

Eastern Shore of Virginia Tourism Commission

Meeting Minutes

March 18, 2026, at 12:30 PM

19056 Parkway Melfa, Virginia 23417

Commissioners in Attendance

Billy Joe Tarr, Accomack Co. Supervisor, Chair-Z
Tammy Holloway, C C Town Council, Vice Chair
Jon Dempster, Northampton Co. Supervisor
Joanne Moore, Chincoteague C of C-
Karin Rush-Monroe, Accomack Co Appointee

Staff Present

Robert Sabbatini, Executive Director
Megan Lawson, DODD
Aileen Joeckel, Executive Assistant
Sally Williams, Southern Gateway Welcome Cnt
HH Scott, Southern Gateway Welcome Center

Commissioners – Absent

Clarice MacGarvey, Northampton Co, Appointee

Guest Present

Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street
Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center
Lee Pambid, Deputy Co. Administrator, CZA-Z
Grace Woodworth, Admin. Assistant Z

Chamber of Commerce – Observer

Ace Seybolt

Ex-Officio Non-VTC Representative

Laura Messer, VTC Representative

1. Call to Order

- At 12:30 p.m. Holloway called the meeting to order.

2. Public Comments

- Ace Seybolt spoke on behalf of Coastal Shore property management of vacation homes on Chincoteague Island. Chincoteague Planning Commission suggested to the town council to have a hearing on removing, use by right, for STR in all R-1 Districts on Chincoteague Island. It is not clear whether a special use permit would be grandfathered. This news on STR just happened 24 hours ago. Currently STR are, use by right, for the islanders with restrictions on septic, 2 people per bedroom, and parking. If STR turns into a special use permit, then the neighbors have a say on home use as STR. The prior manager of Chincoteague stated that 60-70 percent of the homes are second homes.
 - There are about 800 STR homes on the island right now, Moore added.
- Ace Sybolt continued the local management companies are well established they have been able to keep Airbnb blocked out. I don't think they are trying to ban STR I don't know what they are trying to do.
 - Sabbatini added that tourism commission hasn't taken a stand on STR but the Chamber has if the BOC wants to take a stand that's something we can discuss.
 - Chincoteague Chamber is A-political, stated Moore because we wear both hats.
- Cherron Davis, New Church Welcome Center, reported she attended the Visitor Center seminar event in Fredericksburg. They would like to come to the Eastern Shore again, maybe in 2-3 years we might consider positioning the ESVATC again to host the other welcome centers from across the state.

- Jay Abella, Cape Charles Main Street, reported everything has changed since the positive outlook Jay gave last month. What might change as a positive for us is more local travelers. Anyone within 250 miles or less radius of our location will be a good target for trips to the shore. If the conflict is short overseas that could create a flat travel scenario to our area.

3. Consent Agenda

- At 12:45 p.m. Moore made the first motion to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Dempster and passed unanimously.

4. VTC Updates

- Laura reported she facilitated the second session on the Chincoteague Action Plan it was a light attendance but great conversation. Laura attended meetings with Onancock Main Street, Chincoteague and Cape Charles. VTC grant round closes tomorrow. The SBCD workshop is next week on the 24th of March. The power point for the tourism summit has been revised.

5. Commission Updates

- **Welcome Center Updates**

Williams reported that the welcome center is doing better than last year. For Easter the WC is planning to make Easter eggs with a note to come into the welcome center for a prize.

- **Director of Destination Development**

Lawson reported that the Southern Welcome Center google listing up 21% over last year there are 7 new 5 star google reviews. WC has invited the Onancock School artist tenants to display their art anytime on a Saturday at the WC while the school is recovering from the fire. There are changes in lightboxes The largest lightbox was rented by the Island House Restaurant, the town of Wachapreague is going to go into that lightbox. Seasy Story lightbox is now available we are hoping that Cape Charles Tiny Livin takes that space. The VA250 promotions will go into Wachapreague lightbox that is vacating for the larger lightbox. When VA250 is over the lightbox will be available for anyone that is interested. The NHC 250 passport for sights around the shore will be handed out at the WC as its main hub of distribution. The stamps and passports will be coming in soon. The summit is rescheduled for March 30th there are more people interested in attending the rescheduled summit date; 130 tourism partners are planning to attend the summit, typically 20% don't show. Jon Schallert conducted his live boot camp sessions while he was here on the original summit date. The panelists are excited this should be a very dynamic session. ESVA TC is posting to the VTC - VA250 calendar all events in both counties which is 11 so far. ESVA TC is working with Wave Riders on more offerings for tourists, the van seats 14 passengers. Wave Riders has also offered to help TC with FAM tours. Wave Rider has connected with Coastal Sea Plane and would like to be a driving guide for any people that Coastal Sea Plane flies in. A new media project will be with a publication called "Taste of the South magazine" it will be a 5-page feature regionally on the Eastern Shore images will be from VTC. It will be the May/June publication. Megan submitted 2 editorial queries. The first pitch went to FOX 5 DC; a Black travel magazine it will have all year-round travel including the landmark trails. Another pitch went to Travel Pulse Destinations for Introverts. Social media: we had almost a ½ million views in February that is the most we have ever had ever in any month. Mobile app usage is up 36% over last year. Website traffic was down that was due to a gap in social media. We are going to partner with Coastal Virginia Alliance on their blitz in Fredericksburg in the month of April.

