

**Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
October 15, 2025, at 12:30 PM  
19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23417**

Commissioners in Attendance

Billy Joe Tarr Accomack Co. Supervisor, Vice Chair  
Tammy Holloway, Cape Charles Town Council  
Joanne Moore, Chincoteague Chamber of Commerce-Z  
Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton Co. Appointee

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director  
Megan Lawson, DODD  
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant

Commissioners – Absent

John Coker, Northampton Co. Supervisor, Chair  
Matt Spuck, Accomack Co. Appointee

Guest Present

Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street  
Karen Zamorski, Cape Charles Main Street  
Karin Rush-Monroe, Main Street Onancock  
Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center

Chamber of Commerce – Observer

Ace Seybolt

Ex-Officio Non-VTC Representative

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

Tourism Consultant

Evelyn Shotwell

1. Call to Order

- At 12:32 p.m. Tarr called the meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- Karen Zamorski, Cape Charles Main Street, reported Cape Charles social media campaigns this fall, and post stats had click through up sixty-nine percent for September. Cape Charles is in the midst of planning for Festive Friday starting November 28<sup>th</sup>. There will be only four Festive Fridays this year.
- Karin Rush Moore, Onancock Main Street, reported Halloween weekend festivities in Onancock will be the weekend of October 24 and 25<sup>th</sup>. Festivities include pumpkin carving, a parade, and restaurants will be serving spooky cocktails. Trick or treating will be on the 31<sup>st</sup>.
  - Sabbatini added that Matt Spuck, the Onancock town manager, has taken the position of NHC Administrator.
- Ace Seybolt thanked the Tourism Commission for bringing the VA250 mobile museum to the Agi Fair. It was very well attended.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:35 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by MacGarvey and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Laura reported she facilitated a meeting with Beebe Ranch in Chincoteague and told the group about VTC resources and while on Island Laura met with Moore at the Chamber of Commerce in

Chincoteague. October 30, SBD workshop will be held with practical hands-on tools and there are still openings available to attend. VTC - VA250 grant applications closes October 23.

- Tarr asked if there was any further discussion about Zartico data being replaced by data that VTC could support.
- Laura answered VTC Arrivalist and POI (Point of Interest) do give similar data, but Zartico gives more depth. The data from VTC would tell towns where the visitors come from and where they are going. The missing data would be how much money is spent by each visitor, gender, and age.
- Holloway added what needs to be asked of the towns; what breakdown of data are the towns looking for. Balance costs against what each town expects to learn and use.
- Karen added that Cape Charles Main Street has Arrivalist and Placer AI which is renewable in April if a decision could be made before then that would be helpful.
- Jay added that the data that CC Main Street uses helps with fundraising from businesses and data for grants.
- Lawson did talk to Placer; they do not give spend data. The cost of Placer is higher than Zartico for a region. The spending data is only what Master Card and Visa collect, not specific to each business. Placer is not as fully fledged as Zartico. A town on its own pays one fifth of what a region costs. Every town should understand their movement patterns.
- Karen receives zip code data that CCMS use in their social media campaigns.

## 5. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Updates**

Sabbatini reported that Sally's mother-in-law passed away this morning please keep Sally and family in your thoughts. Sabbatini reported the daily high for the month of September was 371 visitors. A new partner was picked up they are Cape Charles Vacation Rentals.

- **Director of Destination Development**

Lawson stated there have been fifteen new media placements. A few of them are Southern Living, Virginia Dogwood, Coastal Virginia, and HGTV. Press release on the VA 250 mobile museum was covered by the Eastern Shore News and Eastern Shore Post. Four hundred visitors attended the mobile museum that includes school children the day before Agi Fair. A reception was held the night before for the mobile museum put on by the Chamber of Commerce, Northampton County History Preservation Society, and Shore History. Fifty people attended the reception. Paid marketing Fall campaigns are back online and they are doing very well. Last month we had 184,000 impressions, 6,200 clicks, and the click-through rate was 3.36 which is triple the travel industry benchmark. This has increased our website traffic by 25 percent. Our next campaign is in line with the grant we received from VTC, Vacations Start with VA. The Campaign will begin in the next couple of weeks followed by the Fall campaign then the Holiday Town campaign. Destination Development has partnered with Cara Burton, Sabbatini and Lawson working to finalize the VA 250 Trail in Accomack County, "Be Free. Revel On." This is a driving trail to supplement the Northampton Co trail and connect the whole shore. It will be promoted in ESVA travel guide, Chincoteague travel guide, landing page on our website and mobile app. Coastal Virginia, Get Away campaign is a \$75k campaign running from November to May. A handful of Eastern Shore hotel partners have committed a 20% discount toward a 3-day booking. Last month ESVA TC was working with the Outdoor Channel Carter Andrews hosting a TV show on the Shore. The show was filmed in Cape Charles, Machipongo, Wachapreague, and Onancock. All the b-roll, three hundred high resolution photographs the TC will receive. The film team had three drones, underwater camera, land camera, and handheld device filming the entire trip. Fishing, culinary, and conservation are all of Carters passions and will be part of the show. The

Complete Obsession of Carter Andrews is the show name. The show will be airing in June 2026 episode three. ESVA TC will own all the content because TC was a sponsor of the third episode. The show did not make it to Chincoteague, but Carter promised to come to Chincoteague to buy a pony. He has twelve horses now a Chincoteague pony will make a baker dozen. It was extremely exciting to have so many Shore businesses involved. The coolest part was when Carter flew from Cape Charles on a sea plane to Chatham. Jon and Mills son Jon Henry drove Carters Sea Vee boat to Chatham's dock simultaneously as the plane was coming in. Carter interviewed Mills and Jon and had a welcoming party at the vineyard.

