Travel Conference and the USA Hockey Sled World Championships. Key bookings included the New York State Bar Exam in 2028, the Women’s Professional USA vs. Canada Series, and new tour operator partnerships.

Ms. Toney provided an update on Destination Experience. She reported expanded partnerships with Buffalo Public Schools and the awarding of Paul Murphy Scholarships. Industry events included the Flight 716 Premier and planning for the Torn Space Theater showcase. She stated that the Certified Tourism Ambassador program is in the pilot stage and is expected to launch in the coming months. The mobile visitor van has been active throughout Erie County, and visitor guides, along with the African American Heritage Guides, remain in high demand.

Ms. Fashana provided an update on the marketing and branding efforts. She explained that MMGY Global has been hired to spearhead the rebranding. The new campaign, “That’s Buffalo for You,” features a bold logo, a refreshed color palette, and adaptable messaging such as “Fiercely Friendly” and “Historically New.” She mentioned that the brand launch event is planned for September 10, 2025, at Riverworks. The media plan includes national partnerships with Conde Nast Traveler, Bon Appétit, Expedia, SiriusXM, and Pandora. She described how the campaign rollout will also involve billboards, transit wraps, and various local activations, including murals, chalk art, lawn art, and community engagement.

Mr. Kaler also highlighted upcoming activities, including the Customer Advisory Council scheduled for September 10–12, sponsorship of the Borderland Music Festival in September, the World Canals Conference from September 21–25, and the opening of the Canal Side Visitor Center later this year.

**ADJOURNMENT:** There being no further business, a motion was made by Ms. Roberts and seconded by Mr. Long to adjourn the VBN meeting. Meeting adjourned at 4:57 PM.

Minutes prepared by J. Bialek

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ /s/ Kimberly Minkel  
Kimberley Minkel