- Summer bookings look solid but April and May are light. Anything that can be done for day trips and weekend getaways will be helpful Holloway remarked

Lawson has two influencers' from VA Beach, with very strong following: we are in discussions about a staycation angle. They are ready to go anytime I can find them lodging and places to eat and build an itinerary for them. One account is Virginia Beach Local, and they have 140k followers another account with all Hampton Roads following.

- **Visitor Guide**

Sabbatini reported we have finished the travel guide it is in line at the printer we should have it shortly. Sabbatini thanked the whole team for their efforts making this guide one of our best.

- **2026 Tourism Summit/Schedule**

Robert ran through the schedule and asked the commissioners to be at the summit March 30th at 9 am which starts registration and networking. Opening remarks begin at 9:45 am, keynote speaker starts at 10:15 am. We have giveaways throughout the day. If more folks sign up, we will have to be creative with the seating.

- Lawson added all the vendors were very supportive in the reschedule of food.

- **Budget Preparation**

Sabbatini reported he is working on a draft budget that he will present at the next BOC meeting for everyone to review. Sabbatini gave a presentation to supervisors in both counties last month

- **Miscellaneous**

Sabbatini added ESVA Tourism is hiring a marketing coordinator. We are in the interview process and there will be two people invited back for an in-person interview.

6. Matters by Commissioner

- Tarr thanked Holloway for running the meeting and plans on attending the Summit on March 30th In regard to the STR issue on Chincoteague Tarr believes it's about the tot tax collection.
- Moore shared the town of Chincoteague has recently hired a new town planner. A position the town has not had in 8 years. The town planner has been tasked with looking at ordinances, zoning and where the short falls are, delinquency in meals tax and tot tax collection. Chincoteague is on a self-reporting basis. Come January there will be reporting changes.
 - Holloway shared that Cape Charles has software that can statistically capture what is going on.

Moore continued, the Museum of Chincoteague opens at the end of March, Beebe Ranch opens in the middle of April, April 3rd and 4th is the Decoy Festival 70 exhibitors currently. April 10th and 11th spring round up of ponies, May 2nd Seafood Festival. You can see all events on event calendar. Visitation has been good, but it has been down a little in February. A law firm has been hired that will be collecting all delinquent taxes.

- Rush-Monroe shared the town manager's search continues there are about 21 applicants the mayor hopes this is wrapped up in a month. Rush-Monroe thanked everyone who supports the Historic Onancock school. Saint Partick's day was this weekend there were 1,500 to 1,600 people attending it continues to be a draw for Onancock. Corner Baker is having an Eastern Egg hunt. 150 eggs will be around town and in each egg is a prize that you can go to a local business and retrieve your prize. VA250 planning is coming along and there is a lot of good energy going into planning the events. May 4th will be the next business workshop it will be held at Bizzotto's from 3 to 5 pm. June 20th will be Le de Tour bike ride, which is the weekend after the Sail Fest. The goal is to encourage people to come for the bike ride and stay the week. Cape Charles Sail Fest is the following weekend.
- Dempster thanked Sabbatini for his presentation. STR are also becoming a focus again in Cape Charles also workforce housing, which is very important. NHC is working on changes to zoning density for new home construction which supports workforce housing. A single home on a 1-acre

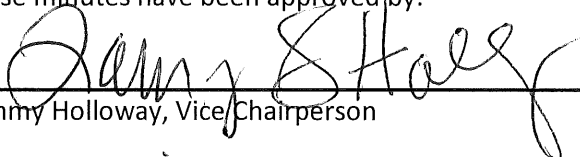
lot can only be priced at \$350K but if you can get multiple homes on a 1-acre lot the cost of the home can be greatly reduced. The people that attend these meetings are those that oppose these changes. There needs to be support from local business owners. If we can't find housing for employees, we can't have restaurants or shop hours open full time. Dempster's perspective on business in Cape Charles; January was better than last year, but February was down which could be related to the weather.

- Holloway shared Cape Charles is struggling with fire protection. There was a home in Bay Creek that was lost by fire. As we bring people here, we must think of our responsibilities with our infrastructure growing needs. Our firehouse and the volunteer fire fighters needs are growing too. Holloway has attended two classes at the Impact Center. It is very exciting to see that facility in use. The Rail Trail is getting paved. The L in the love sign at the beach is missing. It will be about a month for it to get repaired. A big Easter Egg hunt is going on in Central Park, the Love run will be in April.
- Jay Abella added there is going to be cleanup in Cape Charles with a picnic in the park after. April 4th will be a Job Fair at the Impact Center. Chamberfest May 16th , Sail Fest June 19th thru 21st Monday June 21st the ship departs. Blue Grass Festival June 15th , Love Run April 25th , Blessing of the Fleet April 24th , and Blessing of the Worms April 26th .

7. Adjournment

- At 1:33 p.m. Dempster made the first motion to adjourn, seconded by Moore and the meeting was adjourned.


These minutes have been approved by:



Tammy Holloway, Vice/Chairperson

4/15/20

Date



Aileen Joëckel, Secretary

4/15/20

Date