- Laura congratulated ESVA TC with collaboration with partners on VA 250 and the Outdoor Channel bring partners up and down the shore together.

- **2026 Visitor Guide**

Sabbatini reported the guide is coming along well. TC is going to use the tall ship photo as the cover photo. There will be an identifier of when the tall ship will be here. Travel Guide committee is doing an outstanding job the next meeting will follow this meeting as we review several ideas and updates. The plan will be to have a layout ready for the next meeting. If anyone has any pictures or photos, please send them to us. New pictures are appreciated.

- Lawson added we have thirteen ads confirmed. The guide needs about ten more ads to hit our goal. Sabbatini will write up the stories on the towns creating content.

Sabbatini continued, a major theme for the guide this year is the 250 anniversary of our country. The guide will highlight Cape Charles, Onancock, and Chincoteague 250 years in town articles.

- **Hospitality workshops**

Sabbatini reported he wanted to keep the momentum alive on the hospitality training.

Hospitality will be a feature at the summit but also the thought is to have a, Lunch and Learn with the Chincoteague Chamber and ESVA Chamber sponsoring a workshop in the fall and bring in a rep from Ritz Carlton. In addition, lean on the Eastern Shore Community College for smaller events to continue the workshops educating the workforce in all aspects of hospitality. I want to keep this conversation going and see what it develops into.

- Holloway asked what type of program the Community College offers in hospitality. ESVA TC could help in promoting the course to the whole shore through press releases and highlighting students that have gone through the program.

Sabbatini responded it is a well-regarded program with certificates of completion awarded.

- Lawson added there could be a secret shopper connected to the program.
- Holloway added a feature on students that have gone through program could be written by the paper to create more exposure.

- **2026 Tourism Summit**

Sabbatini wants to keep the tourism summit on everyone's radar. The date is Monday, February 23, 2026, in Cape Charles this year at Rosenwald school. Jon Schallert will be the keynote speaker. We will send a save the date mailer out in November.

## 6. Matters by Commissioner

- MacGarvey shared Exmore is in flux right now with good things happening very soon. Exmore hotels have done well June through September. October does not look good. Two things coming up; this Saturday fundraiser in town park the Rotary Oyster Roast and trick or treat on Main Street on October 31<sup>st</sup>. One new business is a coffee shop that does lunch and breakfast.
- Moore shared the past weekend was the Oyster Roast and it was a lovely day. Calendar is full in Chincoteague every single day something is happening. Farmers Market is still open, and Halloween is around the corner. The holiday events are lining up and filling our calendar.

Visitation numbers are even with last year. Assateague is open during government shut down but the bathrooms are closed and visitor centers.

- Holloway shared the new town manager is working out well and is incredibly involved with the community. He attended the VML conference and represents the town and shore well. At the conference Holloway learned that Chincoteague will be hosting VML Small Town Weekend Conference 2026 dates to be announced later. Cape Charles is starting to finalize plans for a new town hall the location will be near Eastern Shore Custom Carts. Right now, we will be moving employees to the Methodist Church. The police will be moving into the old town hall space in the interim. Cape Charles is still working on building bathrooms. It is on hold at this point, and a temporary bathroom will be started as we work out glitches for a new bathroom and a visitor center location. The biggest issue right now is the Verizon cell service which is close to none often. After Verizon installed the 5G towers we lost the good connections for cell phones. This has had a terrible effect on businesses including personal cell phone use. Whoever locally can send support; County Supervisors, ESVA Tourism, ESVA Chamber, Main Street to Verizon to get results is appreciated.

- Sabbatini added whatever they have done to cell service in Cape Charles it has added to dropped service on Bayside Road.

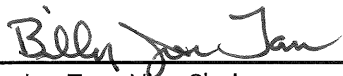
Holloway continued, September was extraordinarily strong for Cape Charles, a lot of private events kept the town busy. We have Halloween Hootenanny the week before Halloween then we go into holiday preparation.

- Tarr had one thing to comment on, when a visitor has a pleasant experience, they come back. Hospitality is key to an experience being memorable. Tarr added there will be changes coming to the Tourism Commission with John Coker no longer being a Supervisor, Matt Spuck will be Northampton Co Administrator, Holloway will be staying on after her business sales. Holloway is an asset in whatever capacity she is in.
- Evelyn will be stepping down in January as the Tourism Consultant.

#### 7. Adjournment

- At 1:24 p.m. Holloway made the first motion to adjourn, seconded by MacGarvey and the meeting was adjourned.

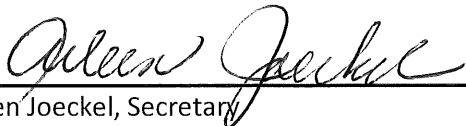
These minutes have been approved by:



Billy Joe Tarr, Vice Chairperson

11/19/2025

Date



Aileen Joeckel, Secretary

11/19/2025

